CHAPTER TWO

Plotting the Ebb and Flow of Racist Ideology: a discussion of theory and methodology

> *History is a continuous process of development, and hence is essentially unpredictable. But this does not mean that 'everything' is unpredictable in the process of development of history; that history, in other words, is the domain of arbitrariness and irresponsible caprice. History is at once freedom and necessity.*
>
> Antonio Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 12 July 1919

> *The deputy sheriffs, the soldiers, the governors get paid,*
> *And the marshals and cops get the same,*
> *But the poor white man's used in the hands of them all like a tool.*
> *He's taught in his school, from the start by the rule*
> *That the laws are with him, to protect his white skin*
> *To keep up his hate, so he never thinks straight*
> *'Bout the shape that he's in, but it ain't him to blame*
> *He's only a pawn in their game.*
>
> Bob Dylan, *Only a Pawn in their Game*

Introduction

At the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) Port Botany picket line in Sydney, during the early days of a major industrial dispute on the Australian waterfront in 1998, a debate took place about appropriate strategies and tactics. At one point, someone in the crowd remarked contemptuously that many of the security men used by the employer, Patrick Stevedores, to evict the wharfies from the docks were from Tonga. MUA official, Robert Coombs, responded immediately. His rejoinder made it abundantly clear that unionists should not use racism to attack the non-union labour because it was both morally abhorrent and would weaken the wharfies' industrial campaign. He warned the picketers that racism could isolate

some of the MUA's most solid members who were also Tongan. This argument was greeted with enthusiastic applause from the large crowd.[1]

One hundred years ago, such racist derision towards Asian and black workers would have been unexceptional in Australia. Now, however, international revulsion over the Holocaust, the eradication of racist immigration restrictions, union solidarity campaigns, the 1960s civil rights movement and many other developments in this country, have contributed to a significant sea-change in the politics of race. Because of these changes, the story of the MUA picket line is important for three reasons. Firstly, it suggests that, while there have been real and lasting challenges to the hegemony of racist ideas in Australia, virulent xenophobia can still, under certain circumstances, resurface. Secondly, just as workers might unite on the basis of common nationality, the opportunity to divide and rule on the basis of 'racial difference' still offers real benefits to employers. As a result, an understanding of racist ideology is not only a question of historical interest, but also an urgent contemporary necessity. Thirdly, while the claim is often made that white workers have benefited from racial exclusion, this example suggests that workers have always had a material interest in fighting the divisions that might weaken their industrial strength – and this is not, by any means, a post-1960s development.

This thesis argues that the tension between racism and industrial solidarity is a fertile area for investigation. While some, but not enough, work has been done on the development of the White Australia policy and its subsequent dismantling some seventy years later, even less attention has been given to the policy's effects on Australian society while it was in operation. This study examines the effect of the White Australia policy on those southern European migrants who were allowed to enter, despite its strictures, and questions whether 'white' workers ever actually benefited from immigration restrictions against non-British workers. Was racism among workers any less damaging to working class industrial solidarity in the 1920s than it would have been to the Patrick workers in the 1990s? While I consistently acknowledge that local workers did on many occasions adopt

[1] Notes from speech, picket line meeting attended by author, 12 April 1998.

racist ideas and engage in racist campaigns, my approach has been to submit ruling class racism to much closer scrutiny. Unlike earlier studies, I have directed attention to the reasons why employers, politicians and newspaper editors sought to maintain the White Australia policy and the subsequent oppression of non-British immigrants. This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework and methodology used to explore the nature of Australian racism in the interwar period.

Theory: employing a Marxist analysis of racism

Historian of racism, Andrew Markus, has defined modern European racism as the belief that distinct human populations have separate genetic constitutions that determine both individual and group destinies. 'Put at its most basic', Markus argued:

> racism sees culture as a function of biology: it holds that 'capacity for civilisation', loyalty to the fatherland, and capacity for abstract reasoning are as inescapably linked to racial origin as skin colour, hair type and eye shape.[2]

In his view, one of the major reasons for the existence and continued survival of racist ideology is its facility for serving the 'material and intellectual needs of dominant groups, at times of subordinate groups', thereby positing the ability of subordinate groups to employ an ideology in their own interests as roughly equal to that of society's ruling elites. In contrast, this thesis defines racism as an ideology which systematically attributes negative stereotypes to people of a particular 'ethnic' group or religion in order to validate existing material discrimination. When posited as a socially and historically constructed ideology linked to tangible forms of oppression, racism is clearly comprehensible as a weapon in the hands of society's powerful to bolster their position against the less powerful.[3] If people in one 'racial' group merely thought of another group of equal power as 'strange' or 'different', racism would have had little real sting and would have no doubt gradually faded

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[2] A. Markus, *Australian Race Relations 1788-1993*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, p. 2.
[3] S. Clegg, 'Theories of racism', *International Socialism Journal*, vol. 2, no. 37, 1988, p. 94.

as the world's populations increasingly intermingled. In reality, however, racism has burgeoned and spread, providing a useful weapon for dominant elites to justify the often brutal oppression of less powerful populations. Such a distinction is of enormous importance, because it allows us to distinguish between a racism wielded consciously by a particular social elite for its own benefit and a racism unleashed far less advantageously by oppressed peoples; the former offers many rewards to its perpetrator while the latter is a sign of further division in an already weakened group.

This thesis is underpinned by a belief that there are no such things as 'races' and that the concept of race is a purely social, rather than biological, construct.[4] In the modern era, citizens have been universally encouraged to see membership of their own national group as somehow 'higher' or 'better' than membership of any other group. Arguments reinforcing ethnic difference have become commonplace and, as Markus pointed out, where some groups were once damned by physiological differences such as skin colour and eye shape, supposedly innate 'cultural' differences with host societies are now commonly wielded to justify discrimination and violence against absurdly-labelled 'minorities'.[5]

Many historians argue that racism has always existed in one incarnation or another.[6] While much of the international debate on this broad question is beyond the scope of this study, the notion that the history of racism is almost as long as that of humankind has had a resonance in Australian historiography. Burgmann's work on the role of the capitalist ruling class in the rise of racist ideology argued that racism did not necessarily coincide with capitalism, but was also a feature of the feudal world.[7] Similarly, Andrew Markus has argued that racist ideology is 'natural' in human society. In his view, its impetus can be

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[4] Prominent Marxist geneticists, such as Richard Lewontin and Stephen Rose, have convincingly demonstrated that the widest range of genetic difference occurs 'intra-racially', rather than 'inter-racially'. See R. Lewontin, *Human Diversity*, Scientific American Library, New York, 1982; R. Lewontin, S. Rose and L. Kamin, *Not in our genes: biology, ideology, and human nature*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984.

[5] M. de Lepervanche, 'From Race to Ethnicity', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol. 16, no. 1, March 1980, pp. 24-37.

[6] A description of this historiographical trend can be found in A. Callinicos, *Race and Class*, Bookmarks, London, 1993, p. 21.

found in people's instinctive need to justify their violent and exploitative behaviour. As he put it:

> The building blocks of racist thought are embedded in most cultures. Thus individuals may independently develop racist ideas without direct access to specifically racial value systems. This explains why racist ideas seem to have existed well before systematic forms of racist thought were established.[8]

In contrast to Markus' aforementioned view that racism is a creation of 'dominant groups', this formulation suggested that human beings are born racist, live consistently racist lives, and maintain racist assumptions until death for no discernible reason. Racist ideology exists in a vacuum, seemingly impervious to changes in the human society from which it emanates. This is an ideological determinism of a most unconvincing kind, and one that is not difficult to discredit. Take, for example, the case of C. P. Ellis, a former Klansman interviewed by the eminent oral historian, Studs Terkel. Ellis was born in Durham, North Carolina, in the 1920s. Poor, fatherless and bitter, he joined the Ku Klux Klan to 'uphold the purity of the white race, fight communism and protect white womanhood'.[9] His local Klan leaders, 'city fathers' one and all, encouraged groups of their poor, white members to attend council meetings and shout down the demands of 'uppity niggers', black activists who were organising as part of the civil rights movement sweeping America at the time. When Ellis realised that he was being used to further the aims of his middle-class Klan leaders, and that he, himself, had a great deal more in common with the poor blacks with whom he dealt at the local school, he began to challenge his own racism. At Duke University, where he worked in maintenance, he realised the importance of the union, ran for the position of elected representative and won office on the votes of a seventy per cent black membership. The contract he negotiated included a paid holiday to celebrate the birthday of Martin Luther King. When some of the white workers complained about

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[7] V. Burgmann, 'Capital and Labour' in A. Curthoys and A. Markus (eds), *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Working Class in Australia*, Hale and Iremonger, Neutral Bay, 1978, p. 22.
[8] Markus, *Australian Race Relations*, p. 2.
[9] S. Terkel, *Race*, Minerva, London, 1992, p. 271-2.

such a challenge to notions of white superiority, Ellis' response was 'Okay, idiots, work.'[10] That a Klansman, of all people, could be won to the cause of anti-racism clearly suggests that racism is not a fixed idea in the heads of individuals. The example of Ellis' workmates also demonstrates that oppressed workers can identify with racist ideas that are often against their own material interests. That other workers were able to overcome their racism and win substantial industrial concessions from their employers also points to issues regarding the material interests behind racial division in the workplace. At a societal level, it becomes even clearer that portraying racism as an eternal human failing cannot help us to account for ebb and flow in the popularity of racist ideology in different societies in different historical periods.

Happily, the notion that racism 'springs eternal' has not passed uncontested. Some historians have insisted that, while certain groups have intermittently developed prejudices against 'outsiders', this intolerance has not always been based on *inherent* features. For example, Hugh Thomas has shown that many Roman slaves were fair-skinned Celts, Germans and Saxons. From antiquity, he argued, slaves were taken from all over the known world, but natural biological features, such as skin colour, were not decisive factors in their abduction.[11] Callinicos pointed to the religious wars of the Middle Ages where the battle between Islam and Christendom was certainly ferocious, but not 'racial' in character. From time to time, slaves taken in battle would convert to their captors' religion and win freedom.[12] The treatment of Jews has been another case in point. While Jews were viciously persecuted in medieval Europe, it was their religious rejection of the Catholic Church that marked them as targets for abuse, not the supposedly inherent and inescapable physical features that became the hallmarks of modern anti-Semitism.[13]

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 279.

[11] H. Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870*, Macmillan, London, 1997, p. 27.

[12] Callinicos, *Race and Class*, p. 21.

[13] See A. Leon, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1970.

According to some, principally Marxist, historians of racism, an ideology that prescribed certain people as inferior, and irredeemably so, was a much more recent development. They suggest that racism emanated from the bourgeois need for an ideological justification of the slave trade.[14] At a time when the forces of capitalism were on the ascendant in Europe, ideas concerning freedom and equality of the individual clashed markedly with the expanding subjugation of black slaves. Acceptance of the notion of 'natural' inferiority, in this case based on skin colour, strengthened the claims of the slave traders that Africans could morally be denied the political and legal freedoms that were being sought throughout Europe. While others have called this analysis crude and deterministic,[15] it could be argued that seeing racism as indistinguishable from other forms of 'ancient prejudice' misunderstands the particular characteristics of racism and its specificity under capitalism. In Hannah Arendt's words: 'Jews had been able to escape from Judaism [religion] into conversion; from Jewishness [race] there was no escape.'[16] In this light, an analysis that portrays racism as a dynamic and malleable ideology easily supersedes the view that racism is 'embedded' in human society and, presumably, cannot be challenged.

From ignominious origins, racist ideology has been reshaped to suit economic and political priorities other than the slave trade. From Britain and Europe, capitalist competitive forces pushed beyond their national boundaries. Ideas of racial superiority justified the actions of the economically successful nations as they subjugated, and extracted great wealth from, those areas that could not repel their superior armed force. The invasion of the Australian continent was part of this process. Reynolds quoted one nineteenth-century settler as saying that it should be 'looked upon as heroism … for a white man to conquer natives'.[17] It was only once Aboriginal people had been defeated by military force and disease that the process of portraying Australia's development as

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[14] R. Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*, Verso, London, 1997; C. Harman, *A People's History of the World*, Bookmarks, London, 1999.

[15] See, for example, V. Burgmann, 'Who our enemies are. Andrew Markus and the Baloney View of Australian Racism', *Labour History*, no. 49, 1985.

[16] Cited in Callinicos, *Race and Class*, p. 22.

[17] H. Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told?*, Viking, Ringwood, 1999, p. 149.

peaceful could begin. It was also on this basis that the implicitly racist concept of *terra nullius* was established.[18] These events were not unique to Australia. For example, Worden has shown that South Africa had its own version of *terra nullius*, with the survival, until relatively recently at least, of a myth that British colonists settled on empty land. The assertion was used, Worden maintained, to justify later claims to white ownership of the land.[19]

In the later nineteenth century, the rise of Social Darwinism was part of an intensification of racist sentiment throughout Europe to match the race for increased imperial conquests. Pseudo-scientific ascriptions of innate 'superior' and 'inferior' characteristics to certain races, or nationalities, not only justified the subjugation of 'lower' Asian and black populations; it also overcame any stumbling block presented by the eventuality that some rival nations would both be white Christians. As Alexander put it, racism had a distinct advantage over religion. Whereas religion had a universal aspect, racism and nationalism emphasised the particular.[20] Nevertheless, inspiring loyalty among citizens to an entity from which most did not benefit was not an easy task and presented a great challenge to bourgeois interests. Racism helped. It encouraged powerless people to think that they had something of which to be proud – a country to which they belonged and others, by definition, did not. The nation's leaders became their friends, the nation's enemies their detested foes. Indeed, Benedict Anderson has argued that what he called 'nation-ness' has become 'the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time'.[21] In Australia, these ideological forces encouraged white Australians to feel pride in the British conquest of Aboriginal land and to unite against any suggestion of a similar invasion from Asia.[22]

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[18] *Ibid*., pp. 92, 135-67.

[19] N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 2nd edition, Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, p. 5.

[20] Peter Alexander, *Racism, resistance and revolution*, Bookmarks, London, 1987, p. 15.

[21] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1991, p. 3.

[22] Curthoys argued that colonists' stereotypes of Aboriginal and Chinese people were remarkably similar, although they saw each in a different light. Nevertheless, the fear of having to 'mix' with either people was widespread. A. Curthoys, 'Conflict and Consensus' in Curthoys and Markus, *Who Are Our Enemies?*, p. 56.

This thesis provides evidence that such an ideology can only survive if it is found to be useful to those who control any given class society. In short, as Marx and Engels wrote, '[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: ie. the class which is the prevailing *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force.'[23] Although they recognised that people holding oppositional views might struggle for recognition – indeed, their belief in the necessity of further social transformation beyond capitalism was based on such struggle – Marx and Engels recognised that the spread of ideas critical of the *status quo* was hindered by major obstacles. Opposition activists did not have equivalent access to mass-produced newspapers, official religious and educational institutions, and even to armed force, as did established ruling elites. Indeed, no class society could achieve anything like relative constancy and longevity if it was not run by an elite that could successfully peddle a set of ideas to legitimise its ruling position. In the case of contemporary 'advanced' societies, the ideas that competition is healthy, that the market is fair, that liberal democratic societies are essentially meritocratic, are widely accepted, despite periodic challenge. From this perspective, the idea that any nation's working class could maintain racist ideology without the approval and material support of its ruling class, is highly problematic.

Even for those who accept some of the Marxist theoretical insights about the relationship between capitalism and racism, the rejoinder that Marxists can suggest no solution short of revolution is common.[24] While some of the more structuralist accounts *have* adopted a teleological approach, this thesis demonstrates how a Marxist conceptual framework can help to analyse the dynamics of racism within the capitalist system without recourse to determinism. It will also prove that those who argue that racism must be fought

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[23] K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, International Publishers, New York, 1972, p. 64. See also A. Callinicos, *The revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx*, Bookmarks, London, 1983, p. 99.

[24] This argument emerges in D. Hollinsworth, 'The work of anti-racism' in G. Gray and C. Winter (eds), *The Resurgence of Racism, Howard, Hanson and the Race Debate*, Monash Publications in History, Clayton, 1997, p. 131. While the issues raised in this article are largely peripheral to this thesis, Hollinsworth's idealist account ignores the work of Leon Trotsky who wrote a practical and sadly prophetic account of the dangers inherent in the rise of Nazism in Germany and of the material necessity for unity among working people in their own defence. In Trotsky's view, idealist analyses were not more sophisticated or less deterministic. They were, quite simply, deadly. L. Trotsky, *Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front*, Bookmarks, London, 1989.

within the confines of capitalist society do not escape the theoretical impasse of teleology. Idealist assumptions that greater education and enlightenment will eventually make racism redundant are not borne out by the contemporary Australian political landscape where, for example, Muslim people have recently become targets for racial vilification.[25]

Although a relatively constant feature of modern capitalist societies, racism is not static, but ebbs and flows in a complex and dialectical interaction with other social, political and economic forces. The task is to dissect the myriad of social relations and economic 'imperatives' – the 'freedom and necessity', as Gramsci described them – that can be seen to accompany changes in racist ideology and practice. This thesis identifies and traces mechanisms by which racism gained ascendancy and, conversely, the strategies that have weakened its influence, in order to demonstrate that such an ideology is neither innate, nor accidental, nor the result of an almost disembodied set of ideas in the heads of unenlightened individuals. By jettisoning both deterministic *and* idealist explanations, it presents a picture of racism as a complex phenomenon that is, first and foremost, socially and historically constructed.

One Marxist who escaped the charge of determinism was Antonio Gramsci.[26] Portrayed as a supporter of parliamentary gradualism, where broad cross-class alliances might seek to educate the masses and gain ideological hegemony without the need for revolution, Gramsci has become the 'thinking-person's Marxist'. To be so canonised by his political enemies has been the ultimate indignity in Gramsci's tragic life.[27] In his view, such reformists were 'like a swarm of coachman flies on hunt for a bowl of blancmange in which

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[25] See an example of such vilification in J. Albrechtsen, 'Talking race not racism', *The Australian*, 17 July 2002. For a rebuttal of anti-Muslim agendas, see R. Manne, 'Open season on Muslims in the newest phobia'. *Sydney Morning Herald* [hereafter *SMH*], 16 September 2002.

[26] John Playford maintained that, 'The mechanical side of Marxism was Gramsci's greatest enemy.' Introduction to Alistair Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: The Man, His Ideas*, Australian Left Review Publication, Sydney, 1968, p. II.

[27] With Karl Marx in mind, Lenin wrote that revolutionaries were pilloried by the ruling class during their lifetimes. After their death, he argued, 'attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them ... while at the same time emasculating the "essence" of their revolutionary teaching, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it'. V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1970, p. 5.

they get stuck and perish ingloriously'.[28] In reality, Gramsci, as a young student, joined the Italian Socialist Party, the PSI, a move which began a lifelong struggle against the reformism that was to divide the Italian opposition to fascism. On the Far Left of the PSI, Gramsci played a pivotal role in the factory councils that emerged in the 'Red Years' of 1919-1920. He edited an explicitly revolutionary workers' paper, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, and argued that the way forward was to build a workers' organisation so strong that it could challenge, break and replace the capitalists' hold on power.[29] A crucial part of these plans was the need to unite the Northern working class with the Southern peasantry.

Gramsci saw racism as a key barrier to a successful socialist transformation of society, where contradictory consciousness among groups of workers could lead them to take actions directly against their material interests.[30] His earliest politics were influenced by Sardinian nationalism at a time when entrenched racism was directed by mainland Italians towards Sardinians, and Southerners generally. When Gramsci's mainlander father announced that he wanted to marry a local Sardinian woman, his relatives were horrified for this 'bordered on miscegenation'.[31] Sardinia was an immensely poor part of Italy, with a mainly peasant population. Waves of protest periodically swept the island and were met with severe repression from mainland troops. The northern industrialists, with the compliance of the corrupt Southern bureaucracy, succeeded in getting protectionist policies adopted to aid Northern industry. These moves had a catastrophic effect on the Southern

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[28] C. Harman, *Gramsci versus Reformism*, Socialist Workers Party pamphlet, London, 1983, p. 8. Bates discussed Gramsci's respect/hatred relationship with liberal Benedetto Croce. He wrote, 'Identifying himself as a protagonist in his own theory, Gramsci imagined himself locked in fierce ideological combat with the "Lay Pope" of Liberal Italy, whom he regarded as the most important educator of the ruling classes.' T. R. Bates, 'Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1975, p. 356.

[29] So dangerous was Gramsci to Italy's ruling Fascist Party that they jailed him for what was, in reality, a slow, painful death sentence. Mussolini's prosecutor announced himself determined to stop Gramsci's mind from functioning for twenty years. A. Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, Merlin Press, London, 1977, p. 231.

[30] A. Gramsci in Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (ed. and trans), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1996, pp. 444-5.

[31] Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, p. 19.

economy, now unable to export agricultural goods or afford manufactured goods from the North.[32]

While studying at university, Gramsci was won to an internationalist perspective, encouraging his fellow Turin socialists to see the political implications of entrenched racism between the Northern and Southern labouring masses of Italy and the gains that this accrued to the Italian ruling class. In his words:

> The average northern Italian believed that if the Mezzogiorno had failed to progress after being liberated from the shackles of the old Bourbon regime, this must be due not to external causes, not to objective economic and political conditions, but rather to the innate, internal incapacity of the southerners … to their organic or biological inferiority, their native barbarism. Such ideas were not only widely accepted, by actually cultivated and given theoretical form by positivist sociologists … until they were regarded as scientific *truths*.[33]

As he saw it, portrayals of peasants as 'backward' and hopeless figures of ridicule were an example of the contradictory consciousness that would weaken the potential strength of both classes.[34] Gramsci came to see the unity of workers and peasants as essential to the success of any future Italian revolution. Industrial workers and the peasantry had to learn to stand aloof from ruling class influence and to form an 'historical bloc' with each other.

Gramsci's analysis is extremely pertinent to an understanding of racism in Australia. In particular, three aspects of his rationale call into question widespread assumptions within the historiography of Australian racism. Firstly, he demonstrated a distinctly ruling class motivation for racial division, outlining the way Italian elites benefited from the cross-class alliances they manufactured. Secondly, Gramsci rejected the notion that racism was an

[32] By 1870, Sardinia had a mortgage debt of three thousand lire to the hectare, four times the value of the land. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[33] G. Fiori, *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary*, Verso, London, 1990, p. 79.
[34] The PSI, under the leadership of Turati, was not much influenced by Marxist ideas, instead forming a reformist alliance with bourgeois Northern interests. It had a dismissive attitude towards the 'Southern problem'. Indeed, Turati called the South, 'the Vendée of Italy'. Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, p. 54.

inevitable consequence of economic competition between the labouring classes. Rather, he suggested that racism was an ideology that could be challenged, both materially and politically. In his view, opposition by workers and peasants to the policies of the dominant Northern industrialists would provide object lessons in the benefits of a united struggle. Thirdly, in contrast to those Australian historians who have frequently argued that white workers benefit from the racial oppression of their migrant competitors, Gramsci argued that racism was costly for Northern workers and prevented them from achieving the concrete benefits of class unity. The next section describes how these tensions were played out in Australia, in order to provide a context and framework in which to place the Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill case studies.

Australian immigration policy between the wars

The *Immigration Restriction Act (1901)* was the first significant piece of legislation passed by the new Federal Parliament. Known as the White Australia policy, it codified and centralised official attempts to control the future ethnic composition of the new nation and ensure its homogeneity. The Act was designed to prevent people of Asian and African descent from entering Australia, but, at various times, it was invoked to place limitations on all but immigrants from Britain.[35] Some European immigration was permitted, but was strictly controlled. After the outbreak of World War One, xenophobia against enemy nations intensified and the persecution of, and discrimination against, small groups of 'enemy aliens' living in Australia increased markedly. Many were interned for the duration of the war, others suffered harassment at work.[36] Sections of the anti-conscription movement argued that the government was planning to flood Australia with cheap labour from overseas, leading to knee-jerk restrictions against Greeks and Maltese immigrants that

[35] Even some Britisher workmen were caught up in the White Australia web, until legislative changes corrected this unintended anomaly. L. Layman, "To Keep Up the Australian Standard': Regulating Contract Labour Migration 1901-50', *Labour History*, no. 70, 1996.
[36] See K. Saunders and R. Daniels (eds), *Alien justice: wartime internment in Australia and North America*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2000.

were later lifted.[37] After the war, more severe restrictions were placed on immigrants from Germany and other enemy nations, than were applied to those from many other countries. Similarly, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Australian government cast a jaundiced eye over immigrants from the new Soviet Republic. There were concerted attempts to limit arrivals from Russia because such immigrants were potentially radicals or Soviet agents. The Governor-General expressed the view that it was 'in the interests of the Empire as a whole that every possible precaution shall be taken to prevent alien revolutionaries from gaining admission into any of the British Dominions'.[38]

The interwar period in Australia was one of enormous political complexity. The immediate post-war years were marked by a polarised industrial relations environment, fluctuating economic indicators and the maturation of two groups that were to become important influences on interwar politics and beyond – the RSL and the Communist Party of Australia [hereafter CPA]. The conservative Nationalist Party was in power federally throughout the 1920s, until James Scullin was elected Prime Minister in late 1929. As Chapter Three will demonstrate, many RSL leaders used their influence in support of Nationalist Party politicians, who emphasised a range of conservative policies based primarily on rural development, the expansion of national infrastructure and the White Australia policy. Loans taken on the London money markets financed heavy expenditure on roads and railways.[39] During the shallow boom of the 1920s, trade union membership density increased, but fell sharply with the onset of economic depression in the late 1920s. CPA membership remained small and steady throughout the 1920s, but grew sharply in the early 1930s as thousands of workers were radicalised by their Depression experiences, the influence of the Militant Minority Movement and the Unemployed Workers' Movement. This radicalisation occurred against a backdrop of increasing pessimism on the part of large

[37] C. A. Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1963, p. 87; B. York, *Empire and Race: The Maltese in Australia 1881-1949*, University of New South Wales Press, Kensington, 1990; M. Caruana and B. York, *Emmanuel Attard: from Gozo (Malta) to Gallipoli and Australia*, Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Australian National University, 1994.

[38] The equation of 'alien' and 'revolutionary' was an enduring political motif in this period. Confidential memo from Governor-General Stonehaven to British Consul-Generals at Canton, Shanghai, Hankow and Tientsin and the British Consul at Harbin, dated 8 December 1925, NAA: A11804/1, 1926/25 Part 2.

sections of the labour movement as a result of political defeats and industrial reversals. As CPA-influenced activists regained employment in the mid-1930s, they began to intervene in trade union activity and, for a period, militant workplace organisation became a feature of key Australian industries, including the mining industry.

From its earliest days, the White Australia policy was an important political target for the CPA in its battle to undermine the class collaborationist politics of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). In an article entitled 'Fomenting Race Hatred' which was aimed at attacking the ALP and the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) for refusing 'our coloured comrades their rightful place in the class struggle because they were not born of white parents in Australia', the writer praised industrial struggle by Chinese, Indian and Japanese workers that had been able to win concessions from British companies. Further, it was argued:

> Ask yourself, fellow-worker, wherein lies your superiority! It is not enough to point to the colour of our hides. Unless we are thoroughly class-conscious and organise with our fellow workers the world over to smash the capitalist system, the capitalist will flay us, if necessary, to make whips for the driving of the other slaves.[40]

In 1925, the CPA hailed Australian trade union contact with their Asian counterparts as a sign that commitment to the White Australia policy was not an 'inviolable tradition' within the labour movement.[41]

During the 1920s, the population of Australia grew by almost one fifth, from approximately 5.4 million to 6.4 million.[42] Political paranoia aside, the Federal Government was generally prepared to encourage European migration during the early 1920s, provided that the prospective immigrant was of good health and had relations in Australia who were

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[39] I. M. Cumpston, *Lord Bruce of Melbourne*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 52-3.
[40] *The International Communist*, 1 April 1921.
[41] *The Communist*, September-October 1925.
[42] Figures cited in K. Buckley and T. Wheelwright, *False Paradise: Australian Capitalism Revisited, 1915-1955*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 51.

prepared to guarantee the maintenance of new arrivals. 'Fair-skinned' immigrants were clearly preferred – assisted passages were granted not only to migrants from Britain, but also, initially, to nominees from France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Finland and Poland. Sir Tom Bridges, the Governor of South Australia, reflected the thinking behind such a policy when he said: 'I believe that the Germans and people of the Nordic races generally make very good migrants. They are very like ourselves, and … make very fine colonists.'[43] Notwithstanding these slight deviations from British preference, immigrants from these places were considered insufficient in number to meet the Federal Government's defence strategies and its burning crusade to populate Australia's 'empty spaces'.[44] Nor were local employers satisfied that they were getting sufficient supplies of unskilled workers at the right price. In order to meet their demands for such labour while still protecting the ideals of the White Australia policy, the Government came to regard the immigration of southern Europeans, not as a contravention of White Australia, but as a measure designed to protect it within the wider coordination of Asian and African exclusion. In 1924, Prime Minister Stanley Bruce stressed that the notorious dictation test was only designed to prevent 'coloured immigrants' from entering the country and that southern Europeans should not be discriminated against.[45] While southern Europeans were not considered equal with Britishers, they were regarded as a lesser and necessary evil. Hence, they were reluctantly permitted entry to Australia in strictly controlled numbers in order to create a pool of workers for low-skilled employment.[46] The major proviso for entry was that such prospective immigrants must not become a burden on the public purse and, to ensure this outcome, the assisted passage scheme was restricted to nominees of, and by, British subjects in July 1925.[47]

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[43] *SMH*, 13 December 1927.
[44] See P. Griffiths, The road to White Australia: Economics, politics and social control in the anti-Chinese laws of 1877-88, unpublished paper in the possession of the author, 2002.
[45] Letter, Prime Minister [hereafter PM] to Premier, South Australia, [no date, circa 1924], NAA: A1/15, 1936/13639.
[46] Draft letter, PM to Premiers, All States, [no date, circa 1922], NAA: A1/15, 1936/13639.
[47] Advice from Deputy Director, Commonwealth Immigration Office, ref no. 26/945, NAA: A1/15, 1936/13639.

Evidence of the Federal Government's attitude on this question can be discerned in its responses to concerns raised by some sections of the community about the level of southern European immigration in the mid-1920s. In this period, agitation against southern European immigration developed something of the flavour of a 'moral panic'. Stan Cohen described this phenomenon thus:

> Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereo-typical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic is passed over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself.[48]

All these features of a 'moral panic' had a resonance in Australia in the mid-1920s around the alleged 'threat' posed by southern European migration. Newspapers ran stories that predicted dire consequences if the current 'influx' of immigrants was not stemmed.[49] In the NSW State Parliament, members engaged in lengthy 'debates' on the immigration question, although neither side of politics disagreed on the matters at hand. Parliamentarians representing Broken Hill repeatedly asked for investigations into the large numbers of southern Europeans arriving in the town in search of work. At this time, four politicians represented Sturt in the NSW Parliament. One of them, Labor's M. A. Davidson, accused the mine owners of deliberately seeking migrant workers by posting signs on the mines in

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[48] S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1972, p. 28. See also S. Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, 'The Social History of a 'Moral Panic'' in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, Macmillan, London, 1978, pp. 3-28.

[49] See, for example, *Age*, 17-8 March 1926; *Argus*, 18 March 1926; *SMH*, 8 February, 22 March, 10-13 August, 9 December 1927.

three languages, despite existing high levels of unemployment.[50] Another Labor member for Sturt, E. M. Horsington, claimed that, because the southern Europeans were getting employment preference on the mines, many local unemployed had been forced to sell their homes and leave the district.[51] In reply, B. J. Doe, a Nationalist member for Sturt, called for an investigation into the amount of money sent out of Broken Hill to southern European countries.[52] He also expressed outrage that migrants were able to learn English in night classes run at a Broken Hill school, thereby increasing their chances of usurping the jobs of local workers. His repeated references to this matter resulted in the Minister for Education issuing an instruction that the classes be discontinued.[53]

A constant theme raised in these debates, by both sides of the House, was the effect that continued southern European migration would have on future levels of British migration. When the Nationalist member for Rockdale, J. G. D. Arkins, asked the Premier to investigate whether British migrants were being excluded by increased levels of southern European migration, his concern was to ensure 'that equity be done, especially to those of our own blood from the British Isles'. Jack Lang, the Labor Premier, agreed that it was 'a pity [that the migrants] are not our own people', adding that 'persons of this class working underground, and not knowing our language, are a danger to themselves as well as to our own people'.[54] In the midst of this furore, Prime Minister Bruce attempted to allay concerns about the level of southern European immigration by releasing the following figures to demonstrate that non-British immigration to Australia was a tiny proportion of the overall total.

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[50] *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, [hereafter *NSWPD*], vol. 107, 1926, p. 340; vol. 108, 1926, p. 918.
[51] *NSWPD*, vol. 102, 1925-6, p. 1329.
[52] *NSWPD*, vol. 108, 1926, p. 757.
[53] *NSWPD*, vol. 108, 1926, pp. 1432-3.
[54] *NSWPD*, vol. 110, 1927, p. 1049.

	Arrived	**Left**
British	94 006	54 175
Greeks	1 366	317
Italians	6 082	1 180
Jugo-Slavs	1 560	432
Maltese	570	169
Total southern Europeans	9 578	2 098
Other Europeans	6 765	3 668
Totals	110 349	59 941

As published in the Argus*, 11 August 1927.*

Lest Bruce's responses be seen as evidence of a more benign attitude to the presence of southern Europeans, it should be noted that the Prime Minister was at pains to appease a deputation from the Australian Natives Association that everything possible was being done to prevent 'undue' southern European migration. He also assured them that, in his view, 'the principle of racial purity' applied to all non-British races, not just the 'coloured races'.[55] Despite these general attitudes, pragmatic concerns regarding cheap labour, 'peopling Australia', and agricultural development dominated his policy formulation. As a sop to his Country Party Coalition partners, Bruce's immigration policy was one which 'allowed the greatest number of migrants to be placed in profitable primary industries at the lowest cost'.[56] Later that year, Bavin, the newly-elected NSW Premier, informed the Parliament that Bruce had met with the Italian Consul-General to ask for his cooperation in restricting Italian migrants to agricultural employment. The Consul-General had agreed to refuse nomination papers to residents living in mining and industrial districts, such as Broken Hill.[57]

On the other side of the country, Labor Premier Philip Collier wrote to the Prime Minister in 1926 to complain about an 'influx' of southern Europeans to Western Australia.

[55] *SMH*, 16 September 1927.
[56] Cumpston, *Lord Bruce of Melbourne*, pp. 33, 42, 52.
[57] *NSWPD*, vol. 112, 1927, p. 687.

He wrote that: '[t]he migrants complained of are largely of the artisan type unsuitable for pioneering in land settlement, and their whole object and intention appears to be to secure employment, amass savings and eventually to return to the land of their birth.'[58] Subsequently, Collier advised that a police officer, Detective Sergeant Doyle, had investigated recent arrivals and their employment situation. Doyle had been unable to find evidence that the migrants were being brought to Australia under contract,[59] but did 'believe' that men were working for under-award conditions. Collier complained to the Prime Minister that the situation would have a serious effect on labour conditions in Western Australia and that, most importantly, the presence of so many 'foreigners' would 'seriously militate against our efforts to absorb British migrants'.[60]

Bruce attempted to allay Collier's concerns in two ways. Firstly, while he acknowledged that Western Australia was receiving a disproportionately high percentage of the total 'alien' immigration compared to other States, he was at pains to point out that Western Australian unemployment was actually falling and was lower than it had been for the previous six years. He also pointed to the real, and racist, reason for permitting southern European immigration and why the Federal Government was prepared to ignore the clamour from the States – his advice was that 'both the Australian born and British labourers are temperamentally and physically not so suitable for the monotonous and exceedingly heavy work of clearing virgin and remote country as, say, the Jugo-Slavs and Northern Italians'.[61] In short, such migrants were allowed to enter Australia in the expectation that they would do the 'dirty work' of developing settlement areas in return for low wages.

Australian mine managers also kept a keen eye out for such workers, often hiring them for labouring jobs on the mines. That migrants were assigned the dirtiest and lowest-

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[58] Letter, Collier to PM, dated 1 March 1926, NAA: A1/15, 1927/15940.
[59] Under the *Contract Immigrants Act (1905)*, Ministerial approval had to be sought by employers who wished to employ contract labour from outside Australia.
[60] Letter, Collier to PM, dated 23 September 1927, NAA: A1/15, 1927/15940.
[61] Draft letter, PM to Collier, dated 15 August 1927, NAA: A1/15, 1927/15940.

paid work mirrored the Taylorisation of mine work and the belief that it was only the most stupid workers who were suited for it. Taylor patronisingly selected a Dutch man named Schmidt to shovel pig iron in his 'experiments'.[62] As I will detail in later chapters, mine managers in Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill also selected southern Europeans to do the mind-numbing and poorly-paid jobs on the mines, reflecting Taylor's view that southern Europeans were best suited for tasks like digging, because racist stereotypes portrayed such workers as unintelligent. As Taylor put it, the first requirement of such a labourer was 'that he shall be so stupid and so phlegmatic that he more nearly resembles in his mental make-up the ox'. In the process of making an argument that the subdivision of labour enabled some workers 'to rise to a higher plane of efficiency', Taylor envisaged no shortage of labour to do the most menial tasks. That work could be done by Italians or Hungarians, he maintained.[63]

Similar racist assumptions informed responses to southern Europeans among Australian elites, especially those who were prominent in the RSL. In 1923, the Annual Federal Congress of the RSL resolved to advise the Federal Government, 'that in all cases of foreigners entering the Commonwealth every possible scrutiny be exercised in respect to the language and character tests'.[64] The Prime Minister's office replied that the RSL had nothing to worry about. The language test was effective as 'an absolute bar to admission' because immigration officials always adopted the practice of administering the test to unwelcome immigrants 'in some European language with which the immigrant is not acquainted'.[65] In 1925, the RSL Federal Executive made representations to the Federal government demanding that both Commonwealth and State governments 'take instant

[62] See Braverman's discussion of 'scientific management' in H. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974, pp. 85-137, esp. pp. 103-6.

[63] F. W. Taylor, *Shop Management*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1947, p. 147 and *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1911, p. 59. For technological changes, see B. Ellem and J. Shields, 'H. A. Turner and "Australian Labor's Closed Preserve": Explaining the Rise of "Closed Unionism" in the Broken Hill Mining Industry', *Labour and Industry*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2000, pp. 77-8.

[64] Letter, RSL Federal Executive to PM, 12 December 1923, RSL Collection, MS 6609, Item 1631, National Library of Australia.

[65] Letter, PM to RSL Federal Executive, 3 January 1924, RSL Collection, MS 6609, Item 1631, National Library of Australia.

action to see that our country is peopled with British Stock'.[66] In August 1927, an RSL conference decided to lobby the Federal Government for the cessation of southern European immigration and restrictions upon such migrants' ability to buy land. The most serious question, said one delegate, was that Australian women were 'allowed to marry these foreigners', a situation that would have dire consequences for 'the purity of the race'.[67] Later in 1927, the RSL informed the Prime Minister that it 'view[ed] with concern the entrance of undesirables into Australia' and requested that the Federal Government take steps 'to strictly control the immigration of such people whose presence is repugnant to Australians'.[68] In one response to this fairly constant correspondence, the Minister for Home and Territories, George Pearce, assured the RSL that the Government was keeping a close eye on the situation. However, he expressed reluctance to totally exclude southern European immigrants on the basis that Australia was a 'comparatively empty continent' and that implementing a total restriction was likely to cause offence to friendly nations and embarrass the government. In addition, he thought that such a ban would 'probably give rise to questions which might have a serious effect on the maintenance of the "White Australia" policy'.[69]

While employers and politicians may have had different strategies regarding immigration policy, the racist nature of their approaches was similar and was not incompatible with fervent commitment to the White Australia policy. Mining employers wanted cheap, unorganised workers for low-skilled labouring on the mines, Federal politicians wanted to direct a highly-controlled number towards lowly-paid agricultural development work and State politicians attributed high unemployment within their constituencies to an 'influx' of such workers. In all these instances, racist assumptions about the nature and effect of southern Europeans workers drove policy development. As the world slid into economic depression in the late 1920s, restrictions on southern European

[66] Letter, RSL Federal Executive to Minister for Markets and Migration, dated 10 December 1925, RSL collection, MS 6609, item no. 2465, National Library of Australia.
[67] *SMH*, 13 August 1927.
[68] Letter, RSL Federal Executive to PM, dated 1 December 1927, NAA: A458, KR745/1/296.
[69] Letter, Minister for Home and Territories to RSL Federal Executive, dated 24 December 1925, RSL collection, MS 6609, item no. 2465, National Library of Australia.

arrivals were increased by both the Bruce and Scullin Governments and were not relaxed until the mid-1930s. Cheap labour was not such a priority in a period of rising unemployment and implementing tighter controls on southern European migrants allowed the Federal Government to appear to be doing something practical about unemployment. In short, workers who had been profitably stereotyped as lowly-skilled drudges in the 1920s found themselves employed as convenient scapegoats when the political and economic conditions of the 1930s deemed them expendable.

As this account of the Australian context demonstrates, Gramsci's focus on ruling class racism suggests important propositions for further examination of Australian race relations. In essence, the racist cross-class alliances encouraged by Italian elites were similar in intent to the White Australia policy, endeavouring to bind the loyalties of a group of workers to their own employers. Gramsci's agitation for the united struggle of workers and peasants was inspired by a recognition that both groups might benefit from a conscious rejection of such elite ideology, in favour of a united class struggle against the political and economic priorities of their rulers. In the same way, Australian trade unionists battled to work out appropriate responses to migrant workers. While influenced by dominant notions of the benefits of 'white' unity, some workers recognised that their southern European counterparts were allies, rather than enemies, in a struggle between classes, not races. These themes have not received sufficient attention in Australian historiography but, as this study demonstrates, were constant issues for local trade unionists.

Methodology: research questions and objectives

Plotting the course of racism in Australia is a mammoth task. I argue that historians have not yet provided a fully sustainable account of the economic, social and political forces that underpin racial division, nor an explanation of the myriad examples of migrant and local workers joining forces against employers. By adopting a Marxist view of racism, attention is shifted away from racial division between workers and towards the hitherto absent

employers. Examples of intense racism in the labour movement have in most cases been relegated to the background in this study, in order to give prominence to material that has been neglected in the past, namely worker internationalism and employer racism. To highlight these features of Australian race relations, this study adopts case study methodology. As Yin has argued:

> Case studies are an appropriate research method when you are trying to attribute causal relationships – and not just wanting to explore or describe … the major rationale for using this method is when your investigation must cover both a particular phenomenon and the context within which the phenomenon is occurring.[70]

Yin did not claim that historical predictions could be made on the basis of case study evidence. He did, however, maintain that the identification of trends, and especially seemingly contradictory trends, might reveal the diverse range of responses and outcomes that are possible, a view especially pertinent to the study of racism. Yin also promoted case study methodology as an important way to build up a 'critical mass' of evidence, in that information gleaned from case studies 'form[s] a database for further refining both methodological and substantive issues'.[71] Carefully assessed, case studies allow attention to details that might be overlooked using a wide-angled historical lens, while not necessarily negating the possibility of making some comments on the more broad-ranging ramifications of local examples. To this end, Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill were selected as suitable case studies for this thesis. Disputes about the place of migrant labour raged in both towns in the interwar period and, by mapping the ebb and flow of such debates, this study assesses the nature of race relations in each town and the interactions between employers and workers, host and migrant workers on this issue.

At the same time, case study research of towns such as Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie, where geographical parameters are easily apparent, immediately raises the issue of locality. As such, it might be argued that aspects of 'local identity' which develop in isolated

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[70] R. K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, Sage, Newbury Park, 1993, p. 31.

districts raise problems of exceptionalism for any historian seeking to extrapolate from local findings. While much has been made of Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill's geographical isolation, and the particular brand of parochialism that their remoteness has engendered, the relevance of this feature has been exaggerated to the point of geographical determinism.[72] In particular, such an emphasis has masked the importance of the frequent interactions that took place between these towns and the 'outside' world. Far from being politically isolated, both towns were leading industrial centres dominated by the rhythms of capitalism. They were in close contact with their respective capital cities and, at times, with each other. For example, in the aftermath of the Kalgoorlie race riots, a Broken Hill meeting of the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia passed a lengthy resolution that denounced 'racial antagonism' and encouraged goldfields workers to foster working class unity, regardless of nationality.[73] Important events in each town were discussed nationally, even internationally.[74] The Kalgoorlie riots were reported in the *London Times* and many locals were aware that they were the subject of international scrutiny.[75] As such, both towns provide distillations of wider developments without, in any sense, being divorced from them. As Patmore has written in their defence, detailed studies of local communities are a window into the myriad of social relationships that are the basis of wider alliances, relationships that might escape attention with the use of a wider historical lens.[76] Indeed, a dialectical relationship between locality and the wider world can be viewed, whereby developments in these towns helped to effect changes in the wider world, while the towns themselves were no less affected by those changes. Local studies also provide an invaluable

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[71] *Ibid*., p. 41.

[72] Howard, for example, argued that Broken Hill's population 'became insular in the extreme'. W. Howard, 'The Rise and Decline of the Broken Hill Industrial Relations System', Management Paper no. 34, Monash University, September, 1990, p. 3; Gerritsen identified a distinctive culture which he claimed pertained to mining towns and frontier societies – a penchant for direct action and 'bush justice'. Gerritsen, 'The 1934 Kalgoorlie Riots', pp. 64-5.

[73] *Workers' Weekly*, 2 March 1934.

[74] Reflecting the success of the anti-racist propaganda of the Militant Minority Movement in the sugar industry, a public meeting in Innisfail, a town with a significant migrant population, unanimously passed a resolution condemning the riots and demanding compensation for those who had suffered losses. *Workers' Weekly*, 9 March 1934.

[75] See discussions of Kalgoorlie riots in *London Times*, 30 January-2 February 1934; *SMH*, 1-6 February 1934; *The Age*, 31 January-5 February 1934; *Bulletin*, 7 February 1934.

[76] G. Patmore, 'Labour History and Local History', *Labour History*, no. 78, 2000, p. 3.

arena for testing theoretical propositions; if a theory does not stand up in a range of local areas, perhaps some qualifications are required before it can logically and productively be projected onto a wider historical stage.

At first glance, a chronicle of the events which took place in Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill suggests histories as incongruous as 'chalk and cheese'. On three separate occasions, Kalgoorlie residents erupted in anger at the 'foreigner' presence on the goldfields, burning migrant homes and businesses in protest while, in contrast, Broken Hill's history of internationalism and anti-war protests has become the stuff of legend. Nevertheless, beneath the surface, important contradictions to both these images are evident. If, for example, the 1934 Kalgoorlie riots were principally inspired by competition for jobs between local and migrant workers, why was it that the principal miners' union, the AWU, refused to support demands for migrant exclusion? Similarly, what explanation can be given for the ability of racist activists in Broken Hill to attract considerable support for the exclusion of migrant workers in a town fabled for its industrial solidarism?

While the case studies were not principally undertaken for their comparative value, some features of the history and social organisation of Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill invite analysis of this nature. Some obvious similarities between the two towns can be discerned. Both are urban outcrops situated in the Australian outback, and would not exist but for the vast mineral resources beneath their surfaces. In both towns, workers suffered under similar conditions – high accident rates, critical levels of industrial disease and an array of mine managers who were generally more mindful of shareholder interests than worker welfare. Moreover, miner mobility, often essential for economic survival, saw some miners work on a succession of fields, carrying news, political attitudes and industrial traditions as part of their baggage.[77] This mobility was no less evident on the other side of the class divide. Some mine managers were part of a peripatetic group, moving from one mine to another, learning and disseminating new mining techniques and industrial relations strategies as they

went. Also of importance for this thesis, both towns experienced enormous social and industrial upheaval as a result of Australia's involvement in World War One. From 1916 onwards, both Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill entertained significant levels of returned soldier militancy, RSL activity and 'Nationalist' political organisation. Nevertheless, there were important differences. While Broken Hill residents experienced the full brunt of the 1930s Depression, the Kalgoorlie mines boomed.[78] Although both mining workforces had significant levels of unionisation, the Kalgoorlie miners, organised into the AWU, were viewed as something of a weak link in unionism's chain. Broken Hill, on the other hand, has long been regarded as a staunchly 'union town'.[79]

All the aforementioned features of Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill will be analysed in an attempt to understand the dynamics and the outcomes of their respective 'race debates', and to build a firm foundation for more general conclusions about racism. In order to plot the course of racism as an ideology, and to make some assessment of the level of its acceptance, this study examines three key groups with ideological and industrial influence in both Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill in the interwar period. In Kalgoorlie, attention is directed towards the Chamber of Mines, as the dominant employer group, the AWU, as the most influential union representing the largest and most concentrated section of the goldfields workforce and the local section of the CPA. In Broken Hill, the activities of the Mine Managers' Association (MMA), as the most important employer group, the Workers Industrial Union of Australia, as the major union on the line of lode, and the various radical groups that had an influence on local race debates are examined. Although not the only organisations possessing powers to sway public opinion, these groups were selected for

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[77] J. Mouat, 'Industry and Community: A Comparison of Broken Hill (New South Wales), Waihi (New Zealand), and Rossland (British Columbia)' in K. Tenfelde (ed), *Towards a Social History of Mining in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Verlag C. H. Beck, Munich, 1992, pp. 275-6.

[78] See Kennedy's remarks about the relative strength of the Goldfields union movement during the Depression, and its improving effect on the working conditions of women. S. Kennedy, 'Segregation for Integration: Women and Work in Factories and Shops in Western Australia during the Great Depression', *Studies in Western Australian History*, vol. 5, December 1982, pp. 44-5.

[79] In mid-1934, the Mining Branch of the AWU had 3,118 members from a workforce of approximately 6,000. Branch Secretary's Annual Report, Australian Workers' Union (W.A. Branch), for year ended 31 May 1934. Broken Hill unionists, in contrast, were able to successfully maintain a closed shop for long periods. See B.

their deliberate attempts to influence race relations in the industrial spheres of their respective localities. Because the views of the above organisations towards southern Europeans were widely disseminated in newspapers, meetings and through a myriad of other intermediaries, these groups contributed significantly to the fluctuating community attitudes about the presence of migrant workers on the mines. Most importantly, the influence of organised returned soldiers will be assessed, along with the nature of the relationship between the employers and the RSL. Although not originally identified as a key component of this research, the local sub-branches of the RSL kept resurfacing in every aspect of Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill's respective histories, until they could no longer be considered of peripheral concern. It became clear that, without an assessment of the RSL's influence in local debates, a complete picture of race relations was not possible.

Issues regarding the historical evidence

The most important sources of evidence for this thesis have been the local newspapers in Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie, although it is acknowledged that these sources present problematic representations of 'the past'. In both towns, the two most widely-consumed periodicals stood on opposite sides of the political divide. The *Kalgoorlie Miner* and the *Barrier Miner* were emissaries of conservative opinion. Their editors supported war and conscription, opposed militant unionism and were fervent advocates of the White Australia policy. From the labour movement emanated the *Westralian Worker* and the *Barrier Daily Truth* (*BDT* or *Truth*). For the latter, and in contrast with the conservative mouthpieces, political commitment to the White Australia policy was not a uniform editorial policy, although *Westralian Worker* articles about southern European immigration were far more frequently couched in racist terms than those contained in the *Truth*. In a variety of contexts, labour movement papers promoted racist and internationalist industrial policies, reflecting the ideological contradictions and uncertainties within the movement about

Ellem and J. Shields, 'H. A. Turner and "Australian Labor's Closed Preserve": Explaining the Rise of "Closed Unionism" in the Broken Hill Mining Industry', *Labour and Industry*, vol. 11, no. 1, August 2000, pp. 69-92.

attitudes towards the presence of migrant labour in their respective communities. The case studies in this thesis show that the principal value of all these newspapers can be found in the heated exchanges that took place *between* the editorial teams of these competing right and left wing papers, as they sought to win the political allegiance of local residents. As such, all these papers were examined, not merely as passive reflections of public opinion, but as active participants in societal debate.

The contents of the major Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill newspapers provide an enormously important window into the competing stances taken during the 1920s and 1930s ‘race debates’. Because the newspapers from both camps were so ideologically driven, their offerings have been scrutinised for exaggeration and errors of omission. While editorials generally reflected the views of the newspaper management, letters to the Editor were less predictable, although the frequent use of pseudonyms prevented accurate assessment of the origins of many letters. Some letters, for example, may have been written by staff journalists to promote a particular political position. Nevertheless, most letters played a role in outlining the parameters of the debate, even if their origins were not as portrayed. Generally speaking, the labour movement papers had a better record of publishing letters from all sides of the debate. Indeed, they seemed to do so with the precise intention of encouraging discussion. For example, while the *Barrier Miner* (or *Miner*) published very few letters that were not stridently anti-southern European, the *Truth* published a series of letters from racist agitator, Richard Gully, in order to rebuff his argument and in the process demonstrate to labour movement supporters how Gully and his campaign could be routed.

Other documentary sources examined in this thesis are of mixed quantity and quality. For the Kalgoorlie study, mine manager records were not abundant, whereas, for Broken Hill, the Melbourne University Archives provided a literal treasure trove of correspondence and meeting minutes. Particular attention should be drawn, however, to the inclusion of material from the Western Australian Chamber of Mines’ *Monthly Journal*, a most revealing source that, to my knowledge, has not previously been incorporated into the

historiography of the period.[80] Mining union records were more comprehensive for Broken Hill than for Kalgoorlie, but any gaps in either records were easily addressed by reports in the local labour movement newspapers. Less easy to come by were records pertaining to the 'scab' or Nationalist unions of Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie. These unions were set up in direct opposition to Labor-affiliated unions by pro-conscriptionist supporters of Billy Hughes' prime ministership, and attracted sizeable returned soldier memberships. While mentioned in the records of other groups and occasionally reported in the newspapers, no written records survive from either the Coolgardie Federated Miners' Union of Kalgoorlie or the Barrier Workers' Association of Broken Hill. Information about the activities of the CPA was extracted from its publications, because Communist activists consistently promoted an internationalist perspective in both Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill. Unfortunately, copies of the January and February editions of *Workers' Weekly* that would have reported the Kalgoorlie riots were missing from all the microfilm and hard copy collections I consulted. In relation to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), State Records NSW holds a fascinating collection of relevant material, including a minutes book of the Broken Hill chapter of this organisation. Records pertaining to the RSL were also not in short supply, except at sub-branch level. However, the more useful documents were located in the records of those organisations with which the RSL dealt, rather than in RSL repositories. For example, the extraordinarily close relationship between the Broken Hill MMA and the local sub-branch of the RSL is revealed in detail in the minutes and correspondence contained in the Broken Hill South collection, held in the Melbourne University Archives.

Many studies of racism are the product of a practice that is only gradually becoming superseded in labour history circles – that labour history is best written by examining the written records of labour institutions. Taking Lunn's advice, we should remember that, '[r]esolutions to the TUC [Trades Union Congress] should be the starting point of any

[80] Regrettably, this source is only available as an incomplete set in the National Library of Australia.

investigation of labour attitudes to race and immigration, not the conclusion.'[81] Most of the aforementioned sources have been trawled previously. Nevertheless, even well-examined sources can yield markedly different results when subjected to a different theoretical approach and a different set of historical questions. Sometimes, too, shifting attention away from the obvious to the more oblique yielded exciting results because it led to more imaginative use of historical sources. A good case in point is the Western Australian branch of the AWU's membership lists, held at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre. At first glance, these records appeared to be undifferentiated lists of names, offering little in the way of usable information. I confess that my first response was to put them straight back into the box from whence they came. However, upon further consideration, I subjected the lists to a somewhat crude, but highly revealing, quantitative analysis. Counting southern European names living at certain goldfields addresses, and calculating them as a percentage of the other names at those addresses, provided an indication of the level of migrant union membership among goldfields workers. The results are not perfect, but they challenge the popular assumption that migrants remained aloof from the Kalgoorlie union movement.

In a sense, oral histories form the only 'new' material presented here. During the 1980s in particular, many interviews were recorded about Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill by oral historians such as Bill Bunbury, Stuart Reid, Ed Stokes, Barry York and others, but the material has seldom been integrated into the relevant historiographies. Given that many decades had passed between the events discussed and the actual interviews, these dialogues are an extremely mediated source and some of the interviewees have been questioned many times, giving a 'rehearsed' aspect to some of their recollections. For instance, in interview, Jack Coleman revealed that he had prepared for his interview with oral historian, Stuart Reid, by going the local library to look up the newspaper accounts of the riots to refresh his memory![82] Oral historians are frequently reminded that such time lapses create enormous problems of veracity, but, thankfully, many have not been dissuaded from interviewing subjects with memories of World War One, the Depression and numerous other episodes of

[81] K. Lunn, 'Race Relations or Industrial Relations?: Race and Labour in Britain, 1880-1950' in K. Lunn (ed), *Race and Labour in Twentieth Century Britain*, Frank Cass, London, 1985, p. 3.

interest to historians.[83] This thesis would be immeasurably poorer without the insights gleaned from their efforts. If these testimonies were not included, the impressions of contemporary eyewitnesses would otherwise go unheard and a rare opportunity to add a 'human dimension' to distant events would be lost. Almost all the oral evidence used in this thesis was elicited from interviewees who have since died.

While this is not the place to replay the largely sterile 'great oral history debate' engendered by Patrick O'Farrell's critical comments of Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past* and Wendy Lowenstein's *Weevils in the Flour*, two comments made in the course of that debate have informed the approach to oral history employed in this study.[84] Firstly, amidst his less judicious claims about oral history theory and practice, O'Farrell wisely pointed out that, '[n]o sensible historian should ignore it, if it is available.'[85] I agree. Secondly, in tandem with the now widely recognised view that it can be unwise to produce oral history in isolation from other sources,[86] it must be acknowledged that most written documents contain inaccuracies and bias. For this reason, oral history should not be singled out as particularly unreliable because the 'historian's craft' is, after all, to carefully evaluate each pertinent and available source in relation to all the others.

Careful evaluation of the interviews conducted with Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill residents suggests that the most valuable information revealed was not the names and dates

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[82] Interview with *Jack Coleman*, conducted by Stuart Reid on 19 September 1988, reference no. OH2062.
[83] See, for example, P. O'Farrell, 'Oral History: Facts and Fiction', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 5, 1982-3, p. 8. For a discussion of this issue, see T. Griffiths, 'The Debate about Oral History', *Melbourne Historical Journal*, vol. 13, 1981, p. 18.
[84] P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978; W. Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, Hyland House, South Yarra, 1978.
[85] O'Farrell, 'Oral History: Facts and Fiction', p. 4.
[86] This view could be tempered by Ann Curthoy's recent revelation that she found her close relationship with fellow 'freedom riders' made her a problematic interviewer, because interviewees knew she was familiar with what had happened. Hiring a research assistant to do subsequent interviews, a woman who had not been born at the time of the Freedom Rides, encouraged interviewees to more fully recount their memories. A. Curthoys, *Freedom Ride*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002, p. xix. However, this can be a risky strategy – one interviewer 'pretended' not to know about the IWW in Broken Hill. Subsequently, his interviewee appeared to lose heart at the enormity of explaining such basic background knowledge, and the interview terminated shortly afterwards. Interview with five Broken Hill miners, conducted by M. Laver in 1974. Tapes held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 341.

that could be verified through other sources, but the small details that would rarely be found in newspaper sources or other written records, snippets that might not even be considered ‘history’ by those involved in the interview. Far from confusing “images’ with ‘realities”,[87] sensitive interpretation of the more implicit meanings behind certain language usage and ‘word pictures’ can yield important evidence to either confirm or contradict established narratives of a period. For instance, Mr E. Fraser, a witness to the Kalgoorlie riots, vividly recalled his mother’s porch filled with black tin trunks owned by fleeing migrants. While this might seem like an incidental fragment, it was, in my view, far more tangible proof that Britishers had assisted their migrant friends than other unsubstantiated claims of friendly relations.[88] Paul Sultana’s almost impatient aside that *everybody*, not just the Maltese men, played euchre together at crib time in the Broken Hill mines was not a considered comment on race relations, but suggested a great deal about the integratory pressures in large workplaces that may counteract racist ideology to some degree.[89] In addition, this example adds weight to Tracy’s view that oral history has particular importance for those who wish to understand labour processes in the mining industry, where worker agency is frequently omitted from the picture, reflecting an erroneous assumption that ‘workers react rather than actively shape workplaces and workplace relations’.[90]

The interviews employed in this study constantly reminded me that I was dealing not only with individual memories, but also with the process of their social construction. As Bodnar explains: ‘interviews can be read not only to discover what people remembered but also to discover how they went about the process of organizing and creating their memories in the first place’.[91] For instance, when interviewees recalled events in Kalgoorlie and the course of action taken by the 1934 rioters, every single interviewee related that a tram had

[87] See Peter Spearritt’s answer to this accusation in P. Spearritt, ‘Oral History: The ‘Cult of the Ordinary’?’, *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 5, 1982-3, p. 11.
[88] Interview with *Stella* and *Evelyn Villa* and *Mr E. Fraser*, conducted by Bill Bunbury on 15 January 1986, reference no. OH1396.
[89] Interview with *Paul Sultana*, conducted by Barry York on 2 November 1984, reference no. TRC 3582/6.
[90] J. Tracy, ‘Oral History and the Mining Industry: a discussion of methodological issues associated with using oral evidence’, unpublished discussion paper, Department of Organisational and Labour Studies, University of Western Australia, 1996, p. 2.

been 'commandeered' – not hijacked or seized or taken – in order to move on to Boulder. A common discourse grew up around the telling of the riot narrative that seemed to influence all those who had experienced them. Even at the time, Kalgoorlie residents frequently perceived the riots as a 'shameful' event in the town's history.[92] Since then, broader societal challenges to racism have had an enormous effect on the way in which witnesses now construct their recollections of the 1934 events. Darian-Smith argues that memory is 'constantly negotiated … in a process of exchange between the individual and society'.[93] This is illustrated by Rip Heyhow's conflicting descriptions of southern Europeans in 1930s Kalgoorlie as both 'a very well-respected group of people' and, on the contrary, 'flashily dressed' and 'pretty cheeky'. His recollections of his '1930s views' are all mixed in with the things he knows that he ought to think now.[94] It is for this reason that I would rely more on Mr Fraser's memory of 'black tin trunks' than Mr Heyhow's recollection that southern Europeans were 'well-respected', when examining Britisher/migrant interaction. Nevertheless, Mr Heyhow's contradictory impressions are an important example of the process of 'memory negotiation'.[95] Ted Thompson, a 1934 rioter who threw his share of bombs at fleeing migrants, also reflected this process of negotiation when he said:

> It was racial and it should not have been because these fellows were pretty fair sorts of fellows. The Italians and Slavs were good workers and fairly good mates, but it just got incensed with the killing of an Aussie bloke and that wasn't on as far as we were concerned … We got to throwing jam tin

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[91] J. Bodnar, 'Power and Memory in Oral History: Workers and Managers at Studebaker', *Journal of American History*, vol. 75, no. 4, 1989, p. 1201.

[92] B. Bunbury, *Reading Labels on Jam Tins*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, 1993, p. 101.

[93] K. Darian-Smith, 'War Stories: Remembering the Australian Home Front During the Second World War' in K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 156.

[94] '[M]emory does not constitute pure recall; the memory of any particular event is refracted through layer upon layer of subsequent experience and through the influence of the dominant and/or local and specific ideology'. Editorial, 'Oral History', *History Workshop*, no. 8, 1979, p. iii.

[95] See Blee's comments on the dearth of oral interviews with right-wing subjects of more 'unsavoury' backgrounds and the exciting oral history prospects in this area, given the tendency of right-wing organisations to be more secretive and less well-documented than some other organisations. K. Blee, 'Evidence, empathy and ethics: Lessons from oral histories of the Klan' in R. Perks and A. Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 335.

> bombs at one another and all kinds of things like that. It should never have been but it just ended up like that.[96]

In assessing all these sources, my foremost concern has been to reveal the cut and thrust of the debates that took place in these towns. This was always going to be a quixotic search in some sense, but not a totally hopeless one. In her study of migrant labour relations in 1920s and 1930s Britain, Tabili argued that historians have exhibited a persistent tendency to assume that official policies represent the views of the whole society. As she put it:

> To view racist policies as the state's response to popular demand or a reflection of union influence promotes [an] unwarranted 'consensus' view of a social formation riven by structural inequalities and consequent conflict. The motives of the white rank and file are extrapolated from those of union leadership; local police are held responsible for nationally promulgated policy; and working people are assumed to share and act on the racist and imperialist propaganda promoted by elites … [t]hese conflicts stemmed neither from essential racial or cultural differences, nor from the inherent xenophobia of ordinary people, but from material constraints negotiated among specific historical actors with explicit goals.[97]

By approaching racism as a debate, instead of a foregone conclusion, and placing that debate in its contemporary context, it is hoped that the fluidity of race relations will be more sensitively revealed and portrayed. Similarly, approaching examples of racism as part of a class struggle involving participants with a complex range of motivations, principles and strategies is more likely to expose racism as an integral feature of a whole society, not as a disembodied ideology floating above the society from which it, in reality, emanates.

[96] Interview with *Ted Thompson*, conducted by Stuart Reid between July and October 1988. Transcript held in the J. S. Battye Library, Perth, reference no. OH2053, p. 60.
[97] L. Tabili, *'We Ask for British Justice': Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1994, p. 7.

Terminology

Throughout this thesis, the terms 'ruling class' and 'working class' are regularly employed to denote economic and social division in the interwar period. Both terms are used in a Marxist sense to describe those who, by the nature of their connection to the means of production, are identified as members of one or other of the two 'contending classes'. As Callinicos and Harman describe the connection between these terms:

> The Marxist conception of class … treats class as a relationship. A person's class position doesn't depend on their place in the social pecking order … but rather consists in his or her relationship, as part of a social group, to other social groups. Secondly, this relationship is antagonistic: it consists above all in the extraction of surplus-labour from the direct producers by the minority ruling class controlling the means of production … Thirdly, this antagonistic relationship is formed in the process of production: exploitation and class struggle arise from the efforts of the ruling class to secure its control over the means of production and the labour itself of the direct producers.[98]

In this study, the term 'ruling class' is used alternatively with terms of similar meaning, such as the 'bourgeoisie', the 'ruling elite', 'capitalist class', 'conservative interests' or 'establishment interests' to indicate a group of people united by family background, private school and university connections, wealth, position and power.[99] The principal section of this class either owns or directs capital and labour in the interests of increased profit-making, while others act as the bureaucratic and ideological arms of the employing section. There is, of course, some overlap here, where governments, newspapers, schools and churches are, themselves, employers. While this minority section of society does not always act in concert and will occasionally disagree quite profoundly over the preferred direction of the economy and political policy, it will always act in concert when its mutual interests in

[98] A. Callinicos and C. Harman, *The Changing Working Class: Essays on Class Structure Today*, Bookmarks, London, 1987, p. 6.
[99] See C. Hazlehurst (ed), *Australian Conservatism: Essays in Twentieth Century Political History*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1979, p. xi-xii.

the maintenance of the capitalist system are threatened. Its opposition to militant trade unionism is generally unquestioned.

The term 'working class' is used in a similar Marxist vein to denote those who, lacking capital and other means of production, are forced to sell their labour power to the ruling class in order to survive. This unequal and antagonistic relationship underpins a relentless effort on the part of both classes to improve their position *vis-a-vis* their adversary or, as Connell puts it, 'the struggles of classes and their intellectuals to define the social world in ways that are friendly to their own interests'.[100] Among working people, there were some who realised that collective struggle is the only way to improve their bargaining position against employers. In this way, trade union development was both an expression of discontent with the capitalist system and a product of that system. The term 'labour movement' is used to denote officials and members of the political and industrial wings of organised labour, or as Turner put it, 'the whole complex of organizations which claim to represent the interests or the aspirations of the working class, as well as the individuals who belong to them or who speak in their name'.[101] Where it is necessary to make a distinction between the officials and the membership, union members and non-union members in this study, it is done in the text.

The case study chapters in this thesis provide some useful examples of the tensions expressed by the term 'labourism', even if a complete discussion of the relationship between the ALP, the trade union bureaucracy and rank and file workers is beyond the scope of this study. Labourism was, as Markey put it:

> [b]ased on the assumption that the State could be 'captured' by parliamentary means and wielded in an impartial manner, to the benefit of the working class, in association with a strong trade union movement which restricted its operations to the industrial sphere.[102]

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[100] R. W. Connell, *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, p. 3.
[101] I Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1979, p. xiii.
[102] R. Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales 1880-1900*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, p. 3.

The union movement's defeat in the 1890s strengthened the impression that union organisation alone was not enough to withstand employer power. Making the system more responsive to workers' demands would require influence in parliament to ameliorate the effects of capitalism's excesses. As such, labourism was always an ideology that complemented capitalism, rather than opposed it. Often, in response to conservative claims that Labor only represented a sectional interest and not the whole nation, Labor seemed hell bent on becoming as 'responsible' as the more open representatives of bourgeois interests. In their eyes, their task was always one of national, not international, proportions to be achieved through class collaboration, rather than class struggle. In order to avert the full force of capitalist power against them, Labor governments have always pleaded commitment to slow, incremental reform for the good of the society or nation. The coincidence that 'national' interests mostly benefited the bourgeoisie, or at least an important section of it, was not explored in any greater detail than the notion that 'working class interests' and 'national interests' were as frequently counterposed.[103]

Most importantly, this thesis supports the 'New Left' claim that labourism was 'an expression of ruling class hegemony in the Labour party and therefore an important target for revolutionary criticism'.[104] Nowhere is this more apparent and less examined than in the area of the White Australia policy. Hagan argued that Labourism had 'three distinctive credos: tariff protection, compulsory arbitration and the White Australia policy.[105] All these policies were dressed up as part of a 'protective' shield for Australian workers, but offered far more to employers. The employers who wanted cheap labour were never seriously threatened with its cessation, while the ideology of White Australia encouraged workers to give their migrant counterparts a hostile reception. While racism tended to militate against strong unionism, support for non-British immigration restriction allowed many Labor politicians to project White Australia, not militant industrial unionism, as the answer to

[103] R. N. Massey, 'A Century of Laborism, 1891-1993: an historical interpretation', *Labour History*, no. 66, 1993, p. 49.
[104] T. Irving, 'Labourism – a Political Genealogy', *Labour History*, no. 66, 1994, p. 3.
[105] J. Hagan, *The History of the A.C.T.U.*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1981, p. 45.

working class demands. Although these accommodations were not without their critics on the left of the labour movement, it was the approach that became the dominant rationale of most of the labour leadership.

In keeping with immigration debates at the national level, propaganda claiming the existence of a 'racial hierarchy' was widespread. Indeed, the White Australia policy was justified on the basis of such notions. In part, this ideology reflected attempts by its proponents to convince those at the bottom of 'white' society that they were actually in a 'superior' alliance with their own ruling elite. Jupp argued that an extension of the racial hierarchy can be found in the belief that higher and lower races should not mix. In his view, this idea was a justification of British imperialism 'where small numbers of British soldiers had conquered vast numbers of Indians'.[106] In 1870, German anthropologist, Max Muller, explained the mechanics of this view thus:

> The Aboriginal was placed on the bottom of the scale with the Papuan, Malayo-Polynesian and Negro on the three levels above; over these stood the American Indian and then the "Higher Asiatic". On the three upper rungs were the Mediterranean type, the Semitic, and, at the top of the scale, the "Indo-German" – the Caucasian or Aryan type supreme.[107]

With minor national variations, this schema was a convenient 'scientific' justification for the imperial subordination of those peoples on lower rungs of the racial ladder. As Burgmann pointed out, while racist ideology was used to explain a certain relatively fixed view of the world, the actual hierarchy could be altered to suit particular circumstances.[108] British interest in Australia was part of that project, fuelled by the knowledge that France was a rival for imperial possessions in the southern oceans. It was for this reason that the First Fleet was heavily armed.[109] However, it was armed not only with munitions but with

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[106] J. Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 7.

[107] Cited in R. Evan, K. Saunders and K. Cronin, *Exclusion Exploitation Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland,* Australian and New Zealand Book Company, Sydney, 1975, p. 15.

[108] Burgmann, 'Capital and Labour', p. 22.

[109] The flagship of the First Fleet was the Sirius, a 531 tonne frigate. The ship was refitted for the journey to Botany Bay, with the inclusion of 14 guns that fired 2.7 kg cannonballs. See First Fleet website, http://www.geocities.com, accessed 2 August 2002.

the ideas necessary for building a white outpost of the British empire in Asia. In the decades to follow, Australia would be commonly portrayed as a white outpost in a sea of coloured barbarism and keeping Australia ethnically homogenous was portrayed as essential to national 'purity' and security. For the early invaders and their successors, racism proved most useful in justifying the wholesale slaughter of Aboriginal people and the theft of their land in order to benefit the interests of a burgeoning pastoralist industry. As a result, the hierarchy placed all peoples emanating from Britain at the top,[110] followed by other white Europeans. Somewhere down the scale came southern Europeans who, in this view, could certainly not be considered 'civilised' but who were infinitely preferable to Asians, Africans and the indigenous people of Australia, those who 'represented the lowest grade in the human family'.[111] According to Richard White, the interwar period was characterised by an 'obsession with racial purity' that had not weakened since Federation. He summed up the nature of the media offensive on this question with a quote from *Smith's Weekly* that described the tiny number of Italian migrants in the country as 'that greasy flood of Mediterranean scum that seeks to defile and debase Australia'.[112]

Reynolds argued that such beliefs were still being promoted in scientific circles in Australia during the 1930s, although he could not confirm a link between these ideas and 'public opinion'. That such ideas had a wide currency can be seen in the common use of the term 'Britisher' to denote locally-born descendants of British people and white British migrants in the interwar race debates that took place in Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill. In both towns, people of such Anglo-Australian background were far more commonly referred to as 'Britishers', than as Australians, regardless of birthplace. Importantly, the term was frequently used in contradistinction to the term 'foreigner', always accompanied by an

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[110] An exception, of course, was made for Irish people as a reflection of the dominant form of racism in Britain that was subsequently transported to the Australian colonies. See P. Hamilton, 'No Irish Need Apply': Prejudice as a factor in the development of Immigration Policy in New South Wales and Victoria 1840-1870, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of New South Wales, 1979.

[111] H. Reynolds, 'Racial Thought in Early Colonial Australia', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 20, no. 1, April 1974, p. 49. See also R. Evans, K. Saunders and K. Cronin, *Exclusion Exploitation Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland,* Australian and New Zealand Book Company, Sydney, 1975

[112] R. White, *Inventing Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1981, p. 141.

inference that to be British was to be at the pinnacle of civilisation. In order to accurately describe the contemporary socially-constructed ethnic boundaries, this thesis will also use the term 'Britisher', while recognising and rejecting its elitist and racist connotations. The terms 'foreigner' and 'migrant' will refer exclusively to 'non-Britishers', and not to recent arrivals from Britain who would also fit the latter description. Slang terms were also widespread. The label 'Ding' was most commonly applied to Italians in Kalgoorlie, but was also directed at people of southern European ethnicity more generally. In Broken Hill, the term 'foreigner' was most common, although some of the more vitriolic racists were known to label Maltese migrants as 'Asiatics', an opprobrium to link them with those who were forbidden entry to Australia and to lower them on the perceived racial hierarchy.[113]

Addendum

In each chapter, the first reference to a particular source is cited in full to assist readers. With a Ludditism perhaps appropriate for a labour historian, I was unable to overcome a fault in *Word* software which, from time to time, placed a footnote on the page following that which contains the relevant superscript footnote number. I apologise for any inconvenience caused. As a measure of respect to the source material, I have avoided the irritatingly superior overuse of the form '[sic]' in quoted material, correcting those typing and spelling errors where to do so did not affect the meaning of the passage. I could not, however, resist being irritatingly superior when Lieutenant-Colonel Fairley of the Kalgoorlie RSL referred to the donation of a 'battle of wine' [sic] to a hospitalised returned soldier in his report on the sub-branches' philanthropic largesse. I have also not changed contemporary spellings when it is clear what is meant – in quoted passages, the term 'Jugo-Slav' is not replaced with the currently-used 'Yugoslav'. The only exception to this rule has been in the use of 'Labor', 'labor' and 'labour'. 'Labor' refers to the ALP and 'labour' replaces any now out-moded use of the word 'labor'.

[113] See, for example, *BDT*, 19 September 1927.

Conclusion

While there is no 'new' theory or methodology used in this thesis, the mere suggestion that employers should be included in the equation of racism presents a range of new historical questions to be addressed. How did employers benefit from racist division among workers? Did they deliberately foster hostile attitudes towards non-British workers? Did workers uniformly oppose migrant labour and, if they did not, how was the argument for internationalism prosecuted and won? Using a Marxist theoretical approach and case study methodology, this study elaborates on these relationships in order to understand the dynamics of racist ideology and its effects on class relations.