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Socialism, Internationalism, and the Australian Labour Movement

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IN COMMON WITH OTHER labour parties of the western world the Australian Labor Party (ALP) is a reformist, pragmatic, and populist party dedicated to extremely general social democratic principles such as "equality of opportunity" and a belief in social progress. It has, however, at various times, experienced conflict over ideological issues of a more specific kind, notably the extent of the party's commitment to socialism and "internationalism" as this has related to questions of race, working-class solidarity, and pacifism. Historically the debate over socialism has been of considerable importance in the affairs of the labour movement, while the partly related issue of internationalism is a subject of contemporary relevance in today's increasingly difficult regional and world political environment.

Before World War I, organized labour in Australia had achieved outstanding success by combining the principles of trade unionism with populist-progressive politics. Male and female suffrage, widely achieved by the early twentieth century, allowed workers to exert an influence not available in Europe until many years later.

A chronic scarcity of labour throughout most of the nineteenth century had produced powerful trade unions across a range of industries. Primary industry, which serviced generally buoyant export markets for wool and minerals, had been conducted along large-scale capitalist lines and as a result had produced mass unskilled, industry-based unions in country regions. The export trade flowed — mainly to Britain — through the half-dozen capital cities of Australia, which had developed as administrative, entrepôt, and manufacturing centres, where craft-based building and light-engineering unions, as well as industry-based transport and maritime unions, provided the backbone of the labour movement. A widespread consciousness of the community of working-class interests, which had been steadily evolving, became a political consideration following the great Maritime Strike, which signalled the dismal depression decade at the end of the nineteenth century.

Partly as a result of the Maritime Strike the trade unions established the Labor Party as a "political arm" of the industrial movement. At first the party

simply reflected the claims of trade unionists for the protection of wage labour and the need for the extension of voting rights to achieve more complete democracy. But it had soon manifested the pattern of developments later apparent in the British Labour Party (BLP) by building its electoral success around a strategy of reaching beyond the unions to wider support and parliamentary organization. Beginning with a policy of providing the older political parties with "support in return for concessions," the ALP went on to represent more successfully than any other party the surge of progressive nationalism which followed the merging of the Australian colonies into a commonwealth in 1901. In 1910 a Labor government came firmly into power in the key state of New South Wales and, after a series of brief snatches at national government, the Labor Party came to power for a three-year term in the federal sphere the same year. By 1915 the party was in power in the Commonwealth and had at least tasted office in every state government.

The Labor Party in Australia was from its beginning more national in its outlook than the parallel movement in Canada.[1] A fundamental premise of labour spokespersons in both countries was the natural right of workers to full representation and participation in the democratic process. In the Australian case, however, the involvement was so complete that the diffuse and unsystematic outpourings that might pass for ideology were soon hard to distinguish from nationalist thought. Concepts of working-class opposition to monopoly capitalism merged with a concern for the condition of the "masses" or the "people." Laborist ideology quickly incorporated city, craft, and rural labour, the "little man" on the land, and anyone disposed to think of themselves as a "battler" or a "dinkum Aussie."

The White Australia policy, for example, was endorsed most enthusiastically by organized labour in the nineteenth century as a means of eliminating cheap or bonded workers. Yet from the beginning there was also a strong racialist tone to the propaganda against "cheap coloured labour." By the turn of the century it had become common for Labor Party spokespersons to stress the community interest of all Australians in a policy of racial exclusion. The lack of ethnic diversity in Australian society, deriving as it did almost completely from British sources of immigration, appears to have encouraged this trend. And only occasionally, for example, as during the split over the issue of conscription during World War I, was the Irish question acutely disruptive of this social homogeneity.

This trend towards the Labor Party's acceptance of a creed of populist nationalism is quite simply explained: the party had been organized in the decade leading up to the emergence of a commonwealth government. Although not a direct participant in the framing of the constitution, Labor was a major beneficiary of the restructuring of political life brought about by federation. In

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[1] See C. Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," Labour/Le Travail, 13 (1984), 45-76.

contrast, labour in Canada has struggled through a series of political expressions, while not yet developing a conquering momentum beyond the traditional union and community bases of the NDP, in a more decentralized, ethnically diverse, and long-established political structure. In Australian experience, however, the cost of success was the abandoning of working-class principle. Every step towards government meant a dilution of class ideology in favour of vague and amorphous concepts fusing populism and contemporary nationalist ideals.

So early Labor Party governments in Australia were not remarkable for their extremist radical initiatives, although the antipodes had at this time a worldwide reputation as a laboratory of social and progressive experimentation.[2] In 1905, after a series of more or less socialist statements of objectives by its branches in the eastern states, the federal ALP Conference adopted the most moderate aims previously accepted by the New South Wales branch, dedicating the party to:

a) The cultivation of an Australian sentiment based upon the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community;

b) 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 function of the State and the Municipality.

The sequence of these two objectives accurately reflected their importance. When the Labor Party entered into government it showed much more interest in the nationalistic first clause of its objective than the second. "We are all socialists now," the future Labor prime minister Andrew Fisher announced to the 1908 party conference, "and the only qualification you hear from anybody is that he is 'not an extreme socialist.' "[3] In fact the party's adherence to a nationalist, racialist, and even xenophobic White Australia philosophy led in the course of time to enthusiasm for massive defence spending, including a system of cadet conscription for home defence and significant militarization of civilian society. The powers of the state were extended considerably during this period, but more in the tradition of Australian nation-building through governmental initiative than as steps towards socialism. And in general perspective, the enthusiasm for defence spending and White Australia merged readily enough with pro-empire patriotism in the pre-war environment so that

[2] On Australia's exaggerated reputation as a social laboratory, see E.C. Fry, "Australian Labour and Labour History," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 12 (1983), 118. Two other surveys of the literature of the Australian labour movement are F. Farrell, "Labour History in Australia," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 21 (1982), 1-17; and J. Merritt, "Labour History," in G. Osborne and W.F. Mandle, eds., *New History* (Sydney 1982), 113-41. On the rise of the ALP see R. Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics* (Melbourne 1960); B. Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism* (Canberra 1973); D.J. Murphy, ed., *Labor in Politics* (Brisbane 1975); L.F. Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography*, Vol. 1 (Sydney 1964).
[3] *Report of the 1908 Commonwealth Conference of the ALP*, 14.

the members of the labour movement came increasingly to share in that outlook described by the historian W.K. Hancock as "independent Australian Britons."[4] When war came in 1914 the Labor leader Andrew Fisher made his famous public pledge "to stand beside [Britain] to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling."

Before the war, there already had been growing opposition to Labor Party policies from the far left of the labour movement.[5] In the 1890s socialist groups which had helped in the establishment of the Labor Party had broken away over the issue of reformism, and the increasing abandonment of socialist commitment that had accompanied the electoral success of the mass party of the labour movement. In the early twentieth century small organizations such as the Socialist Labor Party and, later, the Industrial Workers of the World, contrived links with kindred parties overseas and offered vigorous criticism of the ALP's nationalism, reformism, and accommodation with British imperialism. Other small socialist groups operated within the ALP or exercised an influence through its affiliated trade unions. Their attacks on the Labor Party leadership came to be concentrated around the issue of militarism, and the left turned increasingly to the notions of pacifist oppositionism championed in Europe by the Second International. Socialist and trade union pressure succeeded in committing the Labor Party to seek affiliation with the Second International. Resolutions to that effect were passed at both the 1905 and 1908 Commonwealth conferences of the ALP, but, lacking a federal executive, the party bureaucracy in the state branches simply refused to act. At the 1912 Commonwealth conference of the party, an extended debate took place on the issues of peace, war, and affiliation with the Second International. Once again the conference agreed that involvement with the Second International was necessary and overseas representation was endorsed. However, in addition to the implicit opposition of some leading party politicians, it was clear also that a number of delegates recognized that the problem of financing the association with European socialist movements posed a considerable barrier to any sustained activity at the international level.[6] No links were established with the Second International before World War 1 and although the ALP participated in the formation of the Labour and Socialist International in 1919, relations faded rapidly later in the 1920s following European criticism of White Australia and restrictive immigration policy.[7]

So, despite the manifestations of enthusiasm for the Second International and its anti-war policies, the consensus in the labour movement remained firmly in support of Labor Party nationalism. The hegemony of the party's

[4] W.K. Hancock, *Australia* (Brisbane 1961). First published 1930.

[5] See I. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics* (Canberra 1965); F. Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour* (Sydney 1981).

[6] L.F. Crisp, *The Australian Federal Labour Party 1901-1951* (Sydney 1978), 100.

[7] On the relationship of the ALP with the Second International and the Labour and Socialist International see Farrell, *International Socialism*, 14-19, 161-5.

political leaders over the unions and other segments of the wider labour move-
ment was established in the course of the depression of the 1890s, when a
series of bitter and humiliating defeats in the industrial sphere had made it
apparent that, on their own, trade unions were unable to defend the wages and
conditions won earlier in the dizzy economic expansion of the second half of
the nineteenth century. In the post-federation era a series of Commonwealth
and state arbitration acts were passed, often by Lib-Lab style coalition govern-
ments, which ensured registered trade unions a hearing of their case against
employers before a judicial functionary, who was charged with resolving
industrial disputes. This institutionalization of the class struggle led to a spec-
tacular growth of trade unions in the early part of the century so that Australia
became, during these years, the most unionized country in the world.[8] At the
same time, however, the arbitration system began to shape the direction of
trade unionism towards legalism and timid reform, and even before the end of
the first decade of the twentieth century there were ominous rumblings of
rank-and-file discontent, seized on by socialist groups popularizing a return to
the strike weapon as an answer to the delays and frustrations of arbitration. In
the federal arbitration system, however, a wider consensus was shaped by
attempts at striking a deal between employers and unionists based on the idea
of extending tariff protection to employers in return for a "basic" family
wage.

   This national consensus was shaken and severely tested during World War
I. In 1916 the Labor Party split over the issue of conscription for overseas
military service in support of the British Empire, and most of the leading
politicians of pre-war years were expelled from the ALP.[9] At the ideological
level the split can be seen as divergence between the militarist pro-empire
patriotism of the then-Prime Minister W.M. Hughes (who had succeeded
Fisher as leader of the Labor Party in 1915) and the "independent" Australian
Britishness of the ALP as a whole. This produced a hiatus in the party's outlook
and it was almost a decade before the politicians who advocated moderation
and parliamentary reformism regained even an approximation of their previous
status. In the interim, as the Labor Party descended into opposition in every
legislature except Queensland, the labour movement was wracked by ideologi-
cal disputes of an intensity never previously encountered, as a variety of

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[8] In 1891 there were approximately 55,000 unionists in Australia, which had risen by
1901 to over 100,000. By the outbreak of World War I there were 500,000 unionists.
This was equal to about 10 per cent of the population. In the period since World War II
Australia has been displaced as one of the most unionized countries in the world by
Sweden, Norway, and many other nations not as closely comparable, so that union
power and influence in Australia is today limited by international standards. Australia's
arbitration legislation was a precedent for that of other countries, including Canada.
[9] See Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, Vol. 2 (Sydney 1979); D.J. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan* (Brisbane
1975); L. Ross, *John Curtin* (Melbourne 1977); G. Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo* (Mel-
bourne 1976).

socialist groups sought to point the unions and the ALP in the direction of their creeds.

Accompanying the ideological disputation was an equally profound collapse of consensus in the industrial sphere. Frustration with the arbitration system first began to grow as it became apparent that the constitution prevented implementation of key planks in the platform of the leading advocates of orderly class struggle and "industrial harmony." By the end of the first decade of the century a few unions showed signs of moving towards seriously questioning the arbitration system; by the middle of World War I, when the arbitration system began to appear to trade unionists as a mechanism for holding down wages in the face of acute inflation and structural change, there was a very widespread rejection of arbitration, a development integrally connected with the debates in the ALP over the implications of the consensus political outlook of pre-war years.

The extent of this breakdown in consensus is starkly revealed by the strike statistics of the period. By 1913, the number of working-days lost per year had reached 623,528, with over 50,000 workers in 208 unions involved; by 1916, 1,678,930 days were lost by almost 171,000 workers in 508 unions; by 1919, some 5,652,726 days were lost by nearly 158,000 workers in 460 unions.[10] In the early 1920s an oncoming trade recession honed back working-class industrial militancy but accelerated a swing towards radical politics in the union movement as a whole. By 1927 the number of working-days lost had once again climbed to 1,714,000 with over 200,000 workers involved. After a few further spectacular strike actions in open confrontation with the arbitration system, industrial militancy was finally all but eliminated for a time in the early 1930s by the effects of the Great Depression. As a result, however, the ideological and political factionalism of the labour movement became so intense that the federal Labor government elected in late 1929 collapsed in disarray a short time after assuming office.[11]

Clearly, however, a basis had been laid in these years for the emergence of widespread political dissidence among members of the labour movement. Beginning with the Trade Union Congress against conscription in 1916, there were a variety of confused strivings towards the setting up of an Australia-wide organization to press trade union political and industrial claims separately from, and — if need be — in opposition to the ALP. These moves culminated in the formation of the Australasian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in 1927. The founding congress of ACTU, held in Melbourne in May 1927, was not representative of the whole trade union movement. Nevertheless, the new body derived its authority from a majority of the larger separate unions and the powerful State Labor Councils of the more industrialized states of Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. Over the next few years, as the ACTU

[10] J.T. Sutcliffe, *A History of Trade Unionism in Australia* (Melbourne 1967), 234.
[11] On the short-lived Scullin Labor government see J. Robertson, *J.H. Scullin* (Perth 1974).

began to establish its identity and extend its influence and authority within the labour movement, it entered into a series of intense debates with the Australian Labor Party and with older established unions such as the rural-based Australian Workers Union (AWU). A key matter disputed during these years was the correct attitude to be adopted by the labour movement towards the international working class, and an outcome of the debates was the first significant questioning and discussion of the implications of the labour movement's commitment to the racialist precepts of the White Australia policy.

The conflicts which wracked the labour movement during these years were a by-product of the drift towards radicalism in the period after World War I. For many trade unionists the radical discontent of the war years had carried over into a generalized rejection of capitalism, and an impatience with the moderate and parliamentary methods of Labor Party reformism. At the All-Australian Trade Union Congress held in Melbourne in 1921, a socialist programme thought to be suitable to Australian conditions was formulated in considerable detail. The congress adopted proposals aimed at the socialization of Australian industry by "revolutionary action," reorganization of the union along "one big union" lines, and the development of international solidarity with other working-class movements in the Pacific in order to prevent war.[12] The union movement split soon after the congress, the Australian Workers Union (still, at the time Australia's largest union) and some smaller bodies supporting the ALP in attempts to tame the socialist excesses of the labour left. Despite these splits, however, the movement towards greater unionism continued, eventually culminating in the ACTU. Although looser in organization than the previously envisaged one big union, and more moderate in its aims and ideals, the ACTU was nevertheless in direct line of descent from the All-Australian Trade Union Congress of 1921.[13]

Some militant trade unionists regarded the programme of the 1921 congress as representing merely a partial victory for the revolutionary principles of communism. First emerging as an "above ground" party in Sydney in 1920, the adherents of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), and most especially that group recognized officially by the Comintern in 1922, were entrenched in the trade union movement of the industrialized and mining regions of eastern Australia. Led by the colourful J.S. (Jock) Garden, secretary of the New South Wales Labor Council, the Communist Party was for a time a strong influence in the affairs of both the trade unions and the ALP. From the beginning the party was formally committed to oppose the White Australia policy, and at the 1925 federal elections both labour and conservative parties denounced the CPA as dangerously "un-Australian." With White Australia still an article of faith with working-class electors, the wider appeal of communist doctrines was clearly circumscribed. Yet within the union movement, and especially in New

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[12] *All-Australian Trade Union Congress Report* (Melbourne 1921).
[13] C. Crofts, "Genesis and Achievements of the ACTU," *Labor Call* (Melbourne), 9 August 1945.

South Wales, the direct influence of the CPA was bolstered by the influence of the Profintern, (or Red International), the Moscow-based trade union organization of which the New South Wales Labor Council was the official Australian section. Jock Garden (whose supporters were known as "the Trades Hall Reds" because of their association with the Red International) was elected as a member of the world executive of the Profintern even after his expulsion from the CPA in 1926. The party and the Trades Hall Reds continued to work together in alternate bouts of rivalry and cooperation until Moscow finally decided in favour of the CPA in late 1930.

A far more extensive influence than the militants who were avowed communists was a wider grouping of trade union leaders and activists who professed left-wing ideas of a less revolutionary kind. For many radical unionists the loose amalgam of doctrines incorporated in the programme of the 1921 All-Australian Congress was a sufficiently rigid expression of their political stance. Although not communists (and, indeed, often members of the ALP), they were impressed by the achievements of the Russian revolution and acutely suspicious of the right and ability of conventional Labor parliamentarians to lead the labour movement forward. Pragmatic, and more than dimly aware of the simple practical advantages in industrial bargaining which could result from the formation of a body like the ACTU, they were nonetheless strongly committed to a socialist world view. At an All-Australian Trade Union Congress held in Melbourne in 1922, over 150 delegates representing union organizations in all states re-endorsed the programme set forth the previous year. In 1926 a third All-Australian Trade Union Congress held in Sydney publicly castigated and humiliated the then-federal leader of the ALP, Matt Charlton, for his support of referendum proposals put forward by the conservative Bruce-Page government. In conjunction with this congress a Pan-Pacific meeting was convened which resolved to proceed with plans for an international anti-war congress. At the founding congress of the ACTU the following year, it was decided to establish a "peace bureau" and to convene a Pan-Pacific conference against capitalism and war.[14] Subsequently the first meeting of the ACTU executive in August 1927 announced its affiliation with the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, a body founded in Hankow, China earlier that year.

The Pan-Pacific Secretariat was a result both of the moves by Australian unionists to establish an anti-war international and organizing work undertaken by the Profintern in China and other countries of the Pacific.[15] The obscure, and more or less deliberately manipulated, background to the secretariat's formation, however, was overlooked by most left-wing unionists in favour of its ideological manifestations, which stressed anti-war and anti-imperialist propaganda and a united front political strategy for the working class. However, the Pan-Pacific Secretariat also maintained in its programme a commitment to break down national and racial barriers among the workers of the

[14] Official Report of the All-Australian Trades Union Conference (Melbourne 1927).
[15] Farrell, International Socialism, 126-43.

Pacific, and this was soon seized on by isolationists as a threat to the White Australia policy.

The political climate in Australia at this time was not at all conducive to working-class internationalism. Throughout the early part of 1928 the conservative press had engaged in a "red bogey" campaign of considerable intensity, which was partly inspired by the trend towards working-class internationalism in the trade unions.[16] The press campaign continued on into the federal election of November 1928 and constituted a significant sub-theme of an otherwise dull election.[17] Coming on top of the long furor over the adoption of the so-called "red rules," which had secured the left in control of the NSW Labor Party the previous year, the press allegations of increasing communist influence in the labour movement had an unsettling effect on the balance of factions within the ALP. As had been the case with the red scare campaign conducted during the 1925 elections the conservative press was joined by Labor Party spokespersons in its denunciations of communism. A leading spokesman of the powerful Australian Workers Union denounced the secretariat affiliation of the ACTU as a "red plot," the object of which was alleged to be to undermine the White Australia policy and "break down all racial barriers."[18] He also invited the newly elected leader of the federal Parliamentary Labor Party, J.H. Scullin, to enhance his prospects at the forthcoming elections by repudiating the ACTU.[19] Although at first Scullin would not openly oppose the new trade union organization, he was later forced to assert the Labor Party's dedication to the cause of White Australia when the ACTU reiterated its total support for the programme of the Pan-Pacific Secretariat.

The issues in dispute between the left and right of the trade union movement were fought out in a series of Trades Hall debates and at two important ACTU congresses held over the years 1928-1930. The first ACTU congress, held in Melbourne in July 1928 dealt with the charges levelled by the right against the secretariat. Opposition to the ACTU's affiliation with the secretariat was championed by a group of right-wing unions led by the office-bearers of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. The right stressed the danger of too close an association with an "overseas" and communist-influenced organization and the embarrassment that union policies were causing to the ALP.[20] The left stressed the danger of stirring up race hatred to bolster the alleged imperial expansionist war aims of capitalism. The White Australia policy was seen as an economic measure aimed simply at maintaining living standards through restricting immigration from the regions of most abundant supply. The point of this argument was made reasonably clear to workers in the 1920s by the impact

[16] See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April 1928.
[17] A. Wildavsky and D. Carboch, *Studies in Australian Politics: The 1926 Referendum; The Fall of the Bruce-Page Government* (Melbourne 1958).
[18] *Australian Worker* (Sydney), 27 June 1928.
[19] *Ibid.*, 25 July 1928.
[20] *Pan Pacific Worker* (Sydney), 1 August 1928.

of large-scale "white" immigration from Britain under the Empire Resettlement scheme. In this view working-class internationalism was in fact a *concomitant* of the White Australia policy: it was necessary to insure that the economic origins of the White Australia policy did not overflow into racial chauvinism; it was necessary also to assist the fledgeling trade-union organizations of Asia and the Pacific to prevent inroads into the level of employment as a result of expanding imports from low-wage countries. Thus the logic of ideological conflict between White Australian racialism and working-class internationalism was ignored and the ACTU congress of 1928 came down overwhelmingly in support of affiliation with the Pan-Pacific Secretariat.[21]

This left-wing consensus was undermined over the next two years by the world communist movement's swing towards extremist politics, and by the election of a federal labour government in Australia late in 1929. In 1928 the Comintern began to enter its sectarian "third period" which soon surfaced in the Profintern and Pan-Pacific Secretariat in concerted attacks on the "social fascist" (non-communist) affiliates of those organizations. It was also reflected in the rise of a new leadership to power in the Communist Party of Australia, which now more outspokenly repudiated the White Australia policy and any collaboration with left-wing elements in the trade unions and the ALP. The resulting division on the left insured that when the issue of secretariat affiliation was considered for a second time at an ACTU congress in March 1930, there was a strong movement away from working-class internationalism and towards nationalistic isolationism. Encouraged by the Scullin Labor government to adopt reformist policies, the congress affirmed its allegiance to the White Australia policy, rejecting a left-wing amendment that this policy "badly expressed" the union movement's economic programme.[22]

From this time onwards the Communist Party was the only significant force in the labour movement to question the White Australia policy. Its outspokenness on this matter was modified in the late 1930s by the need to pursue the struggle against fascism and war. Towards the end of World War II, however, the communists joined with several overseas-linked church organizations in calls to change the racialist immigration policy in favour of a system of controlled immigration based on quotas.[23] But opposition to the White Australia policy at this time produced the same reaction and alignment of forces within the labour movement as it had in the early 1930s. The federal Labor government of the 1940s initiated a post-war immigration policy firmly based on the White Australia concept of restricting the intake to Europeans only. And despite strong communist influence in the trade unions at this time the policy was openly endorsed by leading figures in the ACTU.[24] Under the Labor govern-

[21] *Ibid.*, 15 September 1928.
[22] Farrell, *International Socialism*, 188-97; J. Hagan, *The History of the ACTU* (Melbourne 1981).
[23] See K. Rivett, ed., *Australia and the Non-White Migrant* (Melbourne 1975), 25.
[24] A.A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not* (Hawthorn 1974), 100.

ment's minister for immigration, A.A. Calwell, the White Australia policy was rigidly enforced, though his immigration scheme for European migrants was responsible for the development of an ethnic diversity beyond the U.K.-bias of earlier years.[25] The new Liberal-Country Party coalition government of R.G. Menzies, which took office in 1949, was seen by some as more liberal, humane, and progressive in its administration of the White Australia policy, although in fact this was merely a cosmetic change. However, over the next decade and a half, progressive changes were initiated under the Menzies government, culminating in the formal abandonment of the White Australia policy in 1966.

The Labor Party had come to power in both the federal and state political arenas in the wartime conditions of the early 1940s. Led by John Curtin, the wartime Labor government was pledged to set aside its programme of socialist change in favour of national survival.[26] At the end of the war, the Labor government initiated a post-war reconstruction programme which combined Keynesian reformism with the Australian tradition of nation-building by extending the activities of the state.[27] J.B. Chifley, who succeeded Curtin as leader of the ALP after his death in office in 1945, established a number of government businesses which could compete with private firms, including Trans-Australian Airlines, the National Shipping Line, and the Commonwealth Bank (originally established in 1911 by the Fisher Labor government as a "people's bank" but later extended under Chifley into a central bank and development financier). The Labor government also established a number of national monopoly enterprises in key industries, and attempted the nationalization of air transport in 1945 and banking in 1947. The attempt to nationalize the banks resulted in the move being declared unconstitutional, thus revealing the ultimate barrier to parliamentary socialism in the Australian context. At the same time the attempted nationalization of the banks prompted a "red bogey" campaign against the Labor government which assisted in the electoral triumph in 1949 of the strongly anti-communist and "free enterprise" coalition led by R.G. Menzies.[28]

In foreign affairs the Labor government abandoned the narrow-minded isolationism associated with the ALP in the inter-war years. The minister for external affairs, Dr. H.V. Evatt, played an active role in the development of the post-war international system, an endeavour recognized by his election in 1948-9 as president of the General Assembly of the United Nations. The government supported radical trade union demands for the recognition of

[25] C. Kiernan, *Calwell: A Personal and Political Biography* (Melbourne 1978).

[26] L. Ross, *John Curtin*.

[27] E.R. Walker, *The Australian Economy in War and Reconstruction* (New York 1947); F. Alexander, *From Curtin to Menzies and After* (Melbourne 1973); H.C. Coombs, *Trial Balance: Issues in My Working Life* (Melbourne 1980).

[28] L.F. Crisp, *Ben Chifley* (London 1961); A.L. May, *The Battle for the Banks* (Sydney 1966).

Indonesian independence against the Dutch, and sought to argue the rights of small nations against the "great powers," whenever possible resisting the growing encroachment of Cold War politics on the freedom of manoeuvre obtained in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Generally the ALP supported a foreign policy aimed at modifying the world economic and political system sufficiently to insure that middle-range nations like Australia could operate internal policies of national development, immigration control, and full employment, while remaining an integral part of the western alliance.

Further attempts to steer towards a "middle course" in international affairs were assisted by the development of loose party links with overseas movements closely similar in outlook to the ALP.[29] With labour administrations in power in other parts of the Commonwealth, the ALP displayed enthusiasm for regular representation at the Inter-Dominion Labour Conferences, the first of which was held in London in 1944. This revived a relationship which had first been established in the 1920s when the British Labour Party led by Ramsay Mac-Donald had held a series of Commonwealth Labour Conferences which the ALP attended. In 1943 the Curtin government had formulated proposals for the setting up of a British Commonwealth Secretariat in London which, although its original form was unacceptable to some Dominion governments, was afterwards instituted in diluted form. This enthusiasm for Dominion cooperation was largely inspired by the circumstance of labour governments then being in power in a number of countries, particularly New Zealand and Britain. Many members of the ALP came to identify closely with the aims and ideas current in the British Labour Party as the Commonwealth faced the problems of colonial independence movements and the dismantlement of the British Empire in the post-war world. Through its connections with the BLP the Labor Party also came into association at last with the International Socialist Conference, the pallid successor to the Second International, though this relationship has been quite inconsequential. Only the British and Dominion Labour Parties have had sufficient respect from the Australian electorate for Labor politicians openly to celebrate a general fraternity with the ALP.

In the trade unions the influence of left-wing socialism persisted, although it was increasingly diluted as the Cold War progressed. The membership of the Communist Party reached a peak during World War II and the ACTU congress of 1945 was firmly in their control. At the 1947 congress, calls were made for a reduction in military expenditure, the adoption of an independent Australian foreign policy, nationalization of the coal-mining industry, and a policy of friendship and encouragement towards national independence struggles in the Pacific. The same year the ACTU affiliated with the Far Eastern Bureau of the

[29] Crisp, *Australian Federal Labour Party*, 104-7. For a favourable account of Evatt's more general achievements in the international arena, see K. Tennant, *Evatt* (Sydney 1970). For a more hostile account see P. Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness: Australian Foreign Affairs 1941-1947* (Melbourne 1980).

World Federation of Trade Unions.[30] However the communists failed to maintain their influence, and in 1949 the ACTU abandoned the World Federation to join with other non-communist national trade union organizations to form the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. The extent of communist power also led to increased activity by anti-communist and Catholic Action groupings within the labour movement. After 1945 the most important of these organizations, known as "The Movement," gained increasing influence following a decision by the ALP to set up "Industrial Groups" to combat the rise of communist power in the unions. By the early 1950s the power of the Communist Party was restricted to a few key "fortress" unions based mainly in Victoria and New South Wales.

The product of these ideological disputations was a union movement polarized into Cold War inertia, afraid to stand by its radical traditions and largely restricting its attention to such matters as wage claims, working conditions, and arbitration. Under the long presidency of Albert Monk, the ACTU developed a more or less non-political role, seeking to avoid overt public involvement in issues considered to be the province of the ALP. By such adaptation to the environment of the Menzies era, the ACTU developed into an integral part of Australia's economic structure and was eventually to emerge as the industrial colossus that it is today. The ACTU's strength was enhanced by the affiliation of the West Australian trade union movement in 1962 and the giant right-wing AWU in 1967. At the same time the ACTU remained informed of changing world opinion through its links with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the International Labor Organization (with which connections had first been established in the 1920s). With the election of R.J. Hawke as Monk's successor in 1969 there was a move back towards involvement in public issues. In the remarkably changed environment of the early 1970s, the ACTU offered positive leadership of the movement opposed to apartheid and placed a ban on services to a touring South African Rugby Union team. Such an active and outspoken stance on foreign affairs and "political" questions such as racialism had been anathema to the ACTU of the 1950s and 1960s.

A similar pattern of emerging moderation and repudiation of radical influence was evident in the ALP's handling of the socialization objective. Between 1921 and 1927 the Labor Party's political leaders had relied on the so-called "Blackburn Declaration" to explain away the party's commitment to full-blown socialism before hostile audiences. This was a contradictory public "declaration" passed by a narrow majority at the 1921 conference, which included an assertion that "the Party does not seek to abolish private ownership even of any of the instruments of production where such instrument is utilised by its owner in a socially useful manner and without exploitation."[31] In 1927

[30] A Davidson. *The Communist Party of Australia: A Short History* (Stanford 1969), 132.
[31] For a documentary listing of the Labor Party's statement of its objective see G. Evans

ALP politicians managed to modify the "methods" section of the socialization objective to remove any indication of syndicalist, worker control, or guild socialist ideas, so that it was now clearly stated that socialism would be achieved through a series of "constitutional" measures concluding with the "Progressive enactment of reform, as defined in the Labor Platform." From this time onwards the meaning of socialism was, in practical terms, whatever the politicians sought to make of it in parliament. This fact was to some extent obscured by Chifley's attempt to focus socialist and reformist aspirations on the nationalization of banking, a specific measure for the achievement of socialism which had survived in the methods section of the socialization objective since 1921. With socialism excluded from the arena of practical politics after the constitutional rebuff to the attempt at bank nationalization there was no further enthusiasm for such measures. In 1948 the nationalization of banking commitment was replaced by a commitment to institute "National Planning" and "complete control of banking and credit by the nation."[32] In addition the 1948 conference passed a motion which "reaffirmed" the Blackburn Declaration and in 1951 the ALP conference finally inserted an "interpretation" below the text of the socialization objective which summarized the qualifications and obfuscation developed by politicians over the years. Every triennial ALP conference of the 1950s and early 1960s added to or modified the objective until finally the historic commitment to "the socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange" was almost completely obscured by a mountain of prose and "explanation."

Even the departure of many supporters of Catholic Action from the Labor Party in the 1950s did not alter the swing away from socialist ideals.[33] In the wake of the Petrov spy scare of 1954, Dr. H.V. Evatt, Chifley's successor as leader of the ALP, denounced the role of Catholic Action, and over the next few years some serious splits occurred in state branches which led to the setting up of the "anti-Communist" Democratic Labor Party.[34] Locked into desperate competition for the middle-class vote and confined in aspirations by the provincial rhetoric of Cold War Australia, the ALP in the 1960s languished on the opposition benches in federal parliament and progressively lost its power bases throughout the states. Evatt's successor as leader of the party, the moderate Irish Catholic A.A. Calwell, came to within a few votes of unseating Menzies in 1961 in the wake of a credit squeeze, but was subsequently unable to match Liberal-Country Party appeals to middle-class voters. The Labor Party was deemed to be too left-wing by the electorate because of its opposition to

and J. Reeves, *Labor Essays 1980* (Melbourne 1980), 155-63.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] D.W. Rawson, *Labor in Vain?* (Melbourne 1966).
[34] A. Dalziel, *Evatt the Enigma* (Melbourne 1967); R. Murray, *The Split* (Melbourne 1970); P. Ormonde, *The Movement* (Melbourne 1972). On the Petrov affair see N. Whitlam and J. Stubbs, *Nest of Traitors* (Brisbane 1974); cf. M. Thwaites, *Truth Will Out* (Sydney 1980).

American military bases in Australia and to the country's close involvement with the United States in the Vietnam War. Calwell was succeeded by E.G. Whitlam as party leader in 1967. Whitlam played a leading role in moving the ALP away from a commitment to White Australia and began to shape an electoral strategy for the party which aimed at successfully outbidding the Liberal-Country Party in its appeal to a burgeoning middle class produced by a quarter of a century of full employment. Labor's appeal to the young was bolstered by the government's clumsy attempt to continue to enforce conscription despite the withdrawal of the bulk of the Australian troop commitment to the Vietnam conflagration.[35] When Whitlam led the Labor Party to victory in 1972 it was on a skein of promises aimed at appealing to the new and developing aspirations of the middle class by initiating "national" and "reformist" policies which owed little to working-class or even some of the more traditional "little man" populist ideals. The federal parliamentary Labor Party was now very clearly a middle-class party with policies for Australia's post-industrial growth and affluence such as cheaper imports through tariff reduction, squeezing of foreign-owned resource developers, equal pay for women, and increased spending on education, health, housing, Aboriginal affairs, public services, and welfare. The resulting inflation and unemployment were accentuated by a wages and conditions scramble by the trade unions. The mid-1970s world recession had its impact at almost precisely the same time and these considerable economic difficulties insured a conservative victory at the polls following the dismissal of the Whitlam government by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, in November, 1975.[36]

Like the ill-fated Scullin ministry of the 1930s, the Whitlam government was based only on a slim electoral majority in the lower house, despite a brilliantly contrived but clumsily executed and unsuccessful attempt to gain control of the Senate in a double-dissolution election in May 1974.[37] Thus a Senate challenge to Labor's power was an ever-present possibility, which finally led to Kerr's dismissal of Whitlam for his inability to insure supply. Despite this, and despite the fact that traditional socialist ideas were generally anathema to the middle-class parliamentarians of the Whitlam ministry, the government was given to quite spectacular posturing on a number of liberal progressive causes. The progressive initiatives of the government covered a whole range of domestic and foreign policy issues but were perhaps most obviously pursued in the hurried grant of independence to Australia's major colonial possession, Papua-New Guinea, and the repeated public repudiation of

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[35] C. Lloyd and C. Reid, Out of the Wilderness (Melbourne 1974); D Horne, Time of Hope (Sydney 1981).

[36] H.R. Penniman, ed., Australia at the Polls (Canberra 1977); A. Reid, The Whitlam Venture (Melbourne 1976); J. Kerr, Matters for Judgement (Melbourne 1978); E.G. Whitlam, The Truth of the Matter (Melbourne 1979).

[37] L. Oakes and D. Solomon, Grab for Power (Melbourne 1974).

White Australia.[38] Both in domestic and foreign affairs the Labor government sought to define a role for Australia which was more independent, less militarily oriented, and not open to suggestion of racism. Applied in the area of foreign affairs these ideas were in the tradition established by the Labor government in the 1940s of seeking to avoid the restrictions of the bi-polar Cold War international system. The overtly anti-racist stance of the Whitlam government was necessary to provide some freedom of movement in the international environment, but there were also bases of domestic support for such ideas among the educated elite and among those favouring reform of the condition of Australia's small Aboriginal population and "multi-cultural" programmes aimed at eliminating discrimination against Australia's large non-Anglo-Saxon migrant population, whose interests had been largely ignored previously.[39]

Accompanying Labor Party policies of social reform was an attitude of expansive generosity towards public service unions and associated professions, so that wages and conditions in the public sector improved quite markedly. In the private sector, over-full employment generally insured that unions could extend the wage benefits achieved in the public service, and 1974 strike statistics registered industrial disputation approaching levels not seen since the 1920s. This time, however, the unions won the battle over wages. The economic malaise after 1974 saw a considerable movement of private capital offshore into Asia and the Pacific to reduce the costs of production. Within the Labor Party Whitlam's replacement as leader of the opposition by an economist, Bill Hayden, saw a movement away from liberal progressivism towards the careful development of reform policies on the basis of need, and a move back towards more traditional populism associating national development with the revival of manufacturing industries and industrial expansion. The replacement of Hayden as leader of the ALP by R.J. Hawke on the eve of the 1983 election, for no other reason than that he would insure the party's electoral victory, indicates an even greater strengthening of the pragmatic and populist intent of the new Labor government. This tendency has become quite evident during Labor's first term in office. So far the Hawke government has been distinguished in its attempts to impress the electorate with its sane economic management, its pursuit of consensus policies, and its support of a healthy but adaptable private sector. This pragmatic and moderate approach to all domestic and foreign policy issues is certain to continue, provided that the power of the left remains limited.

Opinion polls have indicated that R.J. Hawke is the most popular prime minister in Australia's history. He is a man with great populist appeal, a semi-presidential style, and a commitment to the development of a consensus

[38] For a broad picture see B.D. Beddie, ed., *Advance Australia — Where?* (Melbourne 1975); H. Albinski, *Australian External Policy under Labor* (Brisbane 1977); W.J. Hudson, ed., *Australia in World Affairs 1971-1975* (Sydney 1980). Also K. Rivett, ed., *Australia and the Non-White Migrant* (Melbourne 1975).

[39] G. Freudenberg, *A Certain Grandeur* (Melbourne 1977), 200.

of opinion on Australia's future that reflects a belief in the corporate structure of power and opinion. However, Labor does not have full control of the Senate.

What, then, can be said of idealist influences on the present Labor government? With the government's avowed commitment to a pragmatic and consensus approach to all policy issues it is most unlikely that there will be any radical departures from the status quo. However, the government has moved towards the introduction of a comprehensive public medicare system, increased women's rights, a fairer taxation system, and an assortment of more minor reforms of a broadly social-democratic kind. There is also a continued enthusiasm — already manifested in the policies of the present Labor government — for the United Nations. The idea of an increased role for the United Nations has been a continuing underlying theme of Labor's wider outlook on the world since 1945, and particular emphasis has been placed on its potential for peace and disarmament. More recently there has been enthusiasm for ratification of UN statutes on sex discrimination and wilderness protection among Labor Party supporters involved with these issues. Beyond this general support for the United Nations there seems to be little scope for the development of a very distinct Labor foreign policy along the lines of the Evatt-Whitlam model in the present international environment, though there have been attempted peace initiatives in relation to the Vietnam-Cambodian conflict and the situation in the Middle East. There have also been firm commitments to domestic and international policies opposed to racism.[40]

The opposition Liberal Party and its National (ex-Country) Party ally have had considerable difficulty in coping with the pragmatic style of the Hawke government. Their attacks on "big government" have largely fallen flat with the electorate as a result of Labor's cautious approach to budgeting, although looming debt and balance of payments projections may perhaps bring this question to the fore in future years. Meanwhile, in search of something with more immediate electoral appeal, some opposition spokespersons have indicated an intention of making immigration important as an election issue. They have accused the Labor government of a "pro-Asian" immigration policy, though this claim seems to be based only on the application of a non-discriminatory entry formula. The labour movement has given solid support to the government's policies and the opposition's attacks have not produced anything like the extent of response that the past history of Australia might suggest as likely. Yet it is worth noting that even on the experience of the recent past this issue can explode into prominence, particularly if reforms are pursued too

[40] For an attempt to define the limits of a labor foreign policy in the context of the present world political system see Mr. Hayden's speech to the United Nations as reported in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October 1983 and *Australian*, 5 October 1983. For an optimistic appraisal of the regional situation, see E.G. Whitlam, *A Pacific Community* (Harvard 1981). On the present Labor government's determination to pursue non-racist immigration policies see *Australian*, 4-5 February 1984. On the reaction of extreme right-wing groups see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1984. On the attitude of the opposition parties see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 August 1984.

far in advance of community opinion. This was dramatically illustrated by the reaction in early 1974 to the bid by the ailing Australian subsidiary of the British Leyland Motor Corporation to import a small pilot group of workers in the trades from the Philippines.

When the Leyland scheme was announced in January 1974, it excited considerable publicity and press speculation, despite the fact that some hundreds of immigrants from the Philippines had already been received in Australia over a number of years.[41] The plan was hailed by E.G. Whitlam, on a visit to the Philippines, as symbolizing the new Labor government's determination to put an end to any manifestations of "contemptible White Australia" restrictions on immigration.[42] Opinion in Australia, however, was far more cautious and cool. In the face of announcements by Leyland that the Philippine immigrants were intended as the first of a thousand or so workers in the trades who would be brought into service with the firm, informed observers expressed reservations as to the general desirability of concentrating a single ethnic group into relatively low-status jobs in such a declining and troubled industry.[43] When it was suggested that some of the jobs involved were unskilled, and not for tradesworkers — as earlier maintained — the ACTU executive announced its unanimous opposition to the scheme.[44] Despite this opposition the government stated that it would go ahead with the scheme to honour a commitment made by Whitlam on a visit to Manila.[45] The scheme was then deferred in favour of a wide-ranging assessment of migrant potential in Asia and the Pacific, and there was another symbolic burial of "contemptible White Australia," ACTU president R.J. Hawke optimistically pointing out that a projected acute labour shortage in Australia would in fact allow the migrants to assist in maintaining living standards.[46] At about this time it became clear that the issue had gotten completely out of control, with fringe racialist groups, bureaucratic and political in-fighting, and evidence of growing unemployment levels all casting their shadows over the debate.[47] The issue was put aside following the announcement of the May 1974 election. The collapse soon after of the Leyland Corporation's Australian subsidiary and the abandonment of its local assembly activities were to signal an end to the matter, at least as a live industrial concern.

But what is perhaps most interesting about this strange sequence of events is the confused and equivocal stance of many trade union opponents of racialism. When announcing opposition to the Leyland scheme the ACTU president was at pains to explain that the executive's resolution was "not anti-

[41] *Herald* (Melbourne), 12 February 1974; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 1974.
[42] *Australian*, 11 February 1974; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 February 1974.
[43] *Australian*, 31 January 1974; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 1974.
[44] *Examiner* (Launceston), 11 March 1974; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1974.
[45] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 March 1974; cf. *Australian*, 12 February 1974.
[46] *Sun* (Melbourne), 3 February 1974; *Australian*, 16 March 1974.
[47] *Sunday Press* (Melbourne), 3 February 1974; *Age*, 5 March 1974.

Filipino."[48] The ACTU sought to resolve conflict between anti-racialist beliefs and practical objections to the Leyland scheme by focusing discussion on the assessment of trade qualifications and the level of skill involved. However, as the press pointed out at the time, any refusal to accept the proposal would appear to Asians as confirming that the prejudices of the past remained.[49] When, under pressure, the ACTU finally announced a qualified acceptance of the plan, a left-wing union leader reportedly launched renewed attacks upon the scheme.[50] A similar reaction was forthcoming also from building unions when the Master Builders Federation proposed to follow up the Leyland initiative with the importation of another four thousand tradesworkers from the Philippines to overcome their labour shortage.[51] Explaining the very strong opposition of the left-wing Building Workers Industrial Union to this proposal an official stressed that the union was not being "racist." [52] Subsequently, however, the union joined with three other building unions to issue a statement that the responsibility for labour shortages "lay fairly and squarely with employers," advancing the argument that Australia's "urgent need" was the training of local apprentices rather than the importation of skilled workers in the trades.[53] Although the ACTU cooperated closely with the Whitlam government in overcoming the problems involved in assessing trade qualifications of prospective immigrants from Asia and the Pacific, union spokespersons displayed a marked unwillingness to discuss the more general issues involved in the continued maintenance of informal and discreet restrictions applying to large-scale migration. However, the rapid fall-off in immigration intake which paralleled Australia's economic difficulties after mid-1974 allowed these matters to lose their immediate relevance in public discussion.

Clearly, however, some old problems remain, and may not yet be satisfactorily resolved. Under the conservative Fraser government, in power from 1975-83, there was negligible immigration pressure on Australian living standards due principally to bi-partisan acceptance of impositions of narrow occupational and family reunion provisions on migrant intake. A slow increase in the numbers of immigrants, due to some elastic applications of criteria and a luke-warm response to the plight of refugees from Vietnam, did not evoke any widespread criticism in the labour movement. But there has been a continuing attitude among unionists that racialist ideas are repudiated while in practice considerable barriers to large-scale immigration are left unchallenged. Some such barriers will always be supported by trade unionists for they are essential to maintaining wage levels and general standards of living. As mediators of the demands of bread-and-butter unionism and wider political and ideological con-

[48] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1974.
[49] *Australian*, 11 March 1974; *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 13 March 1974.
[50] *Herald* (Melbourne), 16 March 1974.
[51] *Examiner* (Launceston), 16 March 1974.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Australian*, 20 March 1974.

cerns, coordinating bodies like the ACTU face a continuing and perhaps unresolvable dilemma.

Should the Australian economy begin to decline, a temporary solution might be reached which would lead to a substantial cut in immigration intake. With refugee problems likely to continue in the Asia-Pacific region, however, it is unlikely that circumstances will allow such an easy solution to be maintained for very long. So the possibility remains that the labour movement may yet again suffer the paralysis of "future shock" over the immigration issue.

The trend towards dilution of socialist ideology has been common to most labour parties of the western world since World War II. In the ALP the process has now been completed. The present Hawke government is of a character strongly in keeping with the traditions of national populism laid down by the Labor Party's political leadership since the ALP first took up the reins of government before World War I. At a special federal conference of the ALP in 1981 explicit support for such a programme was written into the party's objective for the first time in 60 years. The key preamble to the party's new objective is a confusing and equivocal formula devised by Labor politicians still forced to work within a tradition of commitment they would perhaps prefer to ignore:

The ALP is a democratic socialist party and has the objective of the democratic socialisation of industry, distribution, production and exchange, to the extent necessary to eliminate exploitation and other anti-social features in these fields.[54]

However, in its aims the ALP also openly states its support now for promoting "a competitive non-monopolistic private sector controlled and owned by Australians" and specifically declares its commitment to "the right to own private property." It is clear that the weight of even this theoretical statement of the ALP's purpose is now towards populist reformism within a mixed economy of a dominating capitalist mode. The Hawke Labor government has concentrated on elucidating modern-day populist policies aimed at creating a more nationally-oriented bourgeoisie, a "spreading" of wealth and "social equity" and holding the trade unions in consensus through a social contract based on traditional arbitration procedures. Only in the widest measure of moderate and social-democratic reform can the Labor Party be seen as radical at all, and then only in relation to the society it seeks to govern.

[54] *Sydney Morning Herald.* 28 July 1981.