

facts as distance (and the costs it imposed) along with the offsetting factors of the contemporary changes in the outside world that we can recreate our past.

Bibliographic Note :

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by

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Convict labour in Australia was merely part of an imperial system governed in all parts by the same laws, usages and regulations. The local variations were extra-legal or illegal — the system was modified through the interplay of economic forces. The convicts, like any other slave category, were able to take advantage of the necessities of their rulers and masters. The commerce of Sydney, as soon as permanence of settlement was assured, made escape by sea possible — to the seal islands, to New Zealand or Polynesia. The perennial labour shortage put a premium on skill, literacy and the acquisition of the economic virtues. Assignment was rightly described as a lottery, which means that there were prizes as well as blanks, and the prospect of prizes — such as money income and the freedom to increase it — worked from the beginning to defeat the enslaving purpose of the system.

Our history has been written by landlubbers subject to the myopia of landlocked people. It has been written as if everything of importance in the development of this group of colonies happened inside the three-mile limit. There is passing mention of Norfolk Island but its penal aspect is stressed while the commercial intentions are ignored. Russell Ward says that a distinctive Australian attitude can be held to have appeared almost from the moment of the first settlement. If he looked to the oceans he could go even farther back. Matra's proposals in 1784 said: 'We must look at the chart of the world with a political eye'. By that time the merchants of London were seeking quick profits from whaling and sealing in southern oceans. They were working, with Lord Hawkesbury's help, to break through the monopoly of the East India Company and were quick to take advantage of the new settlements. It is a fair inference that common seamen in those ships and others shared the aspirations of the captains. It was common knowledge among seamen that the crews of Cook's ships had done well from trading and that whaling and sealing were expanding, with ships manned by loyalists of Nantucket and run on a lay or profit-sharing basis.

If we consider the official plans from this aspect we might ascribe the choice of Captain Arthur Phillip to his experience in the Portuguese navy in Brazilian waters when the sperm whale fishery was first active there. We can find in the minutes of the Committee for Trade and Plantations a constant pressure from London whalers to be allowed the freedom of the seas. Their chief spokesman, Samuel Enderby, was a personal friend of P. G. King and known to Pitt himself.¹ In 1791 the whalers made their first break through when their ships were chartered for the Third Fleet. The Board of Trade minutes show that as this Fleet was being prepared, Pitt attended every meeting of the Committee. So before and during the first establishment of a trading base in the Pacific the aggressive commercial

element was strong and it was this element which contributed most to the abolition of the slave labour system under which these plantations were made.

For the earliest example of an industry employing free labour and seeking profit from aggressive risk-taking we must look to America. In 1770 Crèvecoeur wrote of the Nantucket whalers that 'the sea was to them a sort of patrimony', that they worked on a lay or profit-sharing basis, employing Indians, whites and free negroes indiscriminately, that they were already whaling the South Atlantic and talking of going round Cape Horn to the Pacific. In 1792 de Warville wrote of the equality in American ships and asserted 'nothing stimulates men to be good sailors like the hope of becoming captains'. After 1775 scores of Nantucket loyalists took over ships, crews and families and established the sperm whale fishery from London. Enderby loyalised captains and harpooners at his own expense. Others came to spread civilisation through the South Pacific. Such names as Ebor Bunker, Matthew Coffin, Timothy Folger and Amasa Delano show the influence of puritan free enterprise in Australian development. The early sealers in Bass Strait caused King to disregard imperial restrictions on colonial ship-building and the bay-whaling and sealing communities spread through the straits islands and farther off into southern oceans. Settlements without official blessing were made at many points from Twofold Bay round to Shark's Bay, at a score of points in south-east Tasmania and even in New Zealand.

By 1830 the colonial fishery was more important in these waters than the pelagic London-based sperm fishery and up to 1840 the value of fishery exports exceeded that of pastoral exports. Sydney at all times up to 1850 had one quarter of the total population of New South Wales and by far the richest quarter. Even the convicts employed by private persons in Sydney (and Hobart) were more free, with more opportunities than the bond men of the inland parts; but those who signed on — from choice — for the whaling and sealing gangs were then the only workers who could be called free and independent. (Even the artisans and tradesmen were patronised by the gentry — and were paid when the gentry were ready). Light on this Australian free labour comes from Portland, Victoria. It had been a seasonal whaling settlement from 1830 and not until 1839 was a magistrate sent to report. Foster Fyans, ex-British army, found there 293 Europeans and from their appearance concluded they were a bad lot of ruffians — 'quite independent; every fellow appears a master'. He had therefore no doubt that 'numerous bad and improper acts had been committed and hid from us'. When he spoke to them he rarely received a civil reply. 'To them we are all on a par', he wrote. 'Equality is the order of the day'.²

This statement poses the issue of masters and servants, of owners and slaves better than volumes of official records. An English army officer found himself, for the first time in his life, forced to mix with a large group of free workers and was appalled by what he saw as well as by what he sus-

pected. These men were there from choice and because they could hold down the job. They earned real money in a way of their choice — even if they earned it like horses and spent it like asses. They spent it in Sydney — not the bush. Anyone who is seeking to define the distinctive qualities of Australian society in those times must take account of the fishery, which was run by Sydney merchants but perforce manned by free workers. If we are seeking an equivalent of Turner's frontier principle for Australia we must look to the scores of bay whaling and sealing settlements and also to the pelagic whaling and the trade to the Pacific Islands and New Zealand. It was this that brought most profit to Sydney and profit and high wages brought freedom. It made ex-convicts respectable. Anyone who could acquire a whaleboat and a stock of flour, tea, sugar and rum, could run his own show. Russell Ward ignores this aspect except for a passing mention that the first permanent settlers in South Australia got much needed help from the sealers of Kangaroo Island. He also ignores the maxim 'Sydney or the Bush' and its implication.

The British colonial system was based on slavery. Transportation to the plantations began with early Virginia; later hundreds of Irish and Scot rebels were banished and sold, their services being forfeited to the state. In 1719 Parliament enacted the sentence of transportation for civil offences because of 'a dearth of labour in the plantations'. This made assignment legal and remained the basis of Australian assignment throughout its history. In 1827 Mr Justice Forbes analysed the legal aspects and stated that the intention of the law 'was and is to improve the colony and make it more useful to the British nation'. That assignment meant slavery was frequently asserted by colonial governors like Arthur, Darling, Gipps and Fitzroy, all of whom had had prior experience in colonies where other forms of slavery existed. That there are degrees of slavery does not alter the basic fact. Nor need we concern ourselves with the proposition that the slave was enjoying a higher living standard than he had previously known. This, like the discipline and industrial training, was an essential condition of the efficiency of any slave system. Like horses, convicts were improved by being 'broken in' (as James Macarthur said of his servants) and by being fed well and regularly and by receiving indulgences like rum, tea and tobacco. Such incentives were reserved for times when greater diligence and efficiency were demanded, as at sheep-washing and shearing.

This forced-labour system of Australia was only a part of a colonial forced-labour system which is seen most clearly in the hulks attached to all British dockyards. To Australian historians the hulks were merely a temporary accommodation for convicts awaiting deportation that were used as an expedient when an independent America would no longer receive them. There had been a steady export of a thousand a year run by a private contractor for profit, because there was a demand in some American colonies of about that magnitude. It was a regular slave trade. It ceased because it was against public policy to sell government property to rebellious colonists

and to a foreign state. The record shows that the first hulk was established in 1774 at Woolwich arsenal and others were quickly provided at the naval dockyards at Chatham. In 1776 an act of Parliament made it legal for convicts to serve their sentence in the hulks for the public purpose of 'raising sand and gravel from the river and generally improving the navigation of the Thames'. The need for unskilled labour for these purposes arose from the rapidly increasing trade and increasing size and draught of ships. State-owned labour was applied to public purposes in Britain and was extended to similar public purposes in Port Jackson and Hobart, as it was later in Bermuda and Gibraltar.

In 1812 and 1813 select committees heard detailed evidence of the work done and methods of payment in the hulks. At Woolwich there were grades of work and skill described as Tuppenny, Thrippenny and Fourpenny Hapenny beer. The value of work done was officially compared with that done by free workers but hulks had other advantages apart from work done. The engineers stressed the advantage of removable hostels which housed the workers close to their work and of labour that was on tap for emergencies and under discipline. This was of great moment while a large navy was maintaining the blockade of western Europe and sudden large pressures of work arose from weather conditions and vagaries of tides in the harbours. The tied labour which was called upon for double duty also got incentives like double beer and biscuit. Working 'double tides' for increased pay shows how even this system developed of necessity some of the conditions of free labour. Evidence from Woolwich showed that on one day there were 309 labourers employed rated at 2s.8d. each but boatmen clearing a new wharf site were worth 5/- a day, pile drivers were at 2s. 6d. and ballast heavers 3/-. From 1814 the Superintendent of Hulks made regular half-yearly reports of the establishment, man-power, costs and imputed value of work. For that year the cost was £70,512 and value of work £27,980 but we must always bear in mind that this was imputed value and that without this work force on tap much of this work would not have been done at all. It was a workforce available when wanted and such work could not have been done by free labour.

We must also bear in mind that the Navy was manned by impressment (without crime) and that the hulks were an integral part of the Navy organisation and run on naval lines. At this time cotton mill owners were hiring pauper apprentices wholesale because there was no such thing as a free workforce to be attracted by mere offer of day wages.

As Howard shows, this hulk or galley system was then in use in all large European states. The British hulks were ships in commission, run on naval lines, organised in divisions for work, instruction and prayers. The men slept in hammocks, scrubbed decks, did their own chores. They were naval establishments and drafts were made for despatch to other ships and to Botany Bay when they were above their establishment. On the lowest deck were the longest term and worst conduct men; with good conduct they

might rise to the middle deck in three months and the upper deck in twelve which gave 'a strong expectation that they would not leave the country'. Thus discharge in Britain, with deferred pay, depended on conduct not on crime. The astute convict could 'work his ticket'. The drafts were usually from the lower deck — but again bore no relation to the crimes for which they were hulked. Thus the working of Gresham's Law can be found with convicts as with horses, slaves and seamen.

From 1815 to 1847 there are half-yearly reports which are like live stock returns: January 1 1817, on board 2,041; received 2,364; transported 1,790 (which was an increase of 782 on the previous year) died 45; escaped 1; discharged or removed 483; remaining 2,132. Of the 129 convicts under the age of sixteen received, seventy were sent to New South Wales.³

In 1819 pile driving at 2/- a day accounted for 26,000 man days while a thousand chapters of Holy Writ, forty-eight gospels and fifteen homilies had been memorised and rehearsed in the chapel. Thus did slaves acquire merit — and work their tickets. In 1820 the number transported rose to 2,758 and the chapters memorised fell to 200. The chaplain reported labour troubles in Chatham Dockyard from jealousy of free workers. At Portsmouth the chaplain made his daily visit at dinnertime in order that work might not be interfered with. (Dinner time is NOON in the Navy).

In 1822 the number sent to New South Wales fell to 1,470 and the first draft of 300 was sent to Bermuda; in 1824 Vancouver's old ship *Discovery* was hulked at Deptford and the convict work force aroused there the usual initial prejudice. The number transported was 1,885.

After 1825 the expenses and earnings at Bermuda are shown separately and in each year imputed earnings there exceed costs — because a higher proportion of artificers was drafted there and also only young, healthy men were sent. In 1825 400 men were sent there and 1,105 to New South Wales. In 1826 Bermuda got 700 and New South Wales 1,359.

It is clear that the Government had alternative uses for its tied workers and also that first pick went to the senior service. Of course, we may infer that drafts for New South Wales included the more rebellious as well as the less skilled or older; also all Irish transports went there.

In 1830 there were ten hulks in Britain and four at Bermuda; the new establishments respectively were 4,250 and 1,300. We must remember too that all ex-convicts from Bermuda were discharged in Britain, with large sums of deferred pay, without reference to crimes. Lifers and those convicted of heinous offences were drafted to Australian colonies. In that year the high mortality in British hulks was ascribed to the number of convicts received who were 'utterly unfit for transportation'. For years Australian governors had been complaining that the supplies received were far below the number of applications for servants.

In 1833 the government ordered an increase in the supply to the Australian colonies and two hulks were broken up. The report for 1833 notes that there were only 230 boys who were either orphans or had no friends

to support them so 'it was desirable that they be sent abroad'. This was the year in which negro slavery was abolished and £20,000,000 was voted to compensate the planters — which went mainly to their mortgagees in London whose Parliamentarians had voted public money for that object.

The report for 1836 shows a reduction in the establishment at Bermuda. The cost of maintenance there was 1/- a day while some convicts did stonemasons' work worth 6/- a day; others even worked in the diving bell for which free workers were paid double rates. In England some convicts under ten years had been received — 'much too young to admit of their being sent abroad'. The return shows four under ten years; 110 aged from ten to fifteen and 1,190 from fifteen to twenty, out of a total strength of 1,935. How are we to assess such facts about crime and mortality in an age which, we are assured, was subject to great waves of humanitarianism?

In 1839 the reports give details of work done — in mud punts, stone quarries, fort building; for the Ordnance Department, scraping and painting guns and shot, shifting gun carriages. At Chatham Dockyard convicts helped shipwrights in setting up frames, painting ships, cleaning dry docks, scraping and painting iron cables, shifting pig iron ballast, unloading colliers — all dirty tedious jobs that did not attract enough free workers at the wages then offering.

In 1840 of the 2,187 sent to Australia from the hulks 200 were boys under sixteen. In 1841 it was estimated there was at Bermuda work for a thousand men for another seven years and that directions had been received to send a thousand convicts to Gibraltar to work on fortifications. In 1839 at the same time as the order to end assignment in New South Wales an increase in the hulks' establishment was ordered; the despatch notes that there would be no reduction in the numbers transported from Ireland, the low grade slaves not being wanted at Bermuda nor in Tasmania while Colonel Arthur was governor.

The prior claims of defence in Britain soon emerged more strongly. In 1845 the Admiralty Commissioners on Harbours of Refuge stressed the new dangers from foreign steam-powered navies and recommended rapid development of Dover, Harwich, Seaford and Portland as bases for defensive patrols. Portland was taken in hand at once; the bay was unsafe for hulks so the first job was to build a big prison by the stone quarries from which thousands of tons of rubble and cut stone were trucked to the long breakwater. The large work force — a thousand plus for many years, picked men, caused a relative decline in the hulks, though Bermuda and Gibraltar were still at full strength. The system was being overhauled — hulks were replaced by prisons at Portsmouth and Woolwich but in 1848 the hulks establishment still stood at 1,750.

In 1850 a special report was called for on the Portland works and it found that 'this great national work securing a naval station in war and affording shelter and safety to the commercial marine had been greatly reduced in expense through a large proportion being executed by convict labour'. It

stressed the value of task work and piece work on the breakwater — 'the wheelers were never out of a trot the whole day', and asserted that the discipline and industrial training received there made the men 'more valuable in any colony than an equal number of emigrants'. The appendix includes a letter from the Governor at Bermuda on the high status of convicts there — they 'jeered the soldiers and seamen by asserting they were as well off as themselves'. Meantime the work at Chatham was still the drudgery of mud and rust, scraping cables and shot, cleaning dry docks. This work was 'not favourable for the object of industrial training', but was valuable to the state.

There is today some scepticism about stories of convicts being yoked to ploughs at Port Arthur but man-haulage of timber carriages was also common then even for free workers, over short distances. In 1854 the governor of Portland Prison repeated a complaint he had made earlier that 'the only description of work there is ever any difficulty to get the convicts to perform cheerfully is that of drawing carts about the town and over the country, *like horses* — a party of 10, 12 or 14 draw a loaded cart of a weight from 1½ to 2¼ tons the distance of 10 to 16 miles during the day'. These teams often included men who had been at skilled work valued at 2s. 6d. to 3/- a day. Do we need reminding of the Australian workers' proverb about doing a good horse out of a job?

In 1857 a commission of enquiry found that dockyard work was no longer suitable for convicts because they were inevitably associated with free workers. It sums up the whole history by saying: 'Though discipline and the penal character are important it is of great importance also to obtain as large a return from it as possible — not merely from financial considerations but on account of the moral advantage of employing men on work they know to be useful'. The real point is that steam power and horse power were emancipating workers the world over; steam pumps, steam dredges, steam pile drivers, horse powered threshers and ploughs too — these were emancipating negro slaves as well as convicts. Slave labour was becoming uneconomic.

Thus the hulks system both preceded and outlived Australian transportation because it had at all times the economic basis that in the prevailing nature of work and methods it was the *only way* to get certain kinds of work done. Higher pay attracted free workers but also gave them the means to live without working. The essential immorality of the lower orders of all colours was their lack of the capitalistic virtues of diligence, regularity, punctuality, sobriety, thrift and honesty. The hulks and the whole convict system worked under these limitations but the conception of an industrial academy can be found at Bermuda, Portland and Port Arthur — and this marked the beginning of the end.

Thus throughout the history of Australian transportation the demand for assigned servants on sheep runs as in towns, had to compete with the demands of the Navy in Britain, Bermuda and Gibraltar as well as those of the

government gangs for roads, ports and shipyards. We might note how later on the Victorian government ran its own convict system to build the stone piers of Williamstown. The object of the slave was to 'work his ticket' and to do that he preferred Sydney to the Bush. It was the high demand for labour in cities which forced the outback squatters to rely on tied and servile workers and it was the opposition of freed convicts and the native-born that prevented the attempts to resume transportation and assignment under many disguises.

A candid appraisal of the system was given by Lord John Russell in 1839, in explaining the proceedings of the N.S.W. Legislative Council. It made these points: crime was not punished as crime — the award of justice was mixed with colonial profit considerations — servitude and slavery were comprehended under the word assignment — the masters and slaves had the vices belonging to such conditions — the society in New South Wales was growing in wealth by means of the labour of slaves transported by the mother country — interests of great strength and power were threatened by the end of transportation. Russell quoted Governor Bourke to the effect that convict and slave labour were identical and asserted that to many convicts transportation was migration while to others it was severe coercion, but which it was depended on the capacity of the convict, not on his crime.⁴

The moment of truth comes when any social order is breaking down. In 1843 Governor Wilmot raised the question whether the depressed colony of Tasmania could afford to pay for public works on a scale sufficient to employ the large number of convicts on its hands and Lord Stanley replied that the British government could not accept this argument. He wrote: 'The practice of regarding convict labour as a *commodity* not fluctuating in value like all other vendible things but capable of being estimated once for all at a fixed and low price are alike reprehensible. If the free inhabitants cannot purchase the labour we have to sell at a price it is worth our while to accept it remains for us to consider whether some other advantageous employment cannot be found'. Stanley went on to cite demands from Navy, Ordnance and other services to show that the government was not dependent on any colonial demand; that 'not until this fact was understood would the *real saleable value* of the convicts' labour be appreciated'.⁵

This is the language of the slave market or the horse market: 'We will supply our convicts at our price only so far as it is in our interest to do so'. This was what it had always been and the pious platitudes about the removal of criminals and their reform are irrelevant.

The essential slavery of the system is also exposed by the attempts to apply it wholesale to men who were not servile. The relevant facts for this case may be found in Dr Rudé's article on 'Captain Swing in Van Diemens Land'.⁶ In 1830-31 in seven southern counties of England, where low wages had led to widespread riots and machine wrecking, seven men were hanged, 657 imprisoned and 464 were transported. Of these 325, in two ships, were sent to Governor Arthur's colony. It was from the rich farmers

of these counties that the V.D.L. Company was formed to grow fine wool on free land with convict labour. The Governor of the Company was an M.P. and also Chairman of Gloucester Quarter Sessions at which he sentenced twenty-four of these labourers to seven years transportation. All these had no crime record. Then he and his Court used official pressure and possibly bribery to ensure that the same men and twenty-six others, all named, might be assigned to the Company's agent in Tasmania. They got only twenty-five; other settlers knew what high grade labourers these were — men who could not be hoped for through normal slave trade channels like petty crime and poverty. When the opportunity came to deport wholesale from a region where labour was becoming redundant (the introduction of threshing machines shows that) to one where it was neither cheap nor skilled, it was seized with indecent haste. The first ship reached Hobart by the end of May, 1831. The wife of Squire Frampton of Dorset, who three years later framed the Tolpuddle martyrs, wrote in her diary that the rioters of 1831 were shipped quickly as a petition for their pardon was already before Parliament and it was important to ship them to 'parts of New Zealand and New Holland where their agricultural knowledge and labour might be useful'.⁷ The conclusion is that these rebellious workers were sold down the river by a Magistrate and M.P. that a Company which he governed might prosper. While scholars seek to compute the amount of crime in the 'lower orders' only, all history is perverted.

In 1833 Governor Arthur wrote Lord Goderich a long letter to prove the efficiency of transportation and assignment as a punishment for crime. After asserting that the condition of the assigned convict was in all respects except time that of a slave, he went on to cite the grief and despair of the 'rioters who arrived by the *Eliza*'. To cite such a special group to prove the virtues of a system, from one who was profiting from it, was just as dishonest as the decisions of interested magistrates. Whether Arthur was a hypocrite or had a great capacity for self-deception can be left to those who revel in abstract arguments. What is beyond argument is that he was a large mortgagee and his personal interest in land and mortgages continued after his transfer to Upper Canada. How far these interests were the explanation for the transporting to Tasmania of over two-thirds of the English rioters, or for the diversion of all convict ships from Ireland (the low-grade convicts) to Port Jackson, cannot be known. What is known beyond question is that the transport of the Canadian rebels of 1837 to Van Diemen's Land was on his decision — a plain case of a vested interest setting itself above the law.

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After 1831 the free emigration at Australia was mainly pauper emigration. Before that time the worker emigrants were mainly indentured to settlers — like other apprentices they were the property of their masters. They were tied in law and fact. As workers they were inferior to the ex-convicts and

currency lads who proved themselves in the rough free life of the sealing gangs and whaling brigs of the colonies.

Pauper emigration was first considered in 1826 when Colonel Sorell said in evidence that the proposal 'assimilates in some degree to the earlier idea of settling emancipated persons who became settlers by the creation of the government'.⁸ He said settlers would employ mechanics under indenture, and the Chairman (Wilmot Horton) asked his opinion of mechanics being sent 'under a general indenture to be disposable under the sanction of the government'. Thus, to officials, assigned convicts and indentured workers were bracketed — crime was irrelevant; what mattered was the demand for labour. It was common practice then to loan convict mechanics to settlers. Those on government work were allowed to work for private employers out of government hours. Out of this practice arose the expression 'the government stroke'. It arose in Sydney, not in the bush.

In 1828 E. S. Hall wrote of the young men of the colony having feelings the reverse of those of the 'lower orders' in England — 'high-minded even to arrogance — a fierce enthusiasm for freedom — they would on no account enter the army or the police'.⁹ The inference is that they had no need to take government work; they could earn more in other ways. We should also ponder Fenton's story of Billy Rowe, ex-Point Puer, ex-road gangs, who was a good worker so long as the boss didn't watch him. Here is the Australian dislike of the 'stand-over merchant'. Paupers may resent tyranny but are not free to express resentment unless they can choose how and for whom they will work.¹⁰

The Horton Committee's report (1826) contains a mass of evidence which reeks of the opinions of slave traders — men engaged in forwarding pauper apprentices to Canadian timber lands and Newfoundland fisheries. The recurring theme is the unwillingness of the poor to come forward. An emigration agent at Limerick was of the opinion that provided the poor 'did not regard the scheme as a transportation' it would work but if it was to get rid of bad members of the parish 'people would starve rather than suffer themselves to be transported'. The Bishop of Limerick testified to the unwillingness of landlords to pay for the emigration of dispossessed pauper tenants, of tenants starving in the ditches, of riot, bloodshed, evictions, executions — a 'state of hopeless, despairing recklessness'. Yet it was from this condition of pauperism and misery that much of the assisted and bounty emigration was drawn. Contrast this with the picture of New South Wales in the same year, as presented in an address to Governor Darling which asserted 'the advancement of the colony in population, agriculture and marine enterprise' and 'the production of the seas and islands which surround us'. The records of the next few years tell of regulations trying to restrict the indulgences, that is incentive payments, to convict servants, and of the chronic excess demand for assigned servants. This is evidence of the emancipation of slaves by economic forces, not by laws and even in spite of them. This emancipation was poles away from that Ireland

whence people hoped to draw *free* (!) emigrants to raise the moral tone of the colony. Consider Lord Goderich's announcement of the first pauper emigration — of fifty females from the Cork Foundling Hospital; properly educated on Protestant lines, of virtuous habits, and 'without any of the usual ties they can therefore be transferred to the colony unattended by any of those encumbrances which in other circumstances would be unavoidable'.¹¹ In fact, they were poor, under age, with no family or friends, and therefore disposable. Four days later Goderich applied the same theme to the emigration of unemployed British labourers, which he thought would be most useful from the complaints of difficulty in obtaining labourers and the competition for the services of convicts. A fortnight after that he thought this emigration might be subsidised by a tax on convict labour to offset the lower cost of the passage to Canada.

The pauper emigrants on arrival in Sydney were to be disposed of by government in the same way, from the same barracks and by the same officers as were the assigned convicts. Here is the dominant theme of Australian history: a country in which high profit expectations pushed up wages and engendered high living standards while the slave-minded ruling class was continually seeking to combat these trends by importing low grade labour from the cheapest source available. The Executive Council favoured a tax on convicts if it brought free labourers of the lower orders so long as the paupers were not 'the idle and dissolute rejects of rural parishes'. They said that in Sydney tradesmen earned from 7/- to 10/- a day and worked just so many days as would enable them to live in idleness for the rest of the week.¹² In 1831 Goderich wrote: 'That portion of the value of the labour of convicts which if they were free would be received by themselves should belong to the public' and that 'the government should not give free that which is of so much value'. Two comments on these candid admissions must be made: first, the slaves were well aware of their value and had various ways of showing their resentment, second, this is a good example of what Marx meant by 'surplus value'.

Thus early the character of assisted and bounty emigration became clear, being of lower grade than convicts and priced accordingly. Even the indentured workers, recruited piecemeal by employers' agents, fall into the same lower brackets. Curr, the Agent of the V.D.L. Company, wrote his directors of the 'seven years slavery' of the indentured men sent to him and also that those from Ireland 'were equal to third class convicts'.

The whole story of free, assisted emigration before 1850 can be summed up in these terms — it was a traffic in persons who were recruited with difficulty from the most distressed areas of the British Isles. It began with young girls from Irish institutions. The traffic in single women was run by shipowners through agents for profit, and at first the women were required to sign promissory notes for half the passage money and redeem these out of their wages. In 1834 the Emigration Commissioners reported a reluctance to sign the notes, the girls believing this 'exposed them to

coercion and compulsory service; a considerable number think they would be placed *in what they term slavery*'.¹³ That ugly word! There is evidence enough for a sordid story of exploitation and fraud against ignorant people. Alongside this went fraud of another kind – the condition of the first 'hiring fair' (called a Bazaar) in Sydney was such that the local Ladies Committee had to retire and leave the ladies of Cork to make their own arrangements, which they were quite capable of doing. The moral of this story is that those who are commercially sophisticated will beat any system designed to admit only those who are not.¹⁴

From 1837 the twin systems of Free Emigration began to operate. Private importers of people of defined categories were paid a bounty for those brought in, these persons being tied before they sailed. Governments also imported persons through the Land and Emigration Commissioners who also supervised the Canadian importation, the West Indian import of captured slaves indentured to planters, and the new Coolie trade from India to Mauritius and the West Indies. The merchants who contracted to transport emigrants were in it for profit and the reports of the Commissioners show year after year the abuses, frauds and crimes committed against the ignorant, distressed persons who agreed to go. At least two agents were themselves transported for frauds against emigrants. The whole record shows an imperial system designed not to relieve distress but to take advantage of it in order to meet a privileged colonial demand for a cheaper supplement to the inadequate supply of refractory assigned convicts.¹⁵

The ports of embarkation are evidence in themselves of the nature of the trade. Stornoway, Fort William, Tobermory, Oban and Greenock for Scotland; Derry, Sligo, Limerick and Cork for Ireland. The Commissioners stated that during the years of 'The Great Hunger' four fifths of the emigrants from Liverpool were Irish while many Irish also were collected at Plymouth. The rural distress of the times was not enough of itself to induce people to 'come forward'. Unless landlords and clergy supported the agents and translated or explained the particulars in their leaflets, the ships could not be filled. Broadly speaking the people did not go but were sent. Their consent was from their poverty, not their will.

We must bear in mind such contemporary circumstances as these:

> The Highland Clearances were then at their height, for the landlords of the mountain parts of Scotland were also responding to the increasing demand for wool.

The Coolie trade to the West Indies was then beginning for the same reason as the emigrant trade to Australia – the demand for a cheaper, more docile workforce to bring down the task-work rates of the sophisticated emancipated negroes.

In 1837 when the British government had decided to end Assignment of convicts, the Legislative Council asked Bourke to agree to a bounty on the importation of coolies. He refused to recommend this.¹⁶

Glenelg thought the introduction of Indians would 'bring agricultural

labour into disrepute – an inferior and servile description'. A year later 41 Hill Coolies were imported. Bounty was refused.

The point of view of the rulers and employers is shown by a comment of the *Port Phillip Gazette* on the loss of the emigrant transport *Cataraqui* on King Island in 1845, when 368 free women were drowned. The press deplored the loss to the colony then starving for labour – 'this supply of healthy emigration snatched from us when almost within our grasp'.¹⁷ We might compare this with Charles Swanston's comment in 1835 when the convict transport *George III* was lost and 135 convicts drowned. 'A small fact', he thought it, 'if the mails are recovered'.¹⁸

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The story of aboriginal woman slavery in the sealers' camps is now available in detail in N. J. B. Plomley's edition of Robinson's journals. The recurring theme of moral enlightenment in 'the duty to extend to the aborigines the blessing of Christianity in lieu of the advantages to be derived from the possession of the soil by the British Empire and the Association' was stated by George Mercer in advancing the claims of the Port Phillip Association.¹⁹ This, as Arthur wrote to Bourke a year later, was 'all Stuff' – a sheep run was the primary consideration. Yet Arthur wrote the same stuff to Hay in his suggestion that he might superintend the formation of the settlement. There is circumstantial evidence that Arthur was either a sleeping partner in the Association or intended to be one if its claims were recognised.

Arthur suggested to Hay that convicts might be given conditional pardon 'on condition of residing in Southern Australia', but Batman's conciliation of the aborigines is exposed by Swanston's letters as intended to make them into docile servants. The finding of Buckley was seen as a means to 'gaining the most complete control over his people'. Swanston went on: 'We at present feed the tribes daily but on Mr. Batman's return they are to be fed only at the full of the moon. Clothes and presents of all kinds have been sent. No means will be left untried to conciliate them and keep them on good terms. Buckley will be our mainspring'.²¹ Another Christian gentleman, prominent in this association, wrote of the 'duty and interest to teach them domestic and useful habits and to instill into their minds religious precepts' and at Port Phillip the system of barter was used for this purpose. 'The supply of food should be made to depend on their bringing some commodity of their own to exchange . . . women make baskets which might even be sent to England'. For male adults some light employment might be required – they should on no account be coerced in permanent labour – 'rather let their occupation bear the appearance of amusement'.²²

The Port Phillip gentlemen were eminent, reputable citizens who hoped to employ aborigines on the tucker standard because convicts, ex-convicts and pauper immigrants were not available. They could not expect government favour to extend beyond the purchase of 600,000 acres at 2s.6d. an acre.

Swanston censured his farm overseer for paying his ticket-holding labourers £10 a year and intended to report men who asked for more, adding that it was 'adviseable to keep them always in arrears'.²³

In the depression of the early 1840s there was frequent mention in the reports of the Land Commissioners of the employment of aborigines. At Lake Macquarie they were extinct but at Twofold Bay some were employed in sheep washing and hoeing maize. In the Monaro country some were stockmen. Imlay had three boat crews in whaling, paid on the same lay as whites: the only evidence of equality that appears.²⁴

The reports on employment of aborigines in the remote settlements mention sheepwashing and shearing, and their 'considerable service to stockholders' on the Lachlan. The 'irregular demand for their labour' seems to go along with their recurring reversion to bush life. Their practice of killing their half-caste children is mentioned. The scientists ascribed the decline in their numbers to the 'loss of the will to live'. In a society based on slavery, extermination was inevitable.

In 1843 the reaction of the working classes to the attempts of pastoralists to secure a bounty on Coolies imported is shown by a massive petition with 4,129 signatures, 'principally of the working classes'. Among the objections was that because of the 'habits of masters of assigned servants the employment of Coolies would degenerate into slavery'.²⁵ Gipps's report on this petition approved its assertions and he also made pointed remarks on the slave conditions of convicts and on assignment as the 'greatest and worst of lotteries'.

The association for the import of Coolies asserted that Europeans generally were averse to pastoral pursuits, that Coolies were well adapted for that employment, that the habits of a civilised life might lead them to adopt Christian principles and that 'all attempts to induce aborigines to labour for any length of time had proved abortive'. The surplus value from Coolie labour was put at four times their wages. Those wishing to receive bounty for importing argued that: 'if they took their earnings back with them this was better than sending money to pay for imports of spirits demanded by the British labouring class'. Lord Stanley wrote in 1844 of the possibility of encouragement to Malays or 'even Chinese' at Port Essington because the climate would not admit of reliance on European labour for agricultural purposes.²⁶

For the convicts and paupers alike slavery was a passing phase: they could 'work their ticket' (thus adding a new phrase to the language) but the aborigines were in the same position as the painted Britons on the fringes of Roman settlement fifteen hundred years earlier. The passing of slavery meant the ending of servility in the workers as well as of tyranny of the masters. Both changes were the product of changes in the techniques of production. Horses or mules and ploughs, by making hoe-culture obsolete, released the negro slaves from the worst and crudest field slavery. Steam power in harbour works abolished the demand for mud punts and

scoop dredging by crude man power. It was the premium on skill and responsibility with high grade sheep that brought piece-work and incentive payment into the pastoral industry but after 1850 the alternative of mining played a big part in putting a premium on skill.

The enlightened capitalist wanted a free workforce. By that I mean he wanted a free market for skill, a market in which the offer of wages produced a disciplined response and the best men went to the highest bidder. The convict system afforded tied labour and the supply was by favour, at the caprice of Government, whatever the lawyers might say. It was the capitalists of the seaports who wanted a free labour market where the most competent workers went to the highest bidder. It was the squatters who clung to the system of compulsion or indenture because they could not compete with commercial interests in a free labour market. It is this preference of workers for Sydney rather than the bush which explains the conflict between town and country in 1850 as it explains the division in Tory politics and the different opinions on immigration policy today. Well before the influx of immigrants produced by the gold discoveries the division between slave-owner employers and those who saw more profit in free hiring and firing was working in favour of the growing cities. The slavery attitude persisted in the outback settlements, including the outposts of sugar culture in the tropical coast lands. Here the last and crudest form of Australian slavery (the Kanaka trade) persisted to the end of last century. Its abolition was due to the organised strength of skilled labour but also to the application of scientific methods and mechanical power to sugar culture and manufacture. Slavery was abolished by enlightened self-interest not by the morality of Christians or of socialists.

The passing of slavery was the passive or the legal aspect but the growth of a free wage workforce was due to positive action of capitalists. It was the demand of the big railway contractors that trained the army of navvies and the demands of Yankee investors for free labour that forced the abolition of negro slavery on the Confederacy. It was the revolution of 1848 which abolished slavery in the French plantations though French capitalists used conscript Egyptians to dig the Suez Canal.

When British capitalism was liquidating the Irish slaves the House of Commons was more active in liquidating the bankrupt landlords than in averting famine and destruction of the slaves while at the same time the Scottish clergy told their flock that the potato famine was the punishment of God for their sins. In 1858 the great James Stephen told the Association for promoting Social Science that it was the will of God that, out of the terrible disasters of the famine and self-exile of the survivors, Parliament had been enabled to bestow on Ireland the blessing of an unencumbered proprietary.²⁷ The most appropriate comment on that seems to be that of the Fool in *King Lear* — 'Winter's not gone yet if the wild geese fly *that way*'.

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