

there many Asiatics before 1850, and when they did appear in anything approaching regularity they evoked a racist response from the colonial radicals. What is doubly tragic about Ward's position was that he was genuinely concerned to combat the racism he saw in contemporary Australia, yet could not bring himself to accept that it was the linchpin of his precious nationalism.

The racism inherent in Australia's economic and geographic position as the advance guard of European conquest will be explored elsewhere in this work. Three elements discerned are: the destruction of the Aborigines, the dominance of the Pacific, and the fear of an Asiatic invasion. This section will deal with only one side of this last factor. It will be concerned with the fear of an unarmed conquest of Australia by cheap Asian labourers who would destroy the workers' prosperity and prospects. The connection between racism and radicalism was thereby established.

The most usual explanation for racism is precisely this fear of economic competition and the importance of this fear cannot be denied. Without it, racial intolerance would never have become as deeply embedded as it did. But once started, prejudice did not stop at purely economic objections. Its development can be traced from its 'economic base', through its social reinforcements to its articulated acceptance by the workers and their employers.

ECONOMIC ORIGINS OF RACISM

Although by the 1840s British policy was to reserve 'The continent of New Holland as a place where the English race shall be spread from sea to sea unmingled with any lower caste', this aim had not always been there. Matra's 1783 plan for a British settlement in Australia approvingly quoted Joseph Banks's opinion that 'we may draw any number of useful inhabitants

TWO

Racists

We do not object to a man because his complexion or the cast of his eyes differs from our own, but because his complexion and the cast of his eyes are inseparably connected in our experience with certain qualities of mind to which we do most emphatically object.

Tocsin (editorial), 4 October 1906

Racism became the pivot of Australian nationalism. It is in their discussion of racism that the radical historians failed most seriously because they attempted to minimise its significance even when, like Robin Gollan, they were painfully aware how widespread was its influence. The most Gollan could bring himself to admit in his study of *Radical and Working Class Politics* is that racism 'was perhaps an inevitable aspect of Australian nationalism developing under the conditions we have described' (p. 117). His use of 'perhaps' and 'inevitable' indicated that he considered it foreign to the solid core of radical nationalism.

Russel Ward was far more brazen in his attempts to relegate racism to the realm of marginal importance. The burden of Ward's defence was that since the typically Australian characteristics were formed before the gold rushes, racism (which he claims came after 1850) was not 'necessarily a part of the Australian ethos'. To which one is forced to add, neither were

from China'. This idea was modified in Governor Phillip's instructions to the extent that he was permitted to import 200 island women as wives for the convicts. Some reason — racial and/or moral — decided him against it. However, two Maoris were kidnapped in 1793 in the vain hope that they could assist the floundering flax industry at Sydney.

Edward Gibbon Wakefield's *Letter from Sydney*, published in 1829, struck at the heart of the question by relating coolie immigration to the chronic labour shortage in the colony. It was this very shortage which produced the high wages, independence and prospects of all-round advancement for the colonists, whether convict or free. This link led in turn to their opposition to assisted immigration. In the 1840s, the struggle to end transportation carried over into the fight against indentured Hindus, coolies and kanakas.

The first Asian labourers appear to have arrived in the late 1830s to work in the pastoral industry as shepherds; one estimate put the total at over a thousand. While this inflow benefited the squatters, even they had doubts on account of 'paganism' and 'colour'. The depression in the 1840s sharpened working-class opposition to indenture more Indians. The labourers petitioned the Colonial Office in 1843. Their views matched those of that department's 'Over-Secretary', Sir James Stephen, who had already advised his superiors that they should earn posterity's censure 'if we should colonise Australia from India'. Stephen was looking 'forward for five or six generations' when a white Australia would be of inestimable benefit to Britain and Christianity.

If the decision to keep Australia white found little opposition in England it equally found no want of support in Australia. A motion of the Melbourne Town Council in 1842 declared its opposition to the importation of 'cannibals and coolies'. The tone of this resolution is interesting in the light of Russel Ward's claim that racism was largely a post-gold rush phenomenon.

The adventurer Ben Boyd is a strong contender for the honour of being the first person to use coloured labourers to break a strike in Australia, when he prepared to embark with a crew of New Hebridean islanders instead of his regular sailors. Henry Parkes was not far behind. He brought out twenty-five to thirty Eurasian printers to work for four years at £4 a week. His aim was not cheap labour, but regular workers. The paper on which they were employed, notwithstanding, attacked Chinese immigration late in December 1850 as 'an act of treason to society'. This attack too was a pre-gold rush expression of views more sinister than a desire for high wages.

None the less, the gold rushes produced a qualitative change in the nature of this racism: what had been negative contempt turned to a positive hatred. Disappointed miners blamed not their luck but

the incursions of a swarm of Mongolian locusts who have forced us to fly with our wives and families from all other diggings in the country until we are obliged to turn at bay upon this our last resting-place — our only hope of establishing a homestead — and drive the moon-faced barbarians away. (*The Miner and General Advertiser*, Lambing Flat, 6 March 1861)

Anti-Chinese riots occurred on many goldfields, some of the more serious ones being at Hanging Rock (1852), Bendigo (1854), Buckland River (1857) and Lambing Flat (1861). Juries acquitted European rioters on the grounds that, since all Europeans looked alike to the Chinese, individual offenders could not be identified. Eventually, Chinese immigration restriction Acts were passed in Victoria in 1855 and in New South Wales in 1861, by which time the Californian legislature had passed similar measures to exclude Australians as undesirables.

Even when the Chinese were defended, it was in terms which made them objectionable to the labouring classes, with more than one writer praising their 'docility, industry and sobriety'. This industrial servility made them excellent strike-breakers, for which purpose they were used by Peter Lalor at

his 'Grand Truck' mine in the 1870s, at Clunes in 1873 and in Queensland in 1875. About seventy Chinese were employed as strikebreakers in the Riverina in 1891, prompting 'Banjo' Paterson to the lines:

I asked a cove for shearin' once along the Marthaguy:

'We shear non-union here,' says he. 'I call it scab,' says I,

I looked along the shearing-board afore I turned to go —

There was eight or ten dashed Chinamen a-shearin' in a row.

The maritime dispute of 1878 gained importance, not so much because of the large numbers involved, but because of the response to the shipping company's attempt to have 'aliens of inferior mental and physical capacity or endurance ... supersede ... the indomitable valor of British seamen'. Not only was the opposition to the Chinese expressed in these overtly racist terms, but the strikers also obtained the support of almost every section of the Australian population. Class divisions, such as they were, overlapped. At a protest meeting, 'The Mayor of Sydney was elected chairman, and was surrounded on the stage by many of the best known public men and leading citizens'. At the same time, the Queensland government notified the shipping company that if it did not comply with the terms of the 1877 anti-Chinese legislation, its mail contract, worth £7000 per annum, would be cancelled.

The Melbourne *Argus* (9 December 1878) reported that a very large anti-Chinese meeting in Hyde Park got out of control, and about 2000 larrikins, bent on mischief marched to lower George Street, the area of principal Chinese residences. They swept up the street with the old Lambing Flat cry 'Roll up, no Chinese', and endeavoured to set fire to the Chinese workshops. Before they were dispersed by the police, several people, both Australians and Asians, were seriously injured.

A few days later, an editorial in the *Illustrated Sydney News* (21 December 1878) went a long way towards explaining the intensity of the rioters' hostility:

It may be a foolish prejudice that neither reason nor religious principle can justify, but we cannot get over our repugnance to the race, whose tawny, parchment coloured skins, black hair, lank and coarse, no beards, oblique eyes and high cheek bones distinguish them so widely from ourselves, and place them so far beneath our recognised standards of manliness and beauty.

Economic fears and racial prejudice were by now inextricable, with each feeding the flames of the other's fire. So naturally did they go together that the fourth Inter-Colonial Trades Union Congress in Adelaide in 1886 unanimously agreed that coolie immigration should be totally abolished because 'first, the competition of Asiatic against European labour is entirely unfair; second, it is well known that the presence of Chinese in large numbers in any community has had a very bad moral tendency'.

SOCIAL REINFORCEMENT

Humankind's capacity to embroider necessity with myth made it possible that economic competition of itself could have generated the cultural racism noted already. But that inventiveness was not necessary. There was plenty of non-economic evidence to substantiate the moral degeneracy of the Chinese. Once the Chinese were perceived as an economic threat, the belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority quickly turned Chinese customs into conclusive proof of oriental infamy.

Primary among the non-economic factors was Chinese sexual activity. There was but a handful of women on the diggings, a circumstance which made prostitution and buggery as inescapable as they had been for the white convicts and pastoral workers. Moreover, most of the prostitutes were European. That circumstance was interpreted as proof that Chinese men lusted after white women. In 1883, in the pastoral camps of the Riverina, there were 800 Chinese males but only two Chinese females. The balance was hardly restored by the thirty-six Eu-

ropean women who were married to Chinese, though it was somewhat redressed by the activities of thirty-seven prostitutes.

The 'right to marry' was never far from the minds of Australia's legislators when they proposed restrictive measures. Henry Parkes raised it in 1888. The first Labor prime minister, J. C. Watson, could not have been clearer when he told the House of Representatives in 1901: 'The question is whether we would desire that our sisters or our brothers should be married into any of these races to which we object'. A subsequent interchange between two opposing non-Labor members showed that all three parties were united on this issue. When Mr Lonsdale, a Free Trader, stated 'We don't want them to marry our white women', Alfred Deakin, Protectionist, immediately agreed: 'No we want them to go back to China and marry there'. Intermarriage was subversive of the racial purity that the White Australia policy was designed to maintain.

Those who think that 'White Australia' was purely economic could ponder this extract from the *Wagga Hammer* of April 1892 in which a William Lane stressed that, while he should not do a black man harm, he would rather see his daughter dead in her coffin than kissing one of them on the mouth or nursing a little coffee-coloured brat that she was mother to'. He went on:

If this is a wicked thing to say, then I am one of the wicked ones, and don't want to be good either; and I'd pray daily to be kept wicked if I thought there was any chance of my ever getting to think that the colour didn't matter.

In July the same year, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council heard a submission from a group of women who were establishing a white women's cooperative laundry and were desirous of union support against Chinese competition. According to a report in *Commonweal* (23 July 1892):

One woman, Mrs Krossley, related how her daughter, fourteen

years of age, had answered an advertisement for a nurse-girl, the occupants of the house in Fitzroy to which she applied being Chinese. Now, surely the police can take cognisance of this statement and prevent the defilement of the young girls of our community by the almond-eyed procurer or his leprous associates.

Opium-smoking was another obvious proof of degeneracy. Cases of smallpox and leprosy were discovered among new arrivals around 1880. Equally alarming was the deportation of Chinese criminals to Australia from 1866 to 1876. Even when the Chinese tried to oblige the Europeans, they often provided evidence of barbarism. In 1883, crates of bones for burial in China were sent from Albury via Sydney where they arrived in a 'stinking' condition. To avoid repeating this offence, the Chinese scraped and washed the next shipment. Unfortunately, they did this cleansing in the Bungambrawatha Creek which supplied fresh water to a section of Albury.

Trollope's view of the Chinese in Australia as 'thoroughly vicious and inhuman' had some basis in reality. Australians did not invent all of it, nor was it invented for them. They saw examples of it with their own eyes and, as in all cases of prejudice, they transformed the activities of some into the attributes of all.

Despite ample evidence that the Chinese were extremely law-abiding, this docility did not endear them to Australians, who interpreted it as something sinister and threatening. Or, as the *Bulletin* put it in 1886: 'When he is simply vicious the vice is destructive; when criminal, a menace to the State; when industrious, he threatens revolution to the social structure'. No matter what the Chinese did, they were bound to give offence simply because they were Chinese.

The islanders on Queensland's sugar plantations were far less law-abiding, doubtless the result of being totally alienated from their surroundings. In 1891, for example, they represented 1.72 per cent of the population but 5.52 per cent of the

gaol population. Between 1895 and 1905, they accounted for 45 per cent of the state's executions.

Racism in Australia was not a response to a tiny minority. Although the percentage of Chinese in the total population of Australia remained small, there were times and places when they were in the majority. This was the case in some of the southern New South Wales goldfields in the 1860s. At the Palmer River diggings near Cooktown in 1877, the Chinese outnumbered the Europeans by 17 000 to 14 000. In Narrandera in the 1880s, every second man in town was Chinese. Most important was the fact that in the mid-1850s one adult male in five in Victoria had been Chinese. These concentrations served to keep alive the belief that those already here were but an 'advance guard of the great army of coloured men who when they go back to their country, as the advance guard of the Israelites did of old, will tell their compatriots of the splendid opportunities which await them in the promised land'.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, racism influenced all manner of otherwise unconnected policies. Henry George's single-tax proposal was opposed as the most 'deadly blow aimed at labour' because its implementation would abolish the 'poll-tax on Chinese', and thus destroy 'the security of labour against Mongolian Immigration'. More directly economic perhaps was the 1896 Victorian Factories and Shops Act in which a factory was defined as any place where four or more persons or one or more Chinese were employed. One of the consequences of this Act was the formation of a Chinese Workers' Union which immediately demanded higher wages. Although assisted by the Furniture Trades Union, the Chinese were refused affiliation with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council.

RESPONSES

If it is true that propaganda alone cannot create racism, it is

equally true that propaganda is needed to inflame and direct it. The tribunes of racism in Australia largely came from the leaders of the Labor Party. Instead of combating racism as a tool of oppression, Labor leaders almost invariably articulated and reinforced it. Indeed, they must bear responsibility for purveying the filthiest lies, and inflaming fears. During the 1901 House of Representatives debate on White Australia, one Labor member claimed that those Asians 'who do raise themselves to the level of the whites get as cunning as foxes, and, notwithstanding our laws and our detective skill, they beat us at every turn'. The early Labor MPs matched the Labor Party in the Rand, which was the first party in the Union of South Africa to make segregation a plank in its political platform.

Founding Labor leaders such as George Black and William Lane were outspoken racists. Black was a member of the Anti-Chinese Immigration League in 1883-84 and later a journalist on the *Bulletin* which eventually took as its motto 'Australia for the White Man'.

Lane was a fanatical racist. It has been suggested that his motive for leaving Australia to found a settlement in Paraguay was his fear of the Asian hordes. Although *A Workingman's Paradise* is his better known novel, Lane also wrote *White or Yellow? A story of Race War in A.D. 1908*, serialised in the *Boomerang* from February to May 1888. The action takes place in Queensland, when wealthy Chinese, supported by some Europeans, have established a dictatorship which is challenged by a 'revolutionary race war' for Australian democracy. Lane's distaste for capitalism was strengthened by his belief that it was the capitalists who encouraged Asian immigration. The tone of Lane's *Boomerang* was well expressed in Henry Lawson's poem 'Cambaroora Star', written to commemorate the closure of another newspaper, the *Republican*, co-edited by his feminist mother Louisa:

There was strife about the Chinamen, who came in days of old like a swarm of thieves and loafers when the diggers found the gold —

Like the sneaking fortune-hunters who are always found behind, And who only shepherd diggers till they track them to the 'find'; Charlie wrote a stinging leader, calling on his digger mates, And he said: 'We think that Chinkies are as bad as syndicates. What's the good of holding meetings where you only talk and

swear?

Get a move upon the Chinkies when you've got an hour to spare'. It was nine o'clock next morning when the Chows began to swarm,

But they weren't so long in going, for the diggers' blood was

warm.

Then the diggers held a meeting, and they shouted: 'Hip hoorar.' Give three ringing cheers, my hearties, for the *Cambaroora Star*.

The importance of the struggle to end islander labour for the emerging Labor Party in Queensland cannot be overestimated. When Labor won the seat of Bundaberg at a by-election in 1892 on a policy of White Australia, the *Worker* greeted the victory with the headline 'Bundaberg Goes White'. Labor's opposition to kanaka labour prevented its opposing capital punishment in the first decade of this century, because so many of the condemned were Islanders. In 1901 the *Worker* commented on one such hanging:

The Queensland Cabinet helped ruin the sugar industry by hanging a kanaka on Monday and the *Courier* did not protest. If the Government goes on hanging kanakas like this, there is a grave danger of Queensland becoming a white man's land.

Or, as the Minister for Home Affairs would put it in 1918: 'The policy of the country is that the Chinese population shall gradually become extinct'.

Geographic proximity to Asia seems irrelevant to the intensity of feeling. Though Tasmanian Labor was backward in many respects, it yielded to none in the fervour of its hatred of the Oriental. The Tasmanian Labor paper, the *Clipper*, habitu-

ally wrote of the Chinese in the most offensive terms and suggested, for example, that the abominable Hobart drainage was due to the fact that a 'dirty Chinaman' might have seven votes for the City Council while a white artisan remained disfranchised. In Zeehan and Queenstown, the newly formed Workers Political League scored its earliest successes with boycotts of Chinese laundrymen.

What Lane was fond of calling 'the piebald issue' dominated the thinking of the Labor Party to such an extent that when the objectives of the Federal Labor Party were adopted in 1905 'the cultivation of an Australian sentiment based on the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community' took precedence over 'the securing of the full results of their industry to all producers by the collective ownership of monopolies and the extension of the industrial and economic functions of the state and the Municipality'.

In its own words, the Labor Party was racist before it was socialist.

'White Australia' served as a rallying point to unify the first Federal Labor Caucus, split as it was on the question of free trade versus protection. Free traders, such as Hughes, completely agreed with the protectionist Reverend James Ronald from Victoria when he called on Labor members to keep before them 'The noble ideal of a White Australia — a snow-white Australia, if you will. Let us be pure and spotless' and let there be no attempt to 'blend a superior with an inferior race'. This plea came from a Presbyterian clergyman whom the *Age* denounced as unpatriotic and pro-Boer. Hughes employed his invective to advocate 'White Australia', which he saw as the major virtue in Federation. Speaking to the *Bulletin* early in 1901 on the Labor Party's program in the inaugural parliament, Hughes made it plain that 'Our chief plank is, of course, a White Australia. There's no compromise

about that! The industrious coloured brother has to go — and remain away!’

No longer were the Chinese the primary cause of concern. Their place had been taken by the Japanese who ‘by most accounts [are] able to successfully compete with the white workers in all the skilled trades, whilst at the same time working longer hours for much less wages’. The rise of Japan as a military and industrial power was to have serious consequences for Hughes, the Labor Party and Australia, when he split the Labor Party over conscription in 1916.

Anti-conscriptionists in *Labor Call* (26 October 1916) announced that they would

vote NO because [they believed] in keeping Australia a white man’s country. YES would commit Australia to sending 16 500 men away monthly for an indefinite time. Soon all except those utterly incapable of service would be gone, and this country would have to resort to importing labour.

The *Worker* warned its readers: ‘If we vote to send the white workers out of the country, we vote to bring the coloured workers in’. Frank Anstey felt that the plebiscite should have been called the ‘Coloured Labour Referendum’. Maximum effect was milked from the arrival, a week before the 1916 vote, of a boatload of Maltese, who although they ‘were not coloured people, but still they helped to prove the point’. During the subsequent election campaign in 1917, the *Worker* once more raised the spectre that a vote for Hughes would ‘bring to ruin your White Australia policy’.

Racism was by no means confined to the labouring classes or to the Labor Party. Some employers feared the competition of Asian business rivals just as much as their employees feared Asian labourers. Alfred Deakin, influenced by Professor Pearson, was no less fanatical than Hughes. Pearson had been Professor of Modern History at the University of London before coming to Australia, where he became Minister for Public Instruction in Victoria in the 1880s. On his return to England,

he published *National Life and Character: A Forecast* in which he prophesied that the ‘higher races of men’ would soon find themselves ‘elbowed and hustled and perhaps even thrust aside, by peoples previously considered innately servile. Pearson regarded Australia as among the last strongholds of the white race, but one already threatened by the Chinese and on the brink of destruction. While his book’s sales were small, they were significant. Gladstone and Theodore Roosevelt were in full agreement with Pearson. Barton quoted from Pearson in each of his 1901 speeches on restrictive immigration.

Henry Handel Richardson’s novel *Australia Felix* revealed the degree to which racism became an unquestioned part of the outlook of Australians. Its author never betrayed the least qualm at portraying the Chinese as lacking any redeeming feature. She recaptured all the complaints made against them during the gold rushes, the period in which her novel is set: they use ‘extravagant quantities of water’; they ‘are not such fools as to try to cheat the government of its righteous dues; none but had his licence safely folded in his noselcloth, and thrust inside the bosom of his blouse’; they provide Melbourne’s worst ‘dens of infamy’; and so it goes on until the actual appearance of Ah Sing the vegetable man:

‘You no want cabbage to-day? Me got velly good cabbages,’ he said persuasively, and lowered his pole.

‘No, thank you, John, not to-day. Me wait for white man.’

‘Me bling pleasant for lilly missee,’ said the Chow; and unknotting a dirty noselcloth, he drew from it an ancient lump of candied ginger. ‘Lilly missee eatte him ... Oh yunn, yunn! Velly Good. My word!’ But Chinamen to Trotty were fearsome bod-ies ... [they] corresponded to the swart-faced, white-eyed chimney-sweeps of the English nursery.

What is significant about this portrayal is that Henry Handel Richardson had left Australia in 1887 when she was seventeen and returned but briefly in 1912 to gather material. Most

likely her childhood experiences were similar to Trotty's. But whatever the source of her image of the Chinese, she certainly, in Professor Crawford's phrase, presented her 'Australian material with unerring authenticity'. That judgment has been endorsed by the acceptance that *Australia Felix* found in this country. Few Australians were offended by her implicit account of their racist attitudes. Indeed, so widely accepted were these prejudices that it is likely that they were not considered racist. They were just white Australian.

THREE Invaders

One of the first problems which faced the British when they decided to colonise Australia was whether Australia was to be considered a 'settled' or a 'conquered' colony. If it were a settled colony the law of the indigenes would apply only until superseded by new colonial laws. This possibility had obvious importance for the ownership and control of land. Needless to say, Australia was considered a settled colony, so that the Aborigines were not accorded even the rights of a conquered people. Perhaps it was the memory of the ease with which the British invasion of Australia had been accomplished which kept alive the fear of a further invasion in the minds of Australians. It is less likely that the alarms sprang from feelings of guilt.

In 1813 when Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth crossed the Blue Mountains, they stressed the military advantages of their discovery, arguing that 'the only pass to it, although of easy access, is through a country naturally so strong as to be easily defended by a few against the efforts of thousands'. The arrival of these 'thousands' was a perennial concern for Australia's settlers. First, there was fear of the French, which revealed itself as early as 1792 when the presence of François Peron's ship in Sydney Harbour aroused the prospect of a simultaneous French assault and a convict uprising. Next came the belief that Australia had been marked down by Bonapartist cartographers to become '*Terre Napoléon*'. In or-

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