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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY
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'History', said one of the men who founded the modern teaching of the subject at our universities, 'is past politics'. He might have gone further and said that much academic history is present politics dressed up in period costume. Whether he likes it or not, the work of the academic historian reflects the attitudes and views of his class.

E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Where are British Historians Going?' *The Marxist Quarterly*, Two, 1 (January 1955).

INTRODUCTION

KEN BUCKLEY

IN VOLUME TWO of this series, the main common theme running through the essays was the role of the state, together with an analysis of development and contradictions within the ruling and middle classes in Australia. In the present Volume Three, emphasis is focused upon the working class, especially its separate elements and culture. Also, there is consideration of imperialism here—not only the historical relationship between Australia and Britain, but Australia's own role as a colonial power in Papua New Guinea, as well as the exercise of 'internal colonialism' towards Aborigines within Australia itself.

Class-struggle is a vital concept, but what is class? It is all too easy—and dangerous in political practice—simply to divide society into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, with an ill-defined and shifting middle class between these two poles. On examination, the poles themselves are found to be unstable at some levels. Bettina Cass, the first contributor to this volume, finds it useful to adopt a schema of three main classes in advanced industrial capitalist society; two of these classes are derived in orthodox Marxist terms from the ownership or non-ownership of property in the means of production, while the third is related to the possession of educational or technical qualifications which confer relative power in the labour market. Further, it is necessary to take account of circumstances in which members of a class may have little awareness of their common interests. Bettina Cass quotes a perceptive passage on the creation of class-consciousness, from E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*:

class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily.

Of course, Marxist scholars have always differentiated between and within classes. Thirty years ago, Maurice Dobb in his classic *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* pointed out (pp.265-6) that in Britain the

survival into the second half of the nineteenth century of the conditions of domestic industry . . . meant that not until the last quarter of the century did the working class begin to assume the homogeneous character of a factory proletariat. Prior to this, the majority of the workers retained the marks of the earlier period of capitalism, alike in their habits and

interests, the nature of the employment relation and the circumstances of their exploitation. Capacity for enduring organization or long-sighted policies remained undeveloped; the horizon of interest was apt to be the trade and even the locality, rather than the class; and the survival of the individualist traditions of the . . . craftsman, with the ambition to become himself a small employer, was for long an obstacle to any firm and widespread growth of trade unionism, let alone of class consciousness . . . By this heterogeneity of a still primitive labour force the dominion of Capital over Labour was augmented.

Dobb's work is in a class of its own. There is no comparable, incisive analysis of the development of Australian capitalism. Nevertheless, the writers in the present volume who examine the fragmentation of Australian society, particularly the cruel divisions in the working class, are clearly operating within a great tradition. The fruits of their work are badly needed, as political commentators about class generally eschew analysis and tend to become ever more hazy (or dogmatic) in their pronouncements the closer they approach to the present day.

John Collins, in his essay, 'Fragmentation of the Working Class', provides a comprehensive framework for study of differentiation within the working class. He begins with a critique of orthodox labour market theory, which itself was refined in the USA in the 1960s to take account of persistently higher levels of unemployment evident among blacks and ethnic groups. These refinements were in terms of (a) the 'human capital theory', which relates differences in income to variations in skills and training; and (b) an orthodox theory of discrimination which attempts, by reference to the employer's discrimination on the basis of race, sex, etc., to explain why two employees with identical skills can nevertheless receive different wages. Also in the 1960s, a number of American economists, observing what actually happened, developed the theory of a dual labour market: a primary sector, where jobs offer good wages and conditions, opportunity for advancement and stability of employment; and a secondary market where the reverse applies. The secondary market is where women and minority groups are much more likely to find employment.

The dual labour market theory, with its emphasis upon job structures, is a substantial advance over previous orthodox theory, and Marxists have adopted the concept of primary and secondary labour markets. However, Collins argues that the concept, like orthodox labour market theory in general, is inadequate in some crucial respects. In particular, it needs to be related specifically to class and to the Marxist notion of the industrial reserve army. Critical to this notion is not only the existence of additional sources of labour which capitalists can readily draw upon at need, but a difference in quality or nature between these fresh sources and the existing workforce in industry. In fact, the sources of the industrial reserve army have changed in the course of time.

During the Industrial Revolution, capitalists in such countries as Britain recruited part of their workforce from the countryside, from the ranks of a disintegrating peasantry. Besides this, there was a spreading

pool of labour which developed from the great increase in population which was a feature of industrial capitalism. In 'new' countries of white settlement outside Europe, there was heavy reliance upon a swollen flood of immigrants. And in the case of the USA there was another big labour source in the black population, 'freed' from slavery in the 1860s. These disparate elements of the labour force, whether recruited from the countryside or from immigrant ethnic groups or blacks, all tended to be bewildered, submissive and divided from each other in the work places. Employers were able to play upon the various differences so as to hinder the growth of working class movements.

In the twentieth century, especially since World War Two, the nature of the industrial reserve army has changed in important respects. The biggest change is the enormous increase in the use of female labour in the workforce. Secondly, there are variations concerning migrant labour. On the one hand, the USA no longer accepts large numbers of immigrants (although Mexicans are allowed in on a temporary basis as a source of cheap labour for Californian agriculture). On the other hand, countries in Western Europe have attracted millions of labourers from Southern and Eastern Europe and North Africa—no longer as prospective permanent immigrants, but as 'guest workers' to be sent back by the host capitalists when no longer needed. Whatever the new source of labour (female or migrant), and irrespective of whether the addition to the workforce is permanent or temporary, the role of segmentation of the labour market remains unchanged in essentials: it is to enhance profit through greater exploitation, to divide the working class and inhibit class consciousness, and to encourage the wider spread of bourgeois ideology, especially in terms of racism and sexism.

In Australia, the problem of distance and cost of travel from Europe militated against adoption of the concept of 'guest workers'; and the old phobias—of 'populate or perish' and the yellow-red-peril—encouraged preservation of patterns of permanent immigration from Europe. Even so, there have been big changes in the sources from which Australian immigrants have been drawn since 1945. The old preponderance of migrants from the United Kingdom gave way to growing numbers from the European continent, especially Italians and Greeks, and then the hunt for migrant labour was extended into fresh areas—even into countries such as Turkey and the Lebanon, where the racial mixture was rather doubtful from the 'White Australia' point of view.*

In analysing the Australian labour market as it exists today, Collins considers a number of different segments characterised not only as primary and secondary but also differentiated in terms of sex and racial or ethnic origin. In the primary labour market itself, where wages, conditions, and opportunities are relatively good and employment is stable, a distinction may be drawn between 'independent' jobs (which

*See also Collins' essay, 'The Political Economy of Post-War Immigration', in Volume One of this series.

often require professional standards) and 'subordinate' jobs of a routine nature in factories and offices. There is a high concentration, in the primary labour workforce, of men who were born in Australia, the United Kingdom, other English-speaking countries and Northern Europe. This is equally true of the 'subordinate' range of jobs in this market, so that the native male white Australians and their social peers constitute an aristocracy of labour with a strong grip on comfortable and secure (though not necessarily skilled or highly paid) jobs, as well as the most attractive jobs. On the other hand, workers born in Southern Europe, Turkey, etc. are heavily concentrated in manual jobs, especially in manufacturing industry, i.e. the secondary labour market, where incomes are permanently lower, conditions generally poor and work discipline harsher.

These broad generalisations need to be qualified by taking account of the position of female workers. Approximately one-third of the total Australian workforce consists of women. They are to be found mainly in commercial and service occupations which generally have the characteristics of the secondary labour market. Relatively few women secure jobs in the primary labour market, except at the level of the 'subordinate' category. However, if women are usually at a disadvantage compared with men, there are degrees of disadvantage among women in the labour market. Whereas women born in Australia or the U.K. figure prominently in 'clean' clerical jobs, migrant women from Southern Europe are much more evident in menial jobs in textile and clothing factories. Finally, as segments in the labour market it is possible to discern Aborigines at the bottom of the heap, with Aboriginal women probably in a worse position than their menfolk—in so far as either sex is able to obtain jobs at all, for according to official estimates in 1977, between one-third and one-half of the entire Aboriginal labour force is unemployed.

The various differences in the labour market are reflected in internal differences within the labour movement, as well as in politics and ideology. Collins urges the necessity to study the divisions, so as to understand them and be in a position to overcome them. One important aspect for examination in the current situation is the high level of unemployment which threatens to be no mere passing phase. *Prima facie*, one would expect workers in the secondary labour market, notably women and migrants, to be worst affected by unemployment, and there are some signs of this. For example, thousands of jobs have disappeared in the clothing and textile industries since 1974 and this must have affected migrant women in particular. Also, many women have simply dropped out of the workforce due to unemployment: married women receive no unemployment benefit pay if their husbands are working, so there is little incentive to register as unemployed. Yet whilst the official figures of registered unemployment do not tell the full story on that side, there are some contradictory trends. Thus it seems that female employment continues to grow, while male employment falls. Perhaps this is

due to greater use of women as part-time employees, but it may instead be due to greater recognition by employers of the advantages of female labour, especially by comparison with less-qualified male school-leavers coming into the secondary labour market at relatively high award rates of wages.

Another factor could be less readiness by young male Australian-born workers to accept every kind of job which may be offered to them than was the case in the depression of the 1930s. Young people today may be affected both by the philosophy of the counter culture and the attitudes of their parents and friends along the lines of assuming that they are members of privileged groups who should not have to do the lowest-grade labouring work.

Whatever the validity of such speculation, there can be no question of the importance of 'Women's Place in the Class Structure'—the title of Bettina Cass's essay. Women are still lagging far behind men in active participation in politics and unions, but the efforts of the various women's liberation groups of the past decade are to be seen not only in an upsurge of activity but also in a sharp analysis of the sources of sexual inequality. Cass herself is able to use and bring into perspective the work of such Australian writers as Anne Summers and Margaret Power.

Historically in Australia, the rightful function and duty of women has been regarded as two-fold: the reproduction of the population, and unpaid domestic labour. As Cass puts it, 'Women's unpaid domestic labour supports, like an infrastructure, the wage-structures and profits of the industrial-capitalist economy'. To the extent that women are also wage-workers in the labour force, sex discrimination in the form of the concept of a 'family wage', embodied in the Harvester judgment of 1907, has ensured that they were paid less than men. The extension of the principle of equal pay in the 1970s has narrowed but not eliminated the difference.

Cass's main concern is with the sex-class position of women. Married women are closely identified with the class position of their husbands: the woman's life-style and social rank are derived from the husband's income and class status. Yet the sex position cuts across class lines. Women are very often proletarian workers in their own households, 'even if their husband's market capacity provides them with the resources to employ household help and serve pizza and scotch to their guests for lunch'. In other words, married women who are not in the paid workforce are economically dependent upon their husbands; and the foundation for women's association with unpaid domestic labour is their assumption of prime responsibility for care of the children. This assumption, together with other aspects of sex stereotypes, is formed and nurtured within the family, at school and in society generally. Women entering the paid workforce generally expect relatively poor jobs in the secondary labour market, although aspirations are changing as a result of the work of the various women's movements. The changes in consciousness are appreciably more evident among middle class than working

class women.

This bald summary does not do justice to Cass's nicely balanced discussion of sex-class. She does not fall into the temptation of categorising women as a class *per se*, but she argues cogently that class analysis alone is not enough. The key to economic differentiation between the sexes lies in the unequal obligation of women towards child-care, which associates the woman with unpaid domestic labour in the home. Cass concludes with the sobering comment that although socialists claim that a change in the relations of production will of itself produce changes in family relationships, in fact women continue to be responsible for child-care in state socialist societies.

Fragmentation of the workforce into male and female workers, skilled and unskilled, native-born and migrant etc. facilitates control by the bourgeoisie. For example, employers can set off one ethnic group of workers against another. It is important for the labour movement to counter such processes but in fact Australians give very little attention to ethnic communities, except fleetingly at election times. Gianfranco Cresciani's essay on 'Italian Anti-Fascism in Australia, 1922-45' provides a fascinating picture of politics in a migrant community. Here, in a fast-moving account, is an authentic flavour of action and excitement, occasionally flaring into episodes of violence as at Ingham in 1928, when anti-Fascists gathered outside a building where Father Salza, an agent of Fascist propaganda, was lecturing; stones were thrown on the tin roof, causing panic in the audience. In the 1920s, Anarchists provided the driving force among Italian anti-Fascists in Australia. In the following decade, leadership passed to Communists who were aided if not guided by the Communist Party of Australia.

Anti-Fascists, a minority in the Italian community in these years, needed all the support they could get from Australians. Instead, conservative governments, taking heed of representations from Italian diplomats, banned anti-Fascist newspapers printed for distribution in the Italian community and discriminated against anti-Fascists in such matters as naturalisation. After all, were not the Fascists the upholders of law and order? As for the Australian Labor Party, some links were established during World War Two between H.V. Evatt and the Movimento Italia Libera, but the movement's influence was undercut by the Roman Catholic Church. Cresciani quotes Archbishop Mannix as saying, at a 1943 rally of Italians in Melbourne: 'Mussolini is the greatest man living today . . .'. And at the same meeting, Arthur Calwell came in on cue to express his opposition to Italia Libera, which was branded as a left wing movement.

Workers, women, migrants, Aborigines: there are degrees of exploitation of oppressed groups but by any rational criteria the Aborigines come out worst. Mervyn Hartwig examines the applicability of the theory of internal colonialism to the case of the Australian Aborigine. The basic problem here is to differentiate racial exploitation from class exploitation in a capitalist society. Hartwig looks at structural-functional

theory and the theory of plural society, and finds them quite inadequate as explanations of the relationship of classes within racial or ethnic groups to the class structure of the society as a whole. On the other hand, the theory of internal colonialism as developed by H. Wolpe is useful as a framework for analysis of the intersection of class with race.

Capitalism, in its relations with colonial societies, often destroys non-capitalist modes of production in those societies. Sometimes, however, it is found more useful to conserve a traditional non-capitalist social structure while exploiting it; and in these cases, Wolpe argues, political and ideological domination by the capitalist state tends to be expressed in racial, ethnic or cultural terms. In effect, exploitation is masked by emphasis upon race in the process of conserving a traditional society, and this can occur within the boundaries of a single state (internal colonialism) as well as in relations between an imperial power and a colony. The clearest example of internal colonialism is South Africa where, in the context of economic exploitation, the ideological focus is on racial or tribal elements—and this is precisely because the capitalist state aims at preserving and controlling 'tribes' for its own purposes.

Wolpe's views were developed without specific reference to situations such as that of the Australian Aborigine, who suffers racial discrimination in a capitalist society which tolerates parallel non-capitalist modes of production only to a very marginal degree. However, Hartwig considers that Wolpe's theory, with some modifications, can be applied to the case of Aborigines; and in the latter part of the essay, Hartwig gives a sketch of the history of relations between whites and native blacks in Australia, together with the associated supporting ideology. There have been changes in the ideology. Notably, the modern assimilationist model reflects the aim of completely dissolving a primitive mode of production in northern Australia.

Peter Fitzpatrick's essay on Papua New Guinea is a case study of the way in which an imperial power, while establishing capitalist relations of production in a colony, can find it very useful to preserve elements of a traditional society. Village organisation in PNG not only supplied a certain amount of labour for capitalist plantations but customarily performed functions of social security such as supporting a member of the community in illness, old age or unemployment. This situation, which still obtains, relieves the state of considerable costs which are borne by governments in advanced capitalist countries. Thus it was in the interest of Australian imperialism to preserve native society, provided that this did not unduly limit the supply of labour for capitalist production.

In this context, Fitzpatrick examines colonial regulation of wage labour in PNG. The indenture system, with its compulsion to work and its penal sanctions, was 'really rather like slavery', as Lieutenant-Governor Murray put it. Nevertheless, it was hedged around with 'protective' restrictions which helped to conserve traditional society. For example, indentured workers must be repatriated to their home villages after periods of not more than 3 or 4 years. The explanation is not to be

found in terms of Australia being a relatively humane coloniser; rather, it was 'a late and little imperialist', to quote Fitzpatrick. As imperial powers went, Australia was relatively weak, and the ruling European caste in PNG was prone to hysterical fear at any sign of organisation or disrespectfulness on the part of the blacks. The attitude that the natives must be kept in their place is well illustrated by Amirah Inglis' study of sexual anxiety and politics in Port Moresby in the 1920s. Consequently, Fitzpatrick argues, the indenture system should be viewed as more than simply a means of maintaining a cheap labour supply by conserving traditional society; it was also aimed at preventing the development of New Guinean organisation outside the traditional framework. With Fitzpatrick's comment that 'migratory labour systems make the class organisation of workers difficult if not impossible', we are back in the mainstream of class analysis.

Fitzpatrick's essay is the first approach to the study of Australian imperialism which has appeared so far in this series. It is a neglected area, and the editors hope to present more such studies in Volume Four. From another angle, David Clark's essay looks at the exploitation of less-developed countries by the more highly developed, through the mechanism of trade rather than investment and the repatriation of profit. Clark, in examining the views expounded by the French writer A. Emmanuel in *Unequal Exchange*, relates those views to the orthodox theory of international trade. Emmanuel's work is a critique of Ricardo's theory—as modified by later neo-classical economists—concerning comparative advantages in international trade which certain countries possess in particular commodities. Emmanuel argues that the orthodox theory does not conform to reality, that whereas it could be expected in terms of the law of comparative advantage that the terms of trade for primary products would improve in course of time, in actual fact this is not so, and there is a category of countries which always exchange a larger amount of their national labour for a smaller amount of foreign labour. In an attempt to explain this situation, Emmanuel applies Marx's value theory to international trade and enunciates a maxim: 'One is not poor because one sells cheaply, one sells cheaply because one is poor'.

As Clark ruefully acknowledges, Emmanuel's argument is intricate. Broadly, it emphasises the growing mobility of capital, which tends to equalise the rate of profit throughout the world; whereas the strength of trade unionism in developed countries acts as a barrier to downward pressure on wages in those countries. Thus disparities in wage levels between various countries are maintained; and because of the international equalisation of the rate of profit, the extra surplus value based upon low wages in peripheral countries goes not so much into higher profits in those countries, as into benefits for consumers in the more highly developed 'centre' countries, expressed in the terms of trade. Implicit in this theory is the view that workers in the centre countries exploit workers in the peripheral countries, and on this score Emmanuel's

work has been attacked by other Marxist scholars.

Clark notes some other points on which Emmanuel is open to criticism but he finds Emmanuel's ideas stimulating and a useful challenge to orthodox theory. At least, this is so in relation to the surplus transfer process between rich and poor countries—the classic imperialist pattern. When Clark explores the applicability of Emmanuel's model to a different type of relationship—Australian development as a British colony highly dependent upon overseas trade—he finds some points of interest. For example, there is a reflection of Emmanuel's views on the equalisation of interest rates, in the fact that the return on Australian colonial government loans in Britain was almost as low as on British government consols in the 1880s (although this was not so at other times). However, Clark concludes that on the whole Emmanuel's work has only limited validity for study of the Australian case. In particular, it is difficult to account in such terms for the fact that real wages in Australia were higher than in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Emmanuel's theory, this would suggest that Australian workers, through 'unequal exchange', were exploiting workers in Britain—and that would be an absurd proposition.

The last two essays in this volume are concerned with questions of education and culture in a class society. Ian Turner traverses with some broad sweeps the fields of high culture and the popular arts. He discusses the social bases of the two cultures and examines the separate value-judgments involved in cultural criticism. Modern industrial society—with its changed class relations, new technology and markets—has transformed the pre-industrial patterns of culture. Thus the works of the high arts are still produced by specialists for an élite, but the private patron of the arts has been replaced by a broader, less defined market. And the mass media have taken over popular culture. The two cultures are no longer so sharply distinguishable from each other, yet there remains the assumption (which reinforces class distinction) that only the élite can appreciate high culture. Critics discuss high culture in philosophical or aesthetic terms, whereas popular culture is considered in relation to its political or sociological significance.

Of course, there is much more to popular culture than escapist literature or the 'tops of the pops'. In Australia, the genre includes bush ballads, theatrical entertainment, children's rhymes and spectator sports such as football, where Turner himself is a penetrating observer. He suggests that it is more useful to consider culture than the process of production, when attempting to define the character of a nation or class. Turner argues for a liberatarian Marxist position: cultural creation, the work of the imagination, should not be concerned only with enlightenment or production. For this reason Turner is hopeful about the counter culture, which is against the work ethic and for the right to play—and which aims to subvert existing value systems rather than confront power structures.

On that last point, Helen Palmer would have misgivings. In the course

of her essay on élitism in education she grants the validity of the fundamental critique of schooling expressed by Illyich, yet in her view the young radical who votes against the system with his feet comes from a social group with initial advantages which enable him easily to opt out (and opt in again). Most Australian youngsters are not in this position.

This is merely one example of the way in which Palmer firmly places developments in education in their class context. Since the beginnings of state school systems in nineteenth century Australia, there have been private schools for children of the rulers, and other schools for the offspring of the ruled. The latter schools initially taught only the rudiments of the three Rs. Then came secondary school development and, after World War Two, strong influences tending to raise the level of education and aspirations towards education. These changes were broadly in line with demands for different skills in the economy, but the ruling class faced a growing problem in attempting to justify the poorness of the grade of school training still provided for future labourers. The answer was IQ testing, which purported to select on educational grounds; it appeared to be a scientific means of measuring innate, culture-free qualities, when it was really a device for selecting a small minority of children to fit into the 'better' type of state school.

After tracing the development of IQ testing (the critique of which has not been well known in Australia), Palmer looks at other aspects of élitism in education. As she observes, 'Equality of opportunity, offered to competitors who have unequal starts, merely perpetuates inequalities that already exist'. She takes account of the work of progressive educationists like Montessori, but considers that the fundamental cleft in educational thinking is not between progressive and traditional viewpoints but between those who believe in different forms of education for the rulers and the ruled, and those who want a more egalitarian approach.

The editors of this volume now look forward to preparing Volume Four in the series. Contributions of essays are invited and may be sent to either editor. The essential elements are that the essays be related to Australia, and the approach of the authors should be left-wing, preferably Marxist—using that term in its widest sense. Jargon should be eschewed as far as possible.

Sydney
July 1977