The End of the White Australia Policy in the Australian Labor Party; a discursive analysis with reference to postcolonialism and whiteness theory.


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Abstract

Labor leaders ended their commitment to a White Australia in response to the experience of the Second World War and societal changes brought about by post-war non-British migration. Previous scholarship erroneously credits the ‘baby-boomer’ generation and the ‘middle-classing’ of the ALP. Changing the policy did not mean abandoning the Australian national project or ceding control of the spaces and bodies of the nation to non-white people. Immigration would continue to be controlled to preserve working conditions and democracy. The Whitlam Government’s move toward non-racial civic nationalism proscribed racial discrimination but was productive of discourses of white Australian nationalism.
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Introduction

This thesis will explore why, how, and in what sense, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) rejected the White Australia policy. From the Second World War onwards and culminating in 1975, the ALP’s position on immigration changed from race-based exclusion to anti-racism. In doing so it removed a foundation from its Platform that it had adhered to since its inception as a political movement.

The ‘White Australia Policy’ referred to a set of practices that aimed to keep the Australian population homogeneously European and predominantly British. It had colonial antecedents but began officially with an Immigration Restriction Act of the new Federal Parliament in 1901.\(^1\) It relied on a dictation test as the official tool to assist migration officials to bar people they determined looked sufficiently non-European to cause alarm to White Australians.\(^2\) The dictation test was a technology of control drawn from the global network of white liberal democratic polities trying to make more perfect their own internal order by excluding what they saw as the unassimilable. Innovations such as the passport\(^3\) and the dictation test spread around the network from Massachusetts to Natal to Australia.\(^4\) The policy was updated in 1945 by Labor

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2 Dutton, *One of Us?*, p.36.
Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell to ensure he could deport wartime refugees who had married Australians and did not want to leave. Racial restrictions continued during the post-war immigration program begun by Calwell under Prime Minister Chifley.

This immigration program had resulted in the employment of a large departmental bureaucracy, including migration agents placed throughout nations from Malta to Ireland. With general direction from the Minister, this bureaucracy kept Australia white by an unwritten cultural consensus. The policy began to change in 1958, when the Menzies government removed the dictation test, and gave discretionary power to the Minister for Immigration to rule on the acceptability of migrants. From then onwards internal and external pressure precipitated gradual adjustments to the administration of immigration.

At the same time, members of the ALP, in Opposition throughout this period, began to question Labor's adherence to a White Australia. The 1957 National Conference saw an unsuccessful motion to remove 'White Australia' from the wording of the Party's

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5 Dutton, One of Us?, p.71.

6 John Murphy, Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies’ Australia (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000), p.155.

7 Dutton, One of Us?, p.73. This meant that the immigration department agents continued assessing people based on their phenotype to make recommendations to the Minister, but no longer had the dictation test fig leaf to hide behind as their reason for excluding an individual. The dictation test had also been used to exclude undesirable whites, as its sole purpose was to ensure the potential migrant failed it so they could be dealt with as a ‘prohibited immigrant’.

immigration policy. Four years later, Conference again left the policy intact but insisted that its intention was 'economic' and not 'racial'. Under pressure from within and without, the 1963 Federal Conference agreed to send the question to a committee dominated by men opposed to substantive change. Finally, at the August 1965 Federal Conference, Labor formally abandoned the term 'White Australia'.

Six months later Prime Minister Menzies, the stalwart of British race patriotism and defender of White Australia, retired. Menzies’ successors relaxed immigration restrictions with Labor support. Debate within Labor carried on, but with Calwell's retirement and Gough Whitlam's ascendency, the policy was further liberalised. When Whitlam was elected, his Immigration Minister Al Grassby declared the policy ‘dead and buried’ in Manila in early 1973. The policy was finally eliminated with the passing of Whitlam’s Racial Discrimination Act in 1975, under which it became illegal to exclude people from Australia on the basis of their race.9

The term White Australia policy has more recently come to be associated with both Aboriginal dispossession and genocide as well as restricted immigration, the two being undoubtedly linked, but for the period and the actors examined here it described only the latter.10 This study will look almost exclusively at the immigration policy. It notes however that attention towards the rights of indigenous Australians coincided with a

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9 Dutton, One of Us?, p.84.
10 Dutton, One of Us?, p.33.
growing conception that Australian citizenship was not only defined by British ethnicity.¹¹

The White Australia policy, its origins, operation and putative demise, is of enduring interest as a subject of historical inquiry. It has lasting political and social effects. Understanding what the White Australia policy meant goes to an understanding of Australian identity. The demise of the White Australia policy is important politically, because the major political parties, and their history-writing supporters, are eager to claim credit for its removal. ALP leaders have said in recent speeches that Labor ended the policy.¹² The ALP website lists it as an achievement.¹³ John Howard and Keith Windschuttle have claimed the Liberal Party was largely responsible for its demise.¹⁴ These claims are contested. Ann Curthoys has pointed out that Labor actually neither introduced nor ended the White Australia policy.¹⁵ This controversy is avoided here because the focus is on how the policy ended within the ALP. The contemporary


debates indicate that the White Australia policy holds continued relevance in the political and historical memory. Both parties will continue to claim the maximum credit for their liberality and downplay their histories of racism, exclusion and support for a White Australia.

One problem with these claims by political parties is that in many respects White Australia’s key features persist. It is clear however that there has been significant change. In 2012 Australia there are discourses and hierarchies of racial difference, even if ‘there is no straight-forward, singular relationship between whiteness as a signifier of dominance and authority and the lived experience of white people’. These racialised discourses are different to the prevailing discourses of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, periods within the lifetimes of a large segment of the Australian population. This change can be traced back to decisions made in the period 1945-1975 when Australia changed from being variously a British, European or White Man’s country to whatever it is today, both officially multicultural and yet for many still a ‘White Man’s country’. Many of those decisions, choices to change the composition of Australia’s population, were made by people in the ALP, despite the fact that Labor was not in government federally from 1949 to 1972.

Australian histories are incomplete without an account of White Australia, but nearly all discussion is about its beginnings. There has been little investigation hitherto into the

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ending of Labor support for the White Australia policy. There are several reasons. Histories of the ALP, along with the biographies of its key figures, are often far more concerned with the fight for the soul of the Party between Right and Left than with the struggle between liberalisers and conservatives over White Australia. The ‘official’ Labor histories rarely produce more than a single page on the policy's demise. Books like Dyrenfurth and Bongiorno’s *Little History of the Labor Party*\(^{18}\) or Freudenberg’s history of the NSW Branch are typical in that the beginnings of the policy are covered in depth, but only cursory attention is given to why and how it ended.\(^{19}\) This absence and silence is interesting in itself, an indication that historians view the decisions taken by the ALP to end support for a White Australia as less contentious as other questions of policy, such as support for State Aid to Catholic schools, or attitudes to communism. This is somewhat anachronistic, reflecting contemporary Labor’s anti-racist consensus.

Critical historiography on Labor and the White Australia policy has also so far been more concerned with the beginnings of the policy, with the period when *Drawing the Global Colour Line*\(^{20}\) and *Creating White Australia* occurred, as recent scholarly titles reflect.\(^{21}\) Gwenda Tavan’s *The Long Slow Death of White Australia* performs the necessary task of recording and analysing over twenty-five years of events, but accords


\(^{20}\) Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*.

Labor’s change in policy only a few pages. 22 David Dutton’s *One of Us?* is almost alone in placing changes to the racially exclusionary policy in the context of a critical understanding of Australian citizenship, nationalism and whiteness, but again is not particularly focused on Labor. 23 The only published work on this specific topic is a 1992 essay by Sean Brawley. 24 Since then, cultural history, whiteness studies, transnational and postcolonial history have become more embedded in Australian historiography. The evidence Brawley employs bears re-examination from those viewpoints.

There are other reasons for re-evaluating Brawley’s essay. In explaining why Labor changed its policy Brawley emphasised the role played by a new generation of Labor members influenced by the post-war university environment and other cultural changes associated with the growth of middle class participation in the ALP. This thesis rejects that view and instead suggests that Labor people who had lived through and experienced the Second World War were the drivers of the policy change. Straight after the war, debate began on the wisdom of the White Australia policy. The lessons of that conflict, and the influence of orthodox democratic socialist internationalist humanism on the men who lived and fought through it, leaders such as Whitlam, Jim Cairns, John Wheeldon and Don Dunstan, caused Labor to drop the term ‘maintenance of a White Australia’ from its Platform. The nascent influence of the post-war generation of radicals played a supporting role but it was not the determinant.


23 Dutton, *One of Us?*, pp.79-89.

There were many other factors involved in the Australian Government ending the policy, as well as Labor dropping its support. Only Labor’s reasons are explored in detail in this thesis. The growing economic relationship with Asian nations, particularly the former enemy Japan, may have influenced the Federal bureaucracy or the Liberal and Country Party’s bourgeois and exporting constituencies, but it was only tangentially important to Labor. More urgent to Labor activists was the need to maintain Australia's liberal reputation with the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa. Calwell’s decision to increase post-war immigration and to encourage non-British migrants was also a driver of change. Above all the failure of arguments for retaining the policy was decisive. There was no good reason anymore to exclude non-whites, because, as the reformers argued, they would no longer pose a threat to white wages and democracy. These factors are reflected in motions and memoirs, but there are some that are more intangible. Aside from the many reasons covered by Tavan and Dutton in analysing why Australian society more generally moved away from racial discrimination, two particular events seem worthy of mention. One has recently been examined critically and the other has not.

The more diverse society and more liberal attitudes that relative prosperity engendered were reinforced by tours to Australia by African Americans such as Paul Robeson and Harry Belafonte, who highlighted the injustice of racial exclusion. Robeson's tour and its effect on the labour movement has been particularly well documented. Yet historians have hitherto made no note of one particular event which also contributed to an
atmosphere of criticism of White Australia. When the West Indies cricket team toured in 1960-61 they drew record-breaking crowds and also elicited support for a change to Australia’s racially exclusive policies. A senior churchman pointed out at the time that ‘They may play here but they may not stay here’.  

A key theme in this thesis is ‘whither Whiteness?’ with the abandonment of the White Australia policy. Reformers in the ALP, in common with other bodies such as the various State-based Associations for Immigration Reform (AIRs), argued that their proposed reforms would mean little real change in actual immigration patterns; or white control; or the enduring Australian-ness of the population. This thesis argues that for the ALP, far from being a move to create a racially or culturally diverse nation, ending support for a White Australia was viewed as a way of reinforcing the national success of the Australian project, which was seen as an extension of British culture and the ‘Australian way of life’. It argues that whiteness did not simply disappear because White Australia was no longer official policy. The language of the change was expressly about nation-building, continued control, integration and assimilation. In a rapidly decolonising world, for Labor, abandoning White Australia was an expression of continued white control of the country, not a negation of it. Furthermore, as Labor’s policy was further liberalised in 1969 and 1971 and during the Whitlam Government, conceptions of Labor exclusionary nationalism were superseded by a US-style civic nationalism. However, the new civic liberal democratic nationalism relied on the symbols and discourses of a

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racialist past, and therefore actually contributed to the survival and extension of discourses of racial privilege that continued into the period of official multiculturalism.

This thesis will look at the end of the policy in the ALP through the theoretical perspectives and historiographical techniques of discourse analysis, postcolonialism, transnationalism and whiteness theory. This requires looking afresh at the archive of material around the ALP’s decisions. This is mostly documentary evidence from the Party’s Federal Conferences, Executives and policy committees, local suburban branches and constituent affiliated unions. It also relies on re-reading some biographies and general histories. These sources have their limitations. They are mostly formal and designed to fit into the structures and cultures of the ALP. However the material that is available is rich in meaning and interpretative value for historiography that seeks to look anew at White Australia’s demise. The language reflects discourses of racial difference; of presumed white control of government, space and bodies. It displays Labor’s awareness of an international network of white and non-white countries, of internationalist liberalism and anti-colonialist nationalism and anti-racism.

This thesis will examine the movement for change essentially in chronological order. Chapter one shows that the policy was contested sporadically in the first half of the twentieth century. Then presented is the ‘first wave’ campaign of the 1940s and counterarguments employed to reconfirm Australia’s whites-only immigration policy. This serves to reinforce the influence that the experience of World War Two had on thinking about race. Discussed then are the effects of post-war migration and the first
modest proposals within the ALP that emerged in the 1950s; and then the public campaign of the early 1960s, including the 1961 Conference motion to end the policy. This is placed in the social context of the visits by prominent non-white sportsmen and entertainers. Chapter two covers the growing campaign and the controversy created by Labor participation in the AIRs. It then moves on to the committee created at the 1963 Federal Conference and the arguments employed for and against the policy, culminating in the removal of the term ‘White Australia’ from Labor’s Platform in 1965. Causation and historiography is then debated, particularly why this thesis rejects Brawley’s theory. Finally chapter three looks at the period 1965-1975 in three parts, including analysis of how the changes related to whiteness and nationalism. From 1965-69, when Labor’s white nationalism persisted under challenge; 1969-71 as liberals in the ALP triumphed under Whitlam with a civic nationalist conception; and 1972-1975 when Labor in Government redefined nationalism and in doing so sparked a new nationalism that relied heavily on white discourses, memes and images from the racialist past.
Ch. 1. ‘Generally and genuinely popular’: Early Support & Criticisms, Post-War Debate and the First Attempts at Change.

While the White Australia policy was ‘generally and genuinely popular’, there had always been critics who saw it as incompatible with a belief in equal fraternity of humankind.26 Support for a White Australia through restrictions on immigration of ‘coloured’ people had been official Labor policy since before the first Parliament met27 and was included in the first written ‘Rules and Platform of Caucus’ in 1901.28 It was subsequently agreed to and confirmed as the key plank in the Platform at a number of Interstate Conferences from 1902 to 1908.29 In a sense Labor’s radical, egalitarian liberal antecedents had been expressing opposition to non-white immigration for fifty years, beginning with Daniel Deniehy’s polemics in NSW against the Chinese immigration.30 Even then there had been men who spoke up against racial exclusion,


and wondered why people of mixed race could not one day sit in Parliament.\textsuperscript{31} Just as in the nineteenth century, there were dissenters from the very beginning in the new Federation-era ALP. Frank Bongiorno’s account of the Victorian socialists who opposed the White Australia policy has complicated the prevailing view that Labor and labour were unanimous in their support for restricting immigration to Europeans.\textsuperscript{32} Despite these detractors, as the nation was being constructed, Labor men placed White Australia front and centre in the Party’s Platform.\textsuperscript{33}

However, there were always divisions in the ALP over socialist and nationalist ideology. In the first thirty years of Federation, splits occurred over conscription and the proper economic policy response to the Depression. The Russian Revolution also influenced various sections of the Party. A new ‘Socialisation Objective’ was proposed at the Federal Conference in 1921, namely that ‘the socialisation of the means of production, industry, distribution and exchange’ be the Objective of the ALP.\textsuperscript{34} Queensland Delegate (and later Federal Labor Treasurer) Ted Theodore argued that there was nothing wrong with the existing Objective of ‘Cultivation of an Australian sentiment: the maintenance of a White Australia and the development in Australia of an enlightened

\textsuperscript{31} Daniel Deniehy, ‘Speech in the NSW Legislative Assembly’, reported in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 20\textsuperscript{th} October, 1860, p.13.


\textsuperscript{33} McMullin, \textit{Light on the Hill}, pp.46-47.

and self-reliant community’. Theodore claimed that every delegate knew what the existing Objective meant, but that no two delegates would agree what the proposed 'socialisation' actually entailed. A compromise was reached, and an amended Socialisation Objective and the words ‘maintenance of a White Australia’ were found side-by-side until White Australia was dropped in 1965.

The debates in 1920-21 show that the Party was both strongly nationalist and socialist in its ideology, with inevitable conflict and compromise where the two were inconsistent. Labor historians have pointed out that the electoral benefits of highlighting the Party’s nationalism were seen as greater than emphasising socialism and unionism.

Yet the labour movement had international socialist connections and showed the influence of non-racialist thought, especially when there was interpersonal contact with non-European unionists. Members of the Northern Australian Workers Union (NAWU) changed practices between 1911 and 1937 in the multicultural working conditions in the port of Darwin, beginning as white-only and moving to a less racially exclusive position. In the late 1920s, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), as an

35 Ibid., p.90.
36 Ibid.
innovative left-wing organisation countering the dominance of the conservative Australian Workers Union (AWU), affiliated to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement (PPTUM), which was closely aligned with the new Soviet Russia and the Communist International. The secretariat of the PPTUM condemned the White Australia policy as ‘viciously anti-working class’, against which the movement stood for ‘the unity of workers of all lands irrespective of nationality, colour or creed, for a United Struggle against capitalism and imperialist war’. The officers of the ACTU thereby swore to ‘tear down the barriers that heretofore separated the toiling masses of the East from the Labour movement of the West, and all the racial and national prejudice artificially created by Imperialists and their hirelings’. The NSW Labor Council produced a pamphlet defending the ACTU’s affiliation to the PPTUM and its anti-racist stance, asking whether it was better to have a ‘Workers Australia or a White Australia?’ Under attack from the AWU, who pressured ALP leader Scullin to reaffirm Labor’s commitment to the whites-only policy, and seeking legitimacy more generally, the ACTU disaffiliated from the PPTUM in 1930 and reaffirmed its support for White Australia.

Despite these occasional dissenting views, the ALP was supportive of the restrictions on ‘coloured’ immigration well into the second half of the century. The examples above

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41 Ibid.


do show however that non-racialist thought had currency and occasional potency in the Australian labour movement from 1901 through to the 1930s and the intellectual and ideological criticisms of the policy did not spring fully formed only after the Second World War.

War did however give impetus to the increasing numbers of Australians who were uncomfortable with racial discrimination, and not just those who were ideologically committed to the brotherhood of the working class. A November 1945 article in the *Melbourne Herald* by prominent journalist Clive Turnbull titled ‘Are White Australia Feelings Changing’ quoted a number of Members of Parliament. A Country Party MP stated ‘If the Chinese were good enough to fight for democracy they were good enough to live in a democratic Australia.’ Former liberal politician and Chief Justice of the High Court, as well as former first minister to Japan, Sir John Latham suggested ‘it was time Australia dropped the term “White Australia Policy” which was deemed offensive by certain nations; Australia could conduct its immigration policy without reference to colour.’ Labor MP for Hunter, Rowley James said ‘I would not have a coloured man defending me unless I could say later “Welcome, brother, come and live with me!”’ Labor’s Postmaster-General Senator Don Cameron held that ‘The White Australia Policy is economic, not racial’. Perhaps most tellingly, Eddie Ward, Labor’s firebrand

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44 Ibid, p.25.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
East Sydney MP said ‘Labor support has never been based on any claim of racial superiority...That is a Nazi doctrine’. These sentiments were reflected in Turnbull’s chapter on White Australia in 1948’s *Near North*. A review by the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s ‘K.N.’ summarised Turnbull’s views as: ‘Where there are elements of Fascism in the White Australia Policy they must be recognised and frankly admitted. The writer attacks the hypocrisy of the dictation test, and urges the substitution of a system of quotas for Asiatic immigration’.

There was clearly some broad support for change across the political spectrum. In 1945 the Communist Party, Melbourne Catholic Archbishop Mannix and the Presbyterian Assembly all called for a quota of Asian immigrants to be allowed into Australia. Tavan describes this post-war attitude as ‘a reinvigorated liberalism’, a first wave of anti-racist policy ideas. A symposium held in Goulburn from 26th to 28th January 1946, hosted by the Australian Institute of Political Science published *A White Australia? Australia’s Population Problem* and included chapters such as ‘Is White Australia Doomed?’. Amongst otherwise generally racist, even eugenicist sentiments expressed, particularly about ‘miscegenation’ and the political achievements of non-

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48 Ibid.
51 Tavan, *The Long Slow Death of White Australia*, p.68.
whites, there were some that showed a change in attitude. Professor Elkin said ‘Let us not forget the part played by the coloured people in this world war’. He went on to cite all the various coloured people who served in the war against Japan and Germany, saying ‘In light of this bare recital of facts, the slogan “White Australia” seems like an echo, as from a parrot shut in a cage back in the 1880’s- and it doesn’t make sense.’ He explicitly stated ‘that the term White should be dropped and the use of the Dictation device be rescinded.’ However the nature of the change proposed is revealed as one which is designed to keep Australia white and to avoid Asian criticism, thus strengthening Australia’s security in the region:

The time has come when we can approach the problem in a positive way. We are over 7 million strong. The admission of selected representatives of ethnic groups, irrespective of colour on a quota system, together with some qualification basis which would ensure worthiness of citizenship in a reasonably short interval, would not radically interfere with the dominant Caucasian strain of our population.

To emphasise the tokenistic nature of the proposed change, the numbers suggested were very small:

The quota would have to be arbitrarily determined, seeing that we have no suitable base year. But with regard to Oriental nations, the size of the quota is not the important matter; 50 or 80 a year would probably be accepted by say India or China, and might not always be filled. Its real value is psychological. These nations do not contest the view that other nations should have the right to determine the constitution of their populations, provided the means used for this purpose do not damage their national dignity and self-respect. Exclusion by special tests aimed at them is objectionable to them. But a quota system, though

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., p.198.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
limiting the numbers entering our country, does not exclude a whole people
because of its colour or culture, and so is acceptable.57

The focus on Asian opinion was not just a response to the experience of the war, but
also to the challenges of a decolonisation. Menzies excoriated Prime Minister Chifley's
support for Indonesian independence as ‘the very ecstasy of suicide’ because Australia
‘a country isolated in the world, with a handful of people, a White man’s country’ was
foolhardy to turn its back on its white colonialist Dutch allies in favour of the Indonesian
nationalists.58

Menzies’ pessimism about decolonisation was not shared by all his social peers. The
‘problem’ of Australia coexisting with newly liberated and supposedly somewhat
sensitive Asian nations, motivated innovative ‘solutions’. The confident and educated
elite came to the view that engagement with Asia was inevitable and therefore it was
better to control the way it was done. The ideas expressed by Elkin were not isolated,
but part of the worldwide white community’s response to war-inspired liberalism.

Canada and the USA were using similar systems to manage immigration from non-
European countries, and Canada’s moves to define its nationality inspired Minister for
Immigration Calwell to do the same.59 The countries that had utilised each other’s ideas
on colonisation and then exclusion would copy each other in moving to a less obviously
racial policies. More surprising to find is the comments from the Right Reverend E.G.

57 Ibid.

58 Julie Suares, ‘Engaging with Asia: the Chifley Government and the New Delhi Conferences of 1947

59 Dutton, *One of Us*, p.15.
Burgmann, Bishop of Goulburn, ‘the Red Bishop’, who said that he hoped Australians would:

…in a thousand years be the colour that so many Australians seek to attain on the beaches. Why cannot we get that colour by a gradual infiltration of the other colours into the blood stream and so into the skin texture? That would be the healthier way to do it, if we can overcome the prejudices that lie between.60

Even with this admission of the desirability of interracial mixing, Burgmann’s call was for a ‘tincture’ of Asian blood rather than the loss of the Australian identity, he specifically said ‘we must seek a cultural future rather than a coloured one’, meaning that the current generation’s task was to ensure the continuation of their culture, not to maintain a particular colour.61

The Second World War, especially the experience of the Nazis’ racist worldview, showed to many in the ALP that the accommodation made between democratic socialist and nationalist thought was an uneasy one, and that the most obvious, racist nationalism of the kind exemplified in the White Australia policy was no longer defensible. At the same time, the Australian experience of fighting the Japanese actually reinforced race pride, and the feeling that Australia was a ‘White man’s country’. Wartime publications meant for popular and military consumption claimed that the Japanese regarded themselves as racially superior, and the conflict took on some aspects of a war for racial survival, with little quarter given or expected.62

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60 E.G. Burgmann, attributed comment in Elkin, A White Australia?, p.206.
61 Ibid.
work on the effect of the White Australia policy on Australian foreign relations shows that the policy contributed to the idea that the Pacific conflict was in fact a ‘race war’.\(^{63}\) Prime Minister Curtin had spoken of defending the continent for ‘the British-speaking race’, a strange formulation for saying ‘White Britons’. Using a cricket reference, he said Australians would do their bit to ‘defend our 22 yards of turf’ in the southern seas.\(^{64}\) So while the war inspired a ‘reinvigorated liberalism’, there remained a majority of Australians in the 1940s that thought of the continent and of the nation, and of themselves, as Curtin said, as ‘a British people. Australia is a British land, and the seven million Australians are seven million Britishers’.\(^{65}\)

The chief antagonist for those seeking change in the 1940s was the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell. In response to the calls for change he published pamphlets, newsletters and articles defending the policy in the most strident terms.\(^{66}\) It is worth outlining in detail the arguments Calwell employed as they came to be the points that reformers later countered. They also represent the best articulation of Labor’s complex of racialist, nationalist thought. Danger for Australia was a particularly polemical pamphlet against the weakness of the Liberal Party’s supposedly confused position on immigration. In it, Calwell gave the example that the Graziers Association ‘approached

\(^{63}\) Eric Richards, ‘The spectre of White Australia’, review article in Labour History, no.72, May 1997, pp.204-211.


\(^{66}\) Dutton, One of Us, pp.64-65.
me because they wanted Chinese cooks for outback stations’ which ‘would represent the “thin edge of the wedge” in efforts to break down Australia’s selective immigration policy and Australian standards of living’. 67 He attacked the people who wanted change as ‘the ultra-conservatives and land barons’ who ‘would like vast pools of near-slave labor to make them richer.’ 68 Then there were the Communists:

the Communists wish to bring about any condition of strife, poverty and mistrust in the community which would make good government more difficult, and therefore their struggle towards power easier. The Communists base their appeals on the sympathy Australians feel for the poor and oppressed in backward countries. They preach equality, but ignore the fact that equality does not necessarily mean similarity, or the ability to work together. 69

Calwell warned of a return to the ‘Bad Old Days’ and of the new ‘Spirit of Blackbirding’ that motivated calls for non-White migration. 70 Perhaps with some justification too, as he quoted the pastoralist Sir William Angliss, a Liberal member of the Victorian Legislative Council as saying ‘as recently as one year ago’ that:

In the United States of America and in South Africa the availability of coloured labor offers a solution at least in part of our industrial problem, and I am convinced that if northern Australia is to be developed properly, coloured labour will have to be introduced….I would therefore like to see introduced some form of indentured labor for the northern areas of Australia under conditions somewhat similar to those obtaining 60 or 70 years ago in Queensland for the opening up of the sugar cane growing areas. 71

68 Ibid., p.7.
69 Ibid., p.7.
70 Ibid., p.14.
Calwell used this somewhat extreme proposition to claim that ‘Just as the Kanakas were used to drive the independent, self-respecting workers out of Queensland, so would the flow of coolie labor drive the Australian unionists out of the industries they have built up.’\textsuperscript{72} Finally he urged readers to avoid the fate that listening to the communists, churchmen and capitalists would entail:

The bad old days must not return. The Labor Party defeated the Kanaka trade and the exploitation of Asians on the Australian mainland. Only the Labor Party will keep Australia as you and I have known it, as your parents and my parents knew it, as our grandparents knew it, and for some of us as our great grandparents knew it, and as we would wish our children and our children’s children to know it.\textsuperscript{73}

In another article and pamphlet, \textit{I Stand By White Australia- Appeasement Never Pays}, Calwell responded to the arguments for a quota put forward by Professor of Political Science at Melbourne University, W. Macmahon Ball in the \textit{Argus} on October 17, 1949. Calwell described the argument for a quota as ‘a form of appeasement’, using the pejorative, almost derogatory term associated with the United Kingdom’s pre-war policy toward Hitler.\textsuperscript{74} For Calwell, the ban on non-whites must be total, no matter the consequences. He was sure that he had the support of the majority of Australians:

There can be no half-measures in a matter such as the maintenance of the White Australia policy, on which Australians hold such emphatic views...\textit{Establishment of a quota system would be an undermining of that Australian ideal which, I am sure, Australians would not tolerate.}\textsuperscript{75} [Original emphasis]

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., pp.12-13.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p.22.


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
However he was at pains to address the charge that White Australia was racist, but his choice of wording belies however his racist preconceptions:

I will repeat: Underlying the White Australia policy is no suggestion of racial superiority. It began as a positive aspiration and from it has resulted a positive achievement. This achievement is a united race of freedom-loving Australians who can inter-marry and associate without the disadvantages that inevitably result from the fusion of dissimilar races; a united people who share the same loyalties, the same outlook, and the same traditions.76

Continuing under the heading ‘Evils Elsewhere’ Calwell employed his final argument, laden, as above, with preconceptions about race and blood:

We will avoid the evils that plague America, that distress South Africa, that embitter Malaya and that worry Fiji. Ingredients of an explosive character are inherent in the conditions existing in those countries, and when the explosion occurs, as it did in Durban recently, there is civil war. The evils of miscegenation always result in rioting and bloodshed.77

With modifications, and particularly the use of examples from Britain’s supposedly disastrous post-war migration experience, Calwell made these arguments repeatedly right up until his autobiography was published in 1972, where, even in the face of Labor’s changed policies, he maintained that multi-ethnic societies would never work and that:

For political and diplomatic reasons the 1965 Federal ALP Conference removed the words ‘White Australia’ from the Labor Party Platform. We certainly did not try to water down the policy nor take the ideal from the hearts and minds of the Australian people. Nobody will ever be able to do that.78

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., p.5.
78 A. A. Calwell, Be Just and Fear Not (Hawthorn: Lloyd O’Neill, 1972), p.120.
It was primarily Calwell’s inflexible commitment to a White Australia as Immigration Minister and later as leader of the ALP that would prevent the removal of the term ‘White Australia’ from the ALP’s Platform until 1965. Labor’s adherence to White Australia would shore up Prime Minister Menzies’ preference for whites-only migration while Labor was in Opposition. Menzies would say he that he stood ‘Like members of the Labor Party...four square for Australia’s migration policy’. Those who wanted change faced determined and experienced campaigners as well as the inertia of a settled policy to push against. The nascent campaign for change in the 1940s came to nothing as Menzies won government and the ALP fell into disarray. So it was remarkable that after a few years of tumult due to the Split over Communism the matter came onto the ALP’s agenda.

In the post-war period migration was an important issue. Motions appeared on the agendas of ALP Conferences in the late 1940s and early 1950s discussing shortening the period required before naturalisation, as well as motions decrying the lack of services and housing for migrants from Europe. Labor was concerned about the perceived problem of European migrants favouring the Liberals over Labor, largely because Labor’s name was being blackened with charges of communism, anathema to refugees fleeing Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe. There was some foundation to Labor’s concerns too, with research showing that migrants did become more liberal, if not more right-wing once they left their homelands, and tended to support the Liberals

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above Labor by a small margin.\textsuperscript{81} Labor organisers went to great lengths to cajole and assist MPs into doing more to ingratiate themselves with migrants, distributing to them lists of recently naturalised citizens, and producing pamphlets in various European languages.\textsuperscript{82} Unions too were concerned about migration, occasionally expressing misgivings, such as in 1947 when the AWU passed a motion calling for a ‘similar type of migrant to those who settled Australia in the past’.\textsuperscript{83} Despite these concerns, and an ongoing watchful eye on unemployment and unscrupulous migrant employers, European migration allayed the fears the labour movement held about competition for work, anti-union attitudes amongst migrants and depression of wages by excess labour.

Partly this was because the ACTU and the labour movement were co-opted into the migrant management system under Calwell, and Menzies thought fit to retain the union movement’s cooperation under his government.\textsuperscript{84} Tavan describes the migration program of the 1950s as an imperfect experiment in tolerance and integration, but one which opened up the possibilities of Australian citizenship. It ‘allowed Australians to make sense of, contain and ultimately accept social and cultural change, by gradually if equivocally, incorporating the reality of an ethnically mixed population into popular


\textsuperscript{82} F.E. ‘Joe’ Chamberlain, letter to MPs, 25 May 1961, WA ALP Records, MN 300 ACC 7562/A9, WA State Library.

\textsuperscript{83} Kahan, “Immigration and Political Change”, p.87.

conceptions of the Australian nation. Unfortunately for the ALP migration was a small issue compared to the one that was rending it in two and causing electoral defeat around the country.

The 1957 ALP Conference was held in a poisonous atmosphere of the Split in the ALP over communism. The infamous 1955 Hobart Federal Conference and 1956 Special Conference in Melbourne had witnessed scenes of contested delegations turning up to take their seats, the expulsion of delegates and Parliamentarians, acrimony and dissension. The Split was not a one off event either, it continued into 1957 with the fall of Queensland Premier Vince Gair’s Government, when he and his entire Cabinet (minus one) seceded from the ALP. So it is surprising then to find on the agenda for the 1957 Federal Conference a motion put forward by the Queensland Branch of the Party to remove the term ‘White Australia’ which read as follows:

That the Federal Conference of the Australian Labor Party be requested to endorse the suggestion attributed to Mr P.J. Clarey that the Labor Party delete all reference to ‘White Australia’ from its Platform and that the words ‘Maintenance of a restrictive immigration policy based on economical grounds’ be substituted.

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85 Gwenda Tavan, in Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, p.154.


88 Agenda of the 1957 ALP Federal Conference, Box 1, Folder 3 (previously Folder 1 misfiled), item 13, page A2. Also, ALP 1957 Federal Conference Agenda, Box 1, Folder 3, page 3, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.
The motion does not appear again in any report of the Conference, and it is not clear from the ALP’s files in the National Library of Australia whether the motion was debated or not. The P.J Clarey mentioned was the ACTU Secretary, and former Victorian Minister for Labour, Percy Clarey, who had been active since the thirties. Where he said that ‘White Australia’ should be dropped from the Platform is not clear. His entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography mentions that he was against the policy but upheld it.\(^8^9\) The motion does not appear in the Queensland State Conference agendas and minutes held by the ALP National Secretariat. The agenda of the preceding Queensland State Conference does not include references to it, which presumably means that it was a motion passed by the Queensland State Executive outside of its annual Conference proceedings- there are no minutes for the Queensland State Executive held by the National Library for the period either. So we do not know who moved it or why this motion was brought to Federal Conference in 1957, nor what was said in support of it, if anything, but only that it was not adopted. We do know that it was the first time the question was raised at a Federal Conference since the 1920s. The 1957 Conference motion marked a formal revival of opposition that stretched back to Federation. Brawley says that at the 1959 Conference another attempt was made, however he does not reference where he gets this information\(^9^0\) and the ALP National Secretariat material does not prove this one way or another.\(^9^1\) Change was afoot regardless.


\(^9^0\) Brawley, 'Long Hairs and Ratbags', p.206.

\(^9^1\) Ibid.
The period during which the ALP changed its immigration policy was a time of changing conceptions of race and Australian citizenship, both officially and demotically. Race began to be seen in the contexts of oppression of those without rights, rather than being embedded in a discourse of racial pride or superiority.92 Gordon Bryant, later Minister for Aboriginal Affairs under Whitlam, founded the Aboriginal Advancement League in Victoria in 1957, and it was in the Victorian ALP that the concerted post-war push for change to the White Australia policy began.93 Victoria was also where the first dissent against the policy was expressed in 1901, perhaps a reflection of that state’s more liberal or doctrinaire socialism, as opposed to the pragmatic Laborism of New South Wales.94

Post-war affluence and American cultural influence produced a wider knowledge of the world and contributing to changing ideas about race.95 A number of discrete events also contributed to a feeling of changing attitudes to people of non-British descent, both generally and in the ALP. In late 1960, internationally acclaimed singer Paul Robeson made time during a commercially successful comeback concert tour to take part in

92 Dutton, One of Us, p.156.


95 Murphy, Imagining the Fifties, p.154.
meetings and events that the radical former ALP Senator Bill Morrow helped organise.\textsuperscript{96} Robeson, as an activist and known sympathiser with the Soviet Union, was a transgressive and dangerous figure for some, having been banned from leaving the United States for eight years during the height of McCarthyist persecution of communists.\textsuperscript{97} However for the more radical trade unions and Labor members, he was an inspiring man, embodying the struggle for freedom and equality with which they identified. He received critical acclaim from the mainstream press, who remarked upon ‘the enormous aura of benevolence and goodwill generated by his presence; an aura in which large and resounding concepts like freedom and amity, whether expressed in song or speech, seemed to tingle with new relevance.’\textsuperscript{98}

While in Melbourne he spoke at a Peace Conference, and in Sydney was invited to visit the workers constructing the Opera House and led them in a rendition of the union anthem ‘Joe Hill’. John Aquilina, Labor’s NSW Education Minister recalled in 1998 the effect on his Maltese-born father, a carpenter on the building site, who reported that the tough construction workers were ‘reduced to tears’ by Robeson’s presence.\textsuperscript{99} This was far from an isolated event. Dozens of meetings, events and impromptu concerts

\textsuperscript{96} Audrey Johnson, \textit{Fly a Rebel Flag Bill Morrow 1888-1980 In and out of the Labor Party-Politics with Principles} (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1986), p.278. Bill Morrow also received the Lenin Peace Prize in 1961, and specifically requested that Sahib Singh Sokey present him with the award, as a ‘slap at the White Australia policy; and he had more letters after his name than Menzies did’, Johnson, \textit{Fly a Rebel Flag}, p.285.

\textsuperscript{97} Ann Curthoys, ‘Paul Robeson’s visit to Australia and Aboriginal Activism’, Ch.8, pp.163-184, in Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys and John Docker, eds., \textit{Passionate histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia} (Canberra: ANU E Press and Aboriginal History Incorporated, 2010), p.163.


\textsuperscript{99} Curthoys, ‘Paul Robeson’s Visit’, p.171.
organised by the Waterside Workers Federation, the Building Workers Industrial Union, the Soviet Australia Friendship Committee, state Peace committees and the Union of Australian Women, were addressed by both Robeson and his erudite anthropologist wife, Eslanda. Robeson gave a concert at a packed Sydney Town Hall for a stop work meeting of Waterside Workers called to protest against an anti-union Crimes Bill.\textsuperscript{100} Across the country many thousands attended his concerts, and many more saw him on ABC Television and read of his concerts, and his beliefs, in the mass circulation newspapers.\textsuperscript{101}

The effect of this cannot be easily quantified, but the appearance of such a sympathetic and effective character clearly had an impact on many thousands of people in the labour movement and beyond. Robeson’s visit both challenged and affirmed many Australians’ self-perception as liberal, fair and equal people. Above all it elicited displays of affection and adulation. After performing for the Waterside Workers in Melbourne, on day seven of a ten day stoppage, where he sang ‘John Brown’s Body’ and explained that ‘John Brown had died that his father, a slave, should be free’, he was mobbed, with ‘Members climbing over seats to grasp his hand and the whole gathering was on its feet, stamping, shouting, and clapping. It had to be seen to be believed’.\textsuperscript{102} Robeson’s presence may not have convinced conservative Labor leaders of the wisdom of non-

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, p.171.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid, p.169.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, p.172.
racial immigration. He did however prove that non-whites could stand in solidarity with white workers rather than undermining industrial and political gains.

Robeson was not the first black American performer to visit Australia. The second half of the 1950s saw tours by many black artists such as Little Richard, Louis Armstrong and Nat King Cole.\textsuperscript{103} Just before Robeson came, in August 1960, the hugely popular Harry Belafonte, himself a radical, had toured Australia and visited Aboriginal activists and settlements.\textsuperscript{104} Belafonte was not yet as well known for his political activism, but as in America, he had reached a broad audience with his adaptations of Caribbean folk tunes and working class songs. Mentored by Robeson, he became deeply involved in the Civil Rights movement.\textsuperscript{105} He was the first African American to win an Emmy, and pioneered acceptance of black culture and black faces amongst white audiences.\textsuperscript{106}

The summer of 1960-61 also saw the tour of the West Indies cricket team, under their first black touring captain, Frank Worrell. The importance and impact of this tour should not be underestimated. Cricket is Australia’s national sport, and it embodies a great deal of the Australian identity and the cultural meanings and modes of behaviour taught to


\textsuperscript{104} Curthoys, ‘Paul Robeson’s visit’, p.165.


and expected of Australians, especially boys and men. It is the quintessentially liberal, nationalist, but still British sport. Historians and cricket writers C.L.R. James, and Ramachandra Guha, from West Indies and India respectively, have written on the connection between nationalism, postcolonialism and cricket.\textsuperscript{107} In fact it was James that campaigned to have Frank Worrell appointed captain of the West Indies while editor of \textit{Nation}, the organ of the Trinidadian nationalist movement.\textsuperscript{108} Australian national identity too was defined by cricket, as Australia had a cricket team thirty-four years before it was a federated nation.\textsuperscript{109}

When the West Indies began their tour, Test cricket was under some pressure, with dour draws and conservative play leading to falling attendances. Australian cricket great Don Bradman encouraged the Australia team to play attacking cricket, saying that the selectors would look kindly on players who kept the cricket interesting.\textsuperscript{110} The response produced enormous interest and people flocked to the games. The series began with a scintillating first Test which ended in a tie, the first ever in the history of the sport.\textsuperscript{111} The photo of the ultimate moment, a run out effected from side-on by the West Indian Joe

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\item\textsuperscript{107} C.L.R. James, \textit{Beyond a Boundary} (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1963), R. Guha, \textit{A Corner of a Foreign Field - An Indian History of a British sport} (London: Picador, 2001); Nicholas Lezard, review in \textit{The Guardian} of Guha’s ‘inspired approach to colonial and post-colonial Indian history’, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/may/03/featuresreviews.guardianreview5>, viewed 20 September 2012.
\item\textsuperscript{108} James, \textit{Beyond a Boundary}, p.320.
\item\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Calypso Summer}, ABC TV, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/calypso/synopsis1.htm>
\item\textsuperscript{111} R.S. Whitington, \textit{Australian Test Cricket}, pp.253-5.
\end{itemize}
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Solomon, still features on the front of the official scorebooks used by nearly every cricket club in the country.\textsuperscript{112} Bradman described it as 'The greatest and most exciting Test Match of all time'.\textsuperscript{113} From then on, the crowds, and the reception for the touring West Indians, especially their charming and urbane captain Worrell, were unprecedented. A world record for the largest ever crowd at a Test match was set when 90,800 turned out to watch at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on February 11th 1961.\textsuperscript{114} It was also the first time that ABC Television had shown coverage of all five Tests, so the audience was increased significantly.\textsuperscript{115} At the end of the tour 500,000 people lined the streets of Melbourne for an open-car parade of the departing West Indians.\textsuperscript{116} Speeches of great warmth and sincerity were given by the captains and by Bradman.\textsuperscript{117} The trophy awarded to Australia for winning was named in honour of the West Indies captain, in such esteem was he held.\textsuperscript{118} The success of the tour, and the great affection and adulation shown toward the West Indians, men of a variety of backgrounds, Afro-Caribbean, European, and East Indian, drew comment about the White Australia policy.

The Anglican Dean of Melbourne, Dr Stuart Barton Babbage said:


\textsuperscript{113} R.S. Whittington, \textit{Great Moments in Australian Sport} (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1975), p.1


\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Calypso Summer}, ABC TV, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/calypso/synopsis1.htm>

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} R.S. Whittington, \textit{Great Moments in Australian Sport}, p.17.
It is a sobering and humbling thought that the West Indians, whom Australia welcomes as cricketers would not be welcome as citizens. Their skin is the wrong colour. They may play with us, but they may not stay with us. It may be that the game of cricket will pave the way for more generous national policies. If only we could cultivate the spirit of cricket in all our dealings, one with the other. It is not far from the spirit of Christ.\textsuperscript{119}

It is difficult to know whether the ALP was much influenced by the tour or the comments of the Dean. Suffice to say that the atmosphere in the early 1960s was one where the White Australia policy, race relations and the rights of colonised people were live issues, ones that drew thought and comment. It was in 1961 that Donald Horne took over as editor of the Bulletin, and in a much-publicised move, removed ‘Australia for the White Man’ from the masthead, even requesting that the printing template be melted down.\textsuperscript{120}

Around this time, from 1959 onwards, the movement against the White Australia policy had begun to coalesce around two groups, Student Action and the AIRs, both of which originated on and around University campuses in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{121} Their impact on the ALP will be discussed further below, but their creation shows the period was one in which the ALP was confronting more liberal ideas on race and nationality. The ALP’s Federal Executive and Conference minutes reflect the concerns with decolonisation in Papua New Guinea.\textsuperscript{122} They also show that the Party expressed strong opinions

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  \item \textsuperscript{119} \textit{Calypso Summer}, ABC TV, \texttt{<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/calypso/synopsis1.htm>}
  \item \textsuperscript{120} John Huxley and Samantha Selinger-Morris, ‘Forever misquoted, Donald Horne Dies’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 9 September 2005.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Brawley, ‘Long Hairs and Ratbags’, pp.206-208.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} ALP 1961 National Conference Foreign Policy Committee notes, Box 1, Folder 10, note 8, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.
\end{itemize}
against South Africa’s racial regime.\textsuperscript{123} Related to these were Labor’s policies supporting Asian decolonisation. The Cold War and decolonisation were the driving issues for Australian Labor as it thought internationally, as the potential Federal Government in charge of defending Australia’s interests.

It was in this context that White Australia was again debated at Labor’s 1961 Federal Conference. Brawley characterises this as an attempt by Whitlam and Dunstan to remove the words by stealth before Calwell ‘caught’ them and admonished them for it, saying his leadership would be made untenable by any such move.\textsuperscript{124} It seems odd to describe Whitlam and Dunstan’s push for change as an ambush. The 1961 Agenda paper produced before the Conference met had a number of motions before it on the issue of immigration. One was on the White Australia Policy specifically, Item 112 (of 154 motions) put to the Conference by the Western Australian Branch: ‘That the ‘White Australia Policy’ of the Party be reviewed with the possibility of gradual modification’.\textsuperscript{125} Dunstan sponsored the WA motion but was defeated 27 votes to 7, and there was only marginal interest in the issue from Federal Conference members who went on to discuss other matters at far greater length.\textsuperscript{126} The Conference Report also contained a motion from Victoria that would have entirely re-written the immigration policy, omitting

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\item[123] Ibid.
\item[125] ALP Federal Conference Agenda 1961, Box 1, Folder 10, Note 8, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.
\item[126] Ibid., p.38.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
reference to White Australia. All immigration motions were ‘discharged’ as the topic was ‘covered by Policy Statement’. The statement read, amongst other parts about proper provision of settlement services and protection from private immigration sponsoring rackets, that:

Labor welcomes to Australia the people of the countries concerned, and will, in friendship, assist to its utmost their assimilation into the Australian nation. Maintenance of a White Australia shall provide the basis for immigration policy. This basis does not represent a racial prejudice or carry any suggestion of racial superiority. The policy rejects the ‘Asian quota system’ on the grounds it would make no material impact on overpopulated Asian countries, and would be harsher and more discriminating than the current regulations governing the entry of Asians into Australia for the purpose of trade and education…

3. Policy shall be directed to maintaining the basic British characteristics of the Australia nation by proportion of not less than 60 per cent. British to not more than 40 per cent. non-British…

5. Foreign language newspapers published in Australia shall also be required to publish in English all items appearing in such newspapers.

Some movement had occurred. There was a desire to state clearly that the policy was not racially motivated. The statement makes clear that the ALP conceived of the whole immigration issue from a nationalist viewpoint, where Whiteness and Britishness were the national norm, and new citizens would be expected to assimilate culturally, politically and economically into the legitimate Australian nation. There was an assumption of control, and continuing control, over the bodies of migrants, over the space of the

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127 Ibid., p.37.


129 Ibid., p.67.
Australian continent, over the language migrants would speak, over the political and cultural possibilities that were available to people in Australia.

Dunstan and other reformers could not get anywhere near to a majority for change when Calwell was staking his authority on maintaining the status quo. Calwell and the other men born in the previous century were the embodiment of Labor’s exclusionary nationalist past. They could see no advantage to changing a policy that had been a foundation stone of Australian politics up until that point. It would take active campaigns by committed groups of people to shift Labor’s collective view.
Chapter 2: ‘No Sir, it is out of date and makes for war, so please count me as one against it’ Controversy, Change, Causes, Continuity.

While the 1961 Conference voted down the proposal for change, the topic continued to stir up interest in Victoria and Western Australia. In Victoria, Student Action held speakouts at Melbourne’s Eight Hour Monument to push for change to the policy. In both states the Associations for Immigration Reform (AIR) had recruited some high profile Labor Party members, particularly in WA where Reverend Keith Dowding, John Wheeldon and Peter Crawford held positions within the Party’s State Executive, and up to twenty five members were in danger of losing their membership over the dispute about dual membership of the ALP and the WA AIR. This caused the major controversy in the ALP’s internal struggle over removing White Australia from its platform. ALP Branches with AIR members, particularly in Victoria, but also in WA, had begun moving motions against the White Australia policy. These motions and the lobbying activities of the AIR began to worry the Federal Executive of the ALP. On a number of occasions the Federal Executive, under the influence of WA Secretary Joe Chamberlain, ruled that ALP members could not also be members of the AIRs. The National Secretary wrote to this effect to State Branches in October 1960, a general motion was passed at National Executive in July 1961, and a specific motion on 10

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130 Brawley, 'Long Hairs and Ratbags', p.207.


133 Brawley, 'Long Hairs and Ratbags', p.208.
January 1962 stated that anyone still a member of the Associations on 1 May 1962 would automatically forfeit their ALP membership because the groups were expressly opposed to a key plank in the ALP Platform, and the proper way to change such things was through internal 'constitutional means'.

Proscription on the reform groups did have some effect. Whitlam wrote:

‘Many in Labor’s Parliamentary ranks, such as Dunstan, Cairns and I, thought it ideologically intolerable and morally indefensible that a socialist party should espouse a policy of racial discrimination. We were silenced in public, however, by the threat of expulsion.’

Wheeldon and others resigned from the AIR to avoid expulsion. When the deadline passed, Chamberlain moved quickly to expel Dowding, a Party Vice President in Western Australia. Dowding’s expulsion elicited some sympathetic motions from Western Australian branches, mostly concerned with the procedural fairness of his expulsion rather than the substantive reasons for it. As it turned out, very few ALP members ever actually had their membership revoked, despite newspaper warnings of

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134 ALP National Executive minutes, 1960-1962, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.


137 John Wheeldon, letter to Joe Chamberlain advising of his resignation from the WA Association for Immigration Reform, 21 November 1962, acknowledged by Chamberlain 17th December 1962. WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.

138 Dowding’s son Peter would later become Labor Premier of WA in 1988.

139 Fremantle District Council ALP, motion “That this Council is critical of the means by which Mr Renshaw and the Rt. Rev. K. Dowding were expelled from the Australian Labor Party…,” 10 May 1962, also Midland Guildford Branch, motion of 5th February 1963, WA ALP Records, MN 300 7562/A10, WA State Library.
‘mass expulsions’. One brave soul, Sydney Fraser, a Scottish-born representative of the Hotel, Club and Caterers Union, who had previously served on the WA ALP State Executive, joined the WA AIR two days after Dowding was expelled. He did so as a principled statement against the policy and to show solidarity with Dowding, saying that ‘the White Australia Policy is essentially vicious and in fact contrary to the principles of humanitarian internationalism on which the ALP was founded’. Dowding was later readmitted, unlike the majority of those expelled during the Split over communism.

The WA ALP Branch held a committee of inquiry of its own in 1962 into the question of immigration reform. Somewhat predictably, the answer came back in June 1962 that no reform was necessary because ‘there is no hostility among any responsible quarters in Asia or Africa’ to the White Australia policy. This was despite newspaper clippings held by the WA ALP from the Straits Times of May 1962 saying that the policy was ‘an affront to Asian feeling’. Nor was the report unanimous, with a letter characterised as a ‘dissenting report’ from Ms W. Hewison, expressing her profound disagreement with


141 Sydney Fraser, 7 May 1962, Quoted in unknown newspaper clipping, ‘New bid to change ALP on Migration’, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.


143 G. Piesley, Convenor of the WA ALP Migration Reform Committee, letter to Secretary F.E. Chamberlain presenting the report of the committee, 20 June 1962, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.

the policy: ‘No Sir, it’s out of date and makes for war, so please count me as one against it.’ Even the committee chair was willing to relent somewhat, suggesting that the policy was not set in stone, and that it ‘possibly could be modified when the homogeneous Australian population builds up its numbers...A suggested target would approximate the population of the United States, say about 150 millions.’

At the same time as WA Secretary Chamberlain was writing to his local branches reminding them that membership of the AIR was an expellable offence, a request came in from the Northern Territory to support three resident ‘Malayan’ pearl divers threatened with deportation for being unemployed. The NAWU was a radical union that was to later affiliate with the Miscellaneous Workers Union under Ray Gietzelt rather than the conservative AWU, with which it was formally associated. It had started to relax its racialist exclusive policies as early as the 1920s and 1930s. It had no choice in some respects. Scottish police sergeant Jim Alexander described Darwin in 1953 as ‘a ramshackle town with a mixed population of black and White and all shades in between, Black and White Australians, Chinese, Greeks, Malayans, Filipinos and

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147 WA Union Council, letter to WA State Secretary Joe Chamberlain referring a request from the Northern Australian Workers Union for support for two deported Malayan pearl divers. 13 October 1961. WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.
various mixtures of these races all sweltered together’. The NAWU had gathered 20% of the town’s residents’ signatures on a petition against the deportation of the three men, who had gone into hiding when deportation orders were issued. The workers raised £3000 for legal fees to defend them, and a crowd of 400 marched on Government House to demand that they be allowed to stay. The union’s call for help from their southern comrades did not fall on deaf ears. Chamberlain, after writing on the 17 October 1961 to his Branches that membership of the AIR was proscribed, wrote to the NAWU on 6 November that the WA ALP was supportive of the protests against deportation.

Other ‘deportation controversies’ had to come to the attention of the ALP’s leadership in 1961, with the cases of Sue Tan and Thomas Palmer eliciting motions of support from various WA branches, to which the State Executive was sympathetic. So even as the proposal for change was being voted down in April 1961, changes around Australia

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153 F.E. Chamberlain, letter to Northern Australia Workers Union, on behalf of ALP WA State Executive, expressing support for protests against deportation of Malayan pearl divers, 6 November 1961, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562A/10, WA State Library.

154 C. Ford, Secretary Fremantle District Council, letter to WA State Executive, 17 August 1961, regarding refusal of admission to Sue Tan, and 27 April 1961 regarding Thomas Palmer, endorsed by State Executive 12 May 1961, and a reply from Minister Downer that Palmer was ‘of predominantly non-European appearance received, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7652A/10, WA State Library.
were taking place, sympathy was being openly expressed for limited, controlled non-
European immigration, and impetus was on the side of the reformers.

The 1961 Policy Statement supporting the policy but denying it had a racial basis did
not satisfy those in the Party who saw it as an embarrassment, as a conservative,
racialist policy. Three motions from Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria
regarding the term ‘White Australia’ were brought to the 1963 Federal Conference,
seking respectively to either remove it, clarify it, or have it investigated by a
committee.\textsuperscript{155} In the foreign policy debate, a unanimously supported motion
condemning South Africa’s trusteeship of South West Africa stated that ‘Conference
declares its opposition to any form of segregation or discrimination on the grounds of
colour, race or creed’.\textsuperscript{156} The following day, the WA motion to remove the term ‘White
Australia’ was debated. It included a clause that immigration policy ‘be directed to
maintaining the basic British characteristics of the Australian nation’, but it still went
down 29 votes to 6.\textsuperscript{157} Instead all three motions were discharged as a compromise
motion setting up a special committee was passed unanimously.\textsuperscript{158} The committee
consisted mostly of men who had previously shown support for keeping the intent if not
the wording of the White Australia policy, with the exception of Dunstan.\textsuperscript{159} This

\textsuperscript{155} ALP Official Report of the proceedings of the 25th Commonwealth Conference held in Perth on 29th
July 1963 and following days (Canberra: ALP, 1963), pp.24-25.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p.22.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p.24.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{159} Brawley, 'Long Hairs and Ratbags', p.208.
committee did not meet for twelve months, but its job was clear; to remove this source of contention by forging a compromise between Labor’s democratic socialist principles and the Party’s grounding as a contestant for national power and therefore a nationalist party. 160

The committee refused to hear in person from activists in the AIR.161 Undeterred, the Associations in Victoria162 and NSW wrote detailed submissions answering all the arguments for retaining the policy.163 They also sent individual committee members copies of their publication Immigration: Control or Colour Bar?164 The title summed up the movement’s position, a position that obviously had some sympathy amongst the ALP. It was that Australia could do away with ‘the colour bar’, as an out-dated form of discrimination, and replace it with control and restrictions that would ensure Australia did not change substantially. The Associations advocated restricting migrants on lower incomes, to ensure Asians did not end up working as an underclass and threatening Australian workers’ wages.165 When pressed they proposed only low numbers of

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160 Tavan, Long Slow Death of White Australia, p.155.
162 A.M. Harold, Chairman, Victorian Association for Immigration Reform, ‘Submission to ALP Committee on Migration’, 28 September 1964, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.
163 Peter Saphin, Honorary Secretary, NSW Association for Immigration Reform, letter and submission of 3 July 1964. WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.
165 Harold, ‘Submission to ALP Committee on Migration’, p.1.
potential Asian migrants, 1500 a year, a mostly arbitrary figure. They disavowed support for a quota system that had been fashionable amongst some in the immediate post-war period. They refuted the arguments of Daly and Calwell about Britain, Fiji and South Africa, examples of inter-racial strife, with Brazil and Hawaii, where different races lived together successfully. Above all they emphasised control and restriction and were solicitous toward Labor’s concerns, saying:

The Association agrees that there was at one time substance in Labor’s opposition to coloured immigration. The use of cheap labour on the goldfields and in industry in Sydney and Melbourne did appear to threaten living standards. But in 1964 controlled coloured migration need be no threat to living standards. An experienced Immigration Department and a strong legal structure, which fixes minimum wages and conditions, ensures that migration intake will not adversely affect the position of citizens already here. The continued success of the European migration scheme introduced by the Chifley Government is proof that migration does not reduce living standards. Here it should be stressed that Reform spokesmen are not urging any increase in the number of migrants coming into the country. All they urge is a more flexible attitude to the racial content.

These arguments were designed to allay the concerns of those who remained opposed to change. Calwell was chief among them and his case had been bolstered by events overseas since he first managed to hose down proposals for change in the 1940s. The fear was that Australia would experience ‘racial strife’, and Daly and Calwell would later cite riots in Notting Hill, Little Rock and Sharpeville as proof that different races could

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167 Harold, ‘Submission to ALP Committee on Migration’, p.3.

168 Ibid., p.4.

169 Ibid., p.1.
not live together in peace.\textsuperscript{170} Britain’s experience of mostly Afro-Caribbean migration was confirmation for the ALP’s older generation that racially different groups could not live side by side without the one dominating the other, resulting in hatred. Daly and Calwell thought the best way to avoid such trouble was to forestall the creation of ‘ghettoes’ by prohibiting any migration of people who could not assimilate due to their visible differences.\textsuperscript{171} They were boosted by a submission to the Committee from an otherwise unknown group calling itself the ‘Institute of International Studies’ that reinforced fears of a racial dystopia arising from non-white immigration.\textsuperscript{172} Singled out particularly was the prospect of Chinese communities that would undercut Australian small businesses and Australian workers by working longer hours for less wages and lower profits, and by doing business only with other Chinese.\textsuperscript{173}

The AIR accepted the reality of the basis of these concerns rather than refuting them as stereotypical or inapplicable. The Victorian AIR said in its submission that:

\begin{quote}
A small intake of non-Europeans would not cause friction if they satisfied the normal requirements as regards health, criminal record etc and if they were so chosen that they come to jobs at all levels in the occupational scale. It would be important that they should not concentrate in jobs at the bottom of the economic ladder.\textsuperscript{174}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{170} Dutton, \textit{One of Us?}, p.69.
\item \textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Institute of International Studies, \textit{White Australia Policy and Immigration Reform}, undated pamphlet in WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Harold, ‘Submission to ALP Committee on Migration’, p.2.
\end{itemize}
The reform arguments were framed to reassure the ALP that non-European immigration threatened neither the homogeneity of the nation nor the economic security of White Australian workers. There was one exception. Labor’s leaders and the Liberal Government had long argued that the purpose of immigration restriction was not to assert racial superiority, so Calwell’s fears of ‘miscegenation’ were not regarded as worthy of counter-argument. His views had become beyond the pale of public debate, and no-one thought it necessary to assert the biological equality of humankind. This in itself was a victory for the ‘liberal’ views enshrined in the post-war United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The Committee was not the forum for a debate on race however, its job was to come up with a solution to the problem that would preserve Calwell’s authority, preserve the essentials of a White Australia but remove the racial language that embarrassed the liberal internationalists like Whitlam and Dunstan.

The Committee’s recommendations to the Federal Executive, drafted as a resolution (see below), resulted in the 1965 Conference removing the words ‘White Australia’ from the Platform. The change was not intended to be a serious break from the past and the language of the motion ‘made it quite clear that it would not open the floodgates to Asian immigration’ as the ALP News put it in its Federal Conference report edition.175 The language was measured and the intent remained similar to the previous Conference’s motion: the maintenance of the economic, political and cultural standards and norms to which the citizens of Australia had been accustomed. So after an

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amendment from Western Australia to remove part D) was defeated, the following became the new policy, unanimously supported, and the ALP dropped the term 'maintenance of White Australia' from its official Federal Policy document for the first time since it had formulated a Federal Platform, stating:

After close examination of the existing Platform, the Committee unanimously endorsed the following recommendation:

That Clause XXI Immigration of the Platform be deleted and the following inserted:

"Convinced that increased population is vital to the future development of Australia, the Australian Labor Party will support and uphold a vigorous and expanding Immigration programme administered with sympathy, understanding and tolerance. The basis of the policy will be:

A) Australia’s national and economic security
B) The welfare and integration of all its citizens
C) The preservation of our democratic system and balanced development of our nation; and
D) The avoidance of the difficult social and economic problems which may follow from an influx of peoples having different standards of living, traditions and cultures."\(^{176}\)

In the judgement of some of those listening, Calwell, as he seconded the motion spoke ‘as if his mouth was full of ashes’.\(^{177}\) This may overstate the importance of the change to Calwell, who repeatedly claimed at the time and afterwards that the change to wording would not change the Australian culture to one which accepted a multi-racial


\(^{177}\) Don Dunstan, Felicia, the political memoirs of Don Dunstan (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1981), p.126.
society.\textsuperscript{178} Still, the culmination of efforts since 1957 resulted in a non-racially worded policy.

Determining causation in history can be a Sisyphean task, but there were some obvious contributors to the change in voting by Federal Conference members between 1961 and 1965. The formation of the Committee in 1963, and the wording crafted for the change in 1965 constituted a political fix designed to produce an outcome that everyone could accept.\textsuperscript{179} There was however some substantive change, and this had to have some causal link to the life experiences of the men and women who decided to change more than fifty years of Labor history.

During the Second World War half a million Australians joined a multinational, multi-ethnic army in Asia and Europe fighting for democracy against racialist imperialist regimes.\textsuperscript{180} The Nazi and Japanese doctrines of biological superiority were known to the men and women of the armed forces and raised questions about Australia’s own policies. During the war the Army magazine \textit{Salt} recorded on its letters page debates about whether Australia should remain ‘White’, whether this was legitimate or desirable and the arguments for and against the White Australia policy in general.\textsuperscript{181} As noted above, calls came from all quarters around this time for a change to the strict racist

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{178} Calwell, \textit{Be Just and Fear Not}, p.120.
\item \textsuperscript{179} Tavan, \textit{Long Slow Death of White Australia}, pp.155-6.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Murphy, \textit{Imagining the Fifties}, p.155.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
policy. Ward’s statement that ‘Labor’s support has never been based on any claim of racial superiority...that is a Nazi doctrine’ indicates clearly the effect the war had on opinions about White Australia.

Men affected by and involved in the war drove policy reform from 1957 to 1965. By 1965 they had become influential and powerful enough to effect change. Tom Uren, Arthur and Ray Gietzelt, Lance Barnard and of course Whitlam, had all served in the war fighting with and against Asians and people of colour. That war itself was fought over the proper control of spaces that had been colonised by Europeans based on doctrines and discourses of superiority. These men both operated within those dominant discourses and also challenged them based on their adherence to democratic socialist ideology, humanism and internationalist liberalism, and in no small part Australian nationalism. These liberal ideas were evident in the ALP Federal Conference and its Executive’s post-war motions on topics as varied as the US intervention in the Dominican Republic, the treatment of Australian Aborigines and the Party’s position on the Vietnam War. The Party was consistently orthodox in its adherence to a

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182 Johanson, “History of the White Australia Policy”, p.25; Also see Attitudes to non-European immigration, (Problems in Australian History), A.T. Yarwood, ed. (Sydney: Cassel Australia, 1968), Ch. 6, “The Current Debate”, pp.124-146.


184 ALP National Conference Foreign Policy Committee notes, Box1, Folder 10, note 8, 1961, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.
democratic socialist, liberal internationalist, pro-United Nations position. They also
displayed a liberal attitude towards Papua New Guineans, and ‘New Australians’.186

Indeed the experience that Labor had with ‘New Australians’, the post-war migrants
from non-British nations, contributed significantly to the feeling that Asian migrants
could be assimilated into the mainstream Australian British culture without endangering
the industrial, living and cultural standards that Labor wished to maintain for its working
class constituency. Gil Duthie, a Federal MP and delegate to several Federal
Conferences from Tasmania said of the 1965 changes: ‘We made history by dropping
the White Australia Policy from our platform where it had been for 57 years. In a country
with citizens from all over the world such limitations could no longer be justified.’187

It is important though to not overstate the importance given to the change for most
people in the ALP. It was seen by the adherents of the previous policy, Calwell and his
immigration spokesman Daly, as only semantic.188 As the Platform said, immigration
restriction would continue. Workers in Australia would be protected from wage
competition from Asian workers by the imposition of ‘economic’ restrictions, in other
words making it difficult for an Asian labourer to come to Australia. This was vitally

185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
187 Gil Duthie, I had 50,000 Bosses: Memoirs of a Labor Backbencher (Sydney: Angus and Robertson,
188 H.I. London, Non-White Immigration and the “White Australia” Policy (Sydney: Sydney University
important because it was assumed, and agreed by both sides of the argument, that Asians would work for less and be more tractable than unionised Australian workers.\(^{189}\) Social and cultural standards were to be maintained by the continued use of assimilationist programs, such as teaching new migrants and their children English, and using the ‘Good Neighbour’ program to expose them to mainstream Australian values, manners and the typical ‘Aussie way of life’. Due to the influx of post-war non-British migrants, both political parties were already targeting newcomers with specially produced booklets, printed in several languages.\(^{190}\) These emphasised the democratic, liberal norms of Australian politics, including references to the fight against communism, and the role of trade unions in maintaining a standard of living to which the migrant had been attracted.\(^{191}\) Political parties and trade unions would play their role in integrating migrants into the Australian system. For Labor, the whole immigration program was to be directed at nation building. As Whitlam said \textit{before} the 1965 Conference:

\begin{quote}
No socialist party should have in its platform, however qualified, a policy that is, or could be, interpreted as a racialist one. A migrant who could contribute to our community should not be barred on the ground that he is not white.\(^{192}\)
\end{quote}

This statement sums up a great deal about why and how the policy changed. In it Whitlam states the orthodox socialist humanist viewpoint that racism is abhorrent. He then goes on to make a nationalist claim- that the test for a migrant is whether he can

\(^{189}\) Institute of International Studies, ‘White Australia’ and Harold, ‘Submission to ALP Committee’, p.2.

\(^{190}\) Liberal and Labor pamphlets, ‘Welcome to New Australians’, Box 56, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.

\(^{191}\) Ibid.

contribute to ‘our community’, with its implied membership and inhered boundaries. Anti-racism and nationalism went together. It was not simply a case of enlightened reformers prevailing over racist troglodytes.

The process by which Labor dropped the term ‘White Australia’ has not been extensively debated or significantly revised. Brawley’s 1992 article is expressly written in the context of the debate about the ‘middle-classing’ of the ALP in the 1980s and 1990s, a process that began in the 1960s and supposedly contributed to the neo-liberal economic changes of the Hawke and Keating Governments.193 Some saw these changes as a betrayal of Labor principles and blamed the shift in social class background of members of the ALP’s local branches. Brawley argues that the ‘middle-classing of the ALP’, while much maligned for the move to the Right in the 1980s, had caused the ALP to drop the White Australia policy in the 1960s.194 The new middle class, post-war baby boom generation had caused a liberalisation in the policy that was worth celebrating.195

There are a number of problems with this argument. Brawley states that the ALP first debated removing ‘White Australia’ from the platform at the 1959 Federal Conference, with the first concerted effort coming at the 1961 conference.196 In fact, a motion to

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194 Ibid., p.214.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid., p.206.
remove the term was moved by the Queensland Branch at the 1957 Federal Conference in Brisbane. As it is, a 1961 date is very early to give credit to the baby boomer generation and the new radical middle class of the 1960s, the oldest of whom would be only sixteen. The fact that there is a 1957 motion, even if it was defeated, should prove fatal to Brawley's theory. It may be possible that the baby-boomers had helped create the external conditions that influenced the decision makers, although arguably 1965 was well before the youth radicalisation of the 1960s had really made an impact on the broader culture. However it is not sustainable to say that the decision to remove White Australia from the Platform was either initiated or enacted by the post-war generation.

That Brawley identifies Whitlam and Dunstan as the epitome of the 'new middle class' is also instructive. Neither were men of the baby-boomer generation. They did make an absolutely essential contribution to the removal of the policy, but Whitlam's political awakening happened as result of the Second World War, not the economic or migration boom that followed it. The men who voted on the policy were not educated in the multi-ethnic university environment that Brawley credits for the change in attitudes amongst the post-war generation. Of course people come to politics through many different avenues, some simply by their own intellectual curiosity or the authority of

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197 Agenda of the 1957 ALP Federal Conference, Box 1, Folder 3 (previously Folder 1 misfiled), item 13, page A2. Also, ALP 1957 Federal Conference Agenda, p.3. ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.


199 Brawley, 'Long Hairs and Ratbags', p.205.
ideological texts, but the formative experiences of the Labor men (and some women) who actually voted on the proposals to remove White Australia from the Party Platform were much more likely to have been during the Second World War, if not the Depression. They may have felt more secure and assured that Australia need not be homogeneously British because of the success of the non-British post-war migration boom, but the War provided the greatest example of a liberal democratic struggle for freedom in their lifetimes.

Many of the Labor leaders who made the changes were deeply involved in that conflict. Whitlam flew missions into Asia for the Royal Australian Air Force.200 His first political campaign experience was gained while stationed near an Aboriginal settlement at Gove in the Northern Territory.201 He saw first-hand racism towards an Aboriginal crewman at his airbase who was qualified and physically fit, but was not allowed to perform flight duties. Whitlam said later: ‘There was nothing a junior officer could do, but I remembered it.’202 His future deputy Prime Minister Lance Barnard fought with the multi-national, multiracial force at El Alamein.203 The leaders of the Labor Left that were consistently against the policy included Changi prisoner of war Tom Uren, and New Guinea infantrymen, Arthur and Ray Gietzelt. Uren said that in the 1960s he agreed

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200 Don Whittington, Twelfth Man?, p.172

201 Ibid.


with Whitlam on very little except ending the White Australia policy. Arthur was a leader of the Steering Committee, which was to become the NSW Socialist Left, and later became a Senator. A committed anti-racist, he adopted a non-white son in the 1960s. Ray was the dominant secretary of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union, a force for progressive policies in the labour movement from the mid-1950s. Gordon Bryant, the founder of the Aborigines Advancement League, had attained the rank of captain during his war service fighting through Indonesia. While Dunstan was too young to participate in the war he grew up in multi-ethnic Fiji and made explicit at a young age his sympathy with the Indo-Fijians and Fijians that he met and knew there. Cairns, a major driver of change in the Victorian ALP, joined the Army later in the war and served as a lecturer in economics while stationed in Morotai, in the Dutch East Indies. His opposition to racial discrimination arose from his democratic socialism and his concern with promoting world peace. He certainly wrote in such terms in 1965 when he said ‘Both our use of the phrase and our application of the policy have harmed our

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208 Button, ‘Condolence Motion on Death of Gordon Bryant’, Australian Senate Debate, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=bryant%20gordon;rec=1;resCount=Default>


relations with Asia and we cannot allow that harm to continue’.\textsuperscript{211} John Wheeldon, the Western Australian radical solicitor, born in 1929, was ‘too young for Word War II, too old for Vietnam and too scared for Korea’ but was no baby boomer.\textsuperscript{212} Of those who did not end up in Parliament, Keith Dowding probably played the greatest role in reforming Labor’s position. The Second World War was clearly a major influence on his political views. His brother was executed by the Gestapo for joining the French Resistance when he had escaped a Prisoner of War camp.\textsuperscript{213} Dowding himself served as a chaplain in New Guinea, earning the ire of the military hierarchy for giving a Japanese pilot a Christian burial, and then re-enlisting as a private to work in the Army’s Japanese language section.\textsuperscript{214} None of the decision makers, the people who moved the motions at the Federal Conference, could be described as baby-boomers, but all were old enough to have learnt the lessons of the ‘war for democracy’.

Whether the ALP had become more or less ‘middle class’ than previously by this time is also questionable. As Stuart Macintyre points out, the ALP has always included middle class men and women as members and MPs, in every Parliament since Federation.\textsuperscript{215}


\textsuperscript{212} John Faulkner, ‘Condolence motion on the death of John Murray Wheeldon’, Australian Senate Hansard, 13 June 2006, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=wheeldon%20condolences;rec=1;resCount=Default#HIT1>, viewed 31 August 2012.


\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{215} Macintyre and Faulkner, eds., \textit{True Believers}, pp.xxvii.
The influx of new middle class members only began to make an impact numerically in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{216} As Brawley concedes, the local ALP branch members held little power in the ALP’s structures.\textsuperscript{217} Their ability to make changes to policies was truncated by the numerical dominance of affiliated unions and the top-down nature of the Party where leaders had an enormous influence over the direction of the ALP.

In this sense Brawley is right in casting the fight over the White Australia policy as one between Whitlam, Dunstan, Wheeldon and Cairns, on one side, and Calwell and Daly on the other.\textsuperscript{218} The positions, such as Leader and Immigration spokesman, that these men held, made all the difference as to whether the policy was changed. A social history or structuralist approach to this question can only go so far. Cultural or structural change, shifting modes of economic production and a changing political economy, including expanding trade and engagement with Asia give a context to the decision to abandon the words ‘White Australia’ from the platform of the ALP, but they were not decisive. Whitlam becoming leader and Daly losing the job as Immigration spokesman were the key events in terms of Labor’s move to a liberal approach to immigration. Nor was the attitude to White Australia decisive in the choice of leader. Whitlam certainly did not become leader based on his attitude to the White Australia policy, although it was representative of his reforming stance on many issues, and therefore could reasonably


\textsuperscript{217} Brawley, ’Long Hairs and Ratbags’, p.206.

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., p.202.
be said to have played a contributing part in Whitlam’s rise. Ending support for White Australia was not seen at the time as something that defined the ALP above all else.

While regarded as worthy of some debate, the proposal to remove the term ‘White Australia’ from the Platform was never a top order issue. When it came up at Federal Conferences, it was always at least halfway down the agenda.\(^{219}\) The vast majority of the ALP’s constituent affiliated unions were not exercised one way or another by it. Even when they did show an interest it proved that they had not been following the debate closely. The WA Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees wrote to WA Secretary Chamberlain to ‘request that the Australian Labor Party retain the White Australia Policy’ and that ‘This request arises from the Western Australian Government’s decision to employ Japanese labour in W.A. and the comments of a Japanese visitor that Australia was “theirs”.’\(^{220}\) Chamberlain had to inform the union that the policy had been changed in August and the decision ‘remains binding until such time as it may be altered by a succeeding Conference’.\(^{221}\)

This however was a one-off. Union journals ignored the policy change. These same journals and magazines did carry other political news. The Bootmakers Union

\(^{219}\) ALP Conference Agendas 1957-1963, Box 1 ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.

\(^{220}\) S.J. Harbord, Assistant General Secretary WA Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees, to WA ALP Secretary F.E. Chamberlain, 14 October 1965, WA ALP Records, MN 300, 7562A/10, WA State Library.

\(^{221}\) F.E. Chamberlain, letter to S.J. Harbord, 5 November 1965, WA ALP Records, MN 300, 7562A/10, WA State Library.
publication *Unity* reserved a spot for the latest from the ALP in each edition.\textsuperscript{222} The *Gas Worker*, the *Health Standard*, *Australian Foundry Worker*, *Transport Worker*, *NSW Timber Worker*, *Shop Assistant*, *Sheet Metal Worker*, the *Vehicle Builders Journal*, the *Bakers Gazette*, *Textile Topics* and the *Carpenter and Joiner and Building Worker*—not one of these contained a single word about the change in ALP policy in the lead up to, or immediately after the August 1965 Federal Conference.\textsuperscript{223} Neither did the Australian Railway Workers Union publication, an otherwise radical paper that discussed racism in South Africa, equal pay for women, peace and Papua New Guinean independence, as well as condemning Liberals and Labor when they were too conservative.\textsuperscript{224} There was no divide along blue collar and white collar unions either. The Australasian Society of Engineers publication said nothing, nor did the Journalists Association’s paper.\textsuperscript{225}

Some of the union publications were small and completely silent on politics but most were not, and included articles about the NSW elections, the wider campaign for improvements to the Basic Wage, and the Liberal Government’s opposition to it, and other issues such as Vietnam and the rise of the Democratic Labor Party. The AWU’s *Australian Worker* was exceptional in its coverage of politics, being far more extensive in the topics it chronicled, but even it did not cover the change either side of the 1965

\textsuperscript{222} *Unity, Official Organ of the Australian Boot Trade Employees Federation*, Box 74, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.

\textsuperscript{223} Union journals, copies kept in Boxes 74 and 95, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.


\textsuperscript{225} *The Journalist*, Publication of the Journalists Association, Box 73, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.
Conference. In fact, of the union publications, only the Bootmakers’ *Unity* has any reference. A cartoon shows pressmen screaming ‘It’s a Fight’ and ‘They’re Fighting’ while pointing at a door open to the ALP Conference with Leader Arthur Calwell standing holding an agenda paper that reads ‘Statesmen Resolutions on - Vietnam, White Aust, Wages, Etc.’. The point of the cartoon is to mock the daily press for trying to paint Labor as divided, not to pass comment on the change in policy.

Nor did the political groups associated with the labour movement mention the change. The National Civic Council’s newspaper, the voice of the breakaway DLP, does not mention it, nor did *The Tribune*, the Communist paper. The ALP’s State Branches showed little interest. The South Australian Branch’s *Herald* ignored it, as did the Queensland ALP’s *New Age*.

The edition of the *ALP News* that reported on the proceedings of the 1965 Conference did carry it as a story, on the page two inside cover, but it was not the main story of the

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226 *Unity, Official Organ of the Australian Boot Trade Employees Federation, Vol XXV, No.3*, August 16th 1965, p.9, Box 73, ALP National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.


Conference.\textsuperscript{230} It was never going to be, because the change, while important and symbolic, was not one of major substance, but one of nuance.

ALP Branch records reflect the fact that the debate was not the result of an upswelling of support for change from the ALP branches or the affiliated unions. In NSW, for example, between 1955 and 1965, the topic motivated only a handful of suburban and regional members of the ALP to actually move resolutions against the policy. In April 1959 the Brookvale-North Curl Curl Branch, reported a motion calling for a quota for Asians to be allowed into Australia.\textsuperscript{231} In July 1960 the Condoblin Branch wrote to the ALP asking for ‘a copy of the White Australia Policy’ and ‘the Charter of the Human Rights of the League of Nations’.\textsuperscript{232} The General Secretary wrote back defending the policy as non-racial, the standard defence by then for over twenty years.\textsuperscript{233}

The South Canberra Branch moved in November 1960:

That in the Federal Platform and Objective (in the ALP (NSW Branch) Rules Book 1960-61 edn p.59) in the section on Methods, the following alteration be


\textsuperscript{231} Mr S.G. Stenning, Secretary, Brookvale North Curl Curl Branch, letter to NSW ALP Secretary, 7 April 1959, ALP NSW Branch Records, Item 1063, stamped 10 April 1959, Box MLMSS 2083/161, Mitchell Library.

\textsuperscript{232} Edward E. Short, Condoblin Branch Secretary, letter to NSW ALP, 26 July 1960, ALP NSW Branch records, Item 427, Box MLMSS 2083/161, Mitchell Library.

\textsuperscript{233} W.R. Colbourne, General Secretary NSW ALP, letter Edward E Short, Condoblin Branch Secretary, 11 August 1960, Item 425, ALP NSW Branch records, Box MLMSS 2083/161, Mitchell Library.
made in 2.: namely that the words “White Australia Policy” be omitted and the
words “Controlled Immigration” be substituted.234

Finally the Brookvale-North Curl Curl Branch asked on 12 March 1961, by way of a
resolution, ‘What is the present ALP policy on the admission of immigrants other than
European?’ 235 The reply, as previously, was that the policy was a non-racial defence of
the living standards of the existing population: ‘The maintenance of the White Australia
policy by the encouragement of the entry of suitable immigrants which shall be strongly
regulated so as not to impose any undue strain on the Australian economy or to imperil
full employment...’236

Further examples of interest or debate in NSW about the policy do not appear again
until the 1965 State Conference, when the issue had already been sent to the Federal
Executive’s special committee. Once again, the South Canberra Branch moved for the
NSW State Conference to endorse a position deleting the words ‘White Australia’ from
the Federal Platform, and substituting immigration restriction based on economic
grounds, with the added clause of ‘e) Avoid racial friction’.237 The Unanderra Branch
called for ‘controlled immigration’ to replace ‘White Australia’. The Epping West Branch,

234 Mrs H.V. Fitzhardinge, Hon Sec of the South Canberra Branch, ALP, letter to Secretary of the ALP
(NSW Branch), 16 November 1960, ALP NSW Branch records, Box MLMSS 2083/161, Item 395/73,
Mitchell Library.
235 S.G. Stenning, Brookvale Branch ALP, letter to NSW ALP, 12 March 1961, ALP NSW Branch
Records, ML MSS Box 2083/219, Item 547, Note 731, Mitchell Library.
236 W.R. Colbourne, reply to Brookvale Branch, 16 March 1961, ALP NSW Branch Records, ML MSS Box
2083/219, Item 547, Note 729, Mitchell Library.
237 ALP News, 7 June 1965, (Sydney: ALP, 1965), NSW State Conference motions list, Box 94, ALP
National Records, MS 4985, National Library of Australia.
unaware of the 1963 Federal Conference decision to form a committee, suggested that 'a committee of this Annual Conference investigate the ALP migration policy with a view to basing it on social and economic considerations and not racial considerations'. 238 The North Wollongong Branch moved that 'The words White Australia be deleted from the Federal Platform and that more appropriate wording be used and NSW delegates to Federal Conference be instructed to vote accordingly'. 239 These motions were buried amongst over 600 other motions proposed for the State Conference. 240 There are no other examples in the NSW ALP archives of motions from local branches in NSW. The paucity of documentary evidence from NSW local branches does not mean that the issue was not felt deeply or discussed in other forums, but in the NSW ALP, White Australia, and proposed changes to it, occupied only a fraction of the time and energy of the Party’s activists. Yet Labor men and women had decided by 1965 that Australian Labor nationalism was secure enough that it could incorporate people of different skin tone, if not different ‘industrial, political and cultural’ standards. 241 It was not however intended that Australia would become a multiracial, plural society, as the language of the motion made clear.

238 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
Chapter 3: White nationalism, civic liberal nationalism, Labor nationalism, Whitlam and whiteness.

Labor did not envisage nor agree to substantive change in dropping the words ‘White Australia’ because the cultural assumptions of both reformers and traditionalists were of continuing white control. It is here that newer ways of looking at the evidence reveal continuities that were previously elided. Foucauldian analysis and ‘the cultural turn’ can help reveal the ‘episteme’, the underlying cultural assumptions of the subjects as they change political and bureaucratic structures, laws and conventions. Whilst postcolonial history, particularly Said’s *Orientalism*, has been criticized for attacking epistemological certainty, for creating an irredeemable, and morally dangerous relativism, in some ways the very opposite is the case. 242 By revealing the culture and language, the symbols and semantics of the period in which our historical subjects were acting, a more scientific, even more Rankean picture emerges. We simultaneously put more distance between ourselves and the objects of study and get closer to the subjects because we know more exactly how the people of the past felt, how they expressed themselves, what their language and symbols meant, what images were brought to mind by their words. This understanding is even more important the closer we get to our own time because the subjects and their language can seem so familiar. The past, however, even if recent, is a different country, one that requires rediscovery even if the protagonists are still living.

For this thesis, the question becomes: what is the dominant discourse, the underlying mental boundaries, the epistemic sea, of Labor politics in the period 1955-1975, especially in the crucial period of change around 1965? This thesis contends that the dominant ideology in Australian society and politics more generally was liberal nationalism, a fact that some contemporary analysts recognised. For all its special rituals and languages and cultures, the labour movement was still fundamentally a part of the society from which it sprang, even as it constituted and influenced that society. The ALP was known to be a strongly nationalist party. There were differences between Labor and the conservatives, but the bounds that Labor operated in were determined by nationalist ideology and liberal political culture, a culture with common forms and language linked to the UK, USA and the other Anglophone, white settler nations. Australian nationalism, as Curran and Ward argue (amongst others) had been expressed for most of the preceding history of the nation as British race patriotism. Labor's changing position on White Australia formed part of the process of dealing with the loss of utility of an Australian British identity. In overlapping phases or periods, Labor's leaders expressed views reflecting white labour nationalism, which was superseded by a more liberal, non-racial nationalism. This, in turn, sparked a new kind of Labor nationalism which contained within it persistent and potent white Australian discourses. These periods roughly equate with the years 1965-69 when Calwell's

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influence was still strong; 1969-72 when Whitlam was ascendant but not yet in power; and 1973-75 when Labor gained Government, and perhaps exhilarated with power, dismantled the remnants of White Australia. In doing so it gave rise to a new kind of white Labor nationalism.

In August 1965, Labor removed the words ‘maintenance of White Australia’ from its platform, and on January 26 1966, Robert Menzies, Australia’s longest serving Prime Minister, resigned his post. The consequence of both events was the further relaxation of restrictions on non-white immigration by the new Holt Government.246 The changes precipitated a debate in Parliament. Immigration spokesman Daly explained Labor’s position, quoting directly from the new non-racial platform. He was at pains to reiterate that there was to be continuity, that Labor supported ‘Australia’s established policy’.247 Daly’s words were taken as indicative of Labor’s position.248 Daly continued to restate Labor’s white nationalism, saying ‘that the decision of the ALP to drop White Australia from its Platform was a change in wording only’.249 On January 20 1966, the Canberra Times reported Daly saying that the ALP ‘was against the introduction of non-European labour, even though the policy had been reworded to remove the term White


Australia’.250 Charlie Jones, Labor MP for Newcastle, maintained that the ALP’s policy ‘does not envisage a multiracial community in Australia’ because ‘people of different colours just do not mix’.251 Calwell’s attitude also remained unchanged. He said in September 1966: ‘Asians present a menace to our society. Australians are fearful of foreigners. They have xenophobia. And they do not want their rhythm of life disrupted. Because of this the established policy is still the best one.’252 Later that year as he gave the Federal Election Policy Speech on 10 November 1966 at St Kilda Town Hall, he read verbatim Labor’s new policy, but explained what it meant in practice: ‘Australians are descended, to a predominant degree, from people of English, Scotch, Irish and Welsh origin. That predominance should not be disturbed’.253

At the same time, the reformers kept up the pressure for a more liberal civic nationalism to define Labor’s attitude to immigration. Whitlam had already given a speech decrying racist policies: ‘No socialist party should have in its platform, however qualified, a policy that is, or could be, interpreted as a racist one.’254 Future leader Bill Hayden, and Cairns gave speeches in Parliament in 1966 that went further than Labor’s policy, by calling for assisted passages for Asian migrants. This induced interjections from

[250] Ibid., p.93.
[251] Ibid.
Daly, who yelled ‘This is not Labor policy!’ throughout. Straight after, Charlie Jones read Labor’s policy into Hansard to the cheers of the Government members.

These episodes show that Curran’s argument applies to Labor’s 1960s leaders Calwell and Daly, who, like Curtin, expressed the fundamental Britishness of their culture and nation. One criticism may be that such an ideology was created and maintained discursively and materially by dominant elites which necessarily left a stronger record than indifference or resistance by those who did not feel ‘British’, or that Labor men only clothed themselves in Britishness in order to win votes. Yet Calwell and Daly’s attachment to Britishness was more than just electioneering. Even when not appealing to a wider audience on the hustings, Labor men showed real attachment to Australia’s status as a British nation, and continued to do so when dominance had passed to Whitlam and the ‘new nationalists’. Chamberlain wrote in 1971 that ‘unionists want Australia to develop along British lines’ and that Australian unions ‘preferred British migrants.’

The 1969 Federal Conference made only minor changes to Labor’s immigration policy, adding to it that the spouses and children of Australian citizens should be eligible for


256 Ibid., pp.210-211.


258 F.E. Chamberlain, letter to Walter Horeb, 8 March 1971, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A9, WA State Library.
Australia citizenship. While this can be seen as further liberalisation, perhaps more revealing is the preamble. It declared that ‘The ALP is a movement having as its purpose the development of a free, independent and enlightened Australian nation within the British Commonwealth of Nations.’ Labor was transitioning from white British nationalist conceptions of the nation to a more liberal civic nationalism, but it was doing so slowly in order to maintain unity between the new nationalists and the adherents of the old racial nationalism.

Of course, implied in these statements is a belief in the Australian nation. Australia, like all nations, is a social construction. Not only is the Australian identity invented, as Richard White shows in *Inventing Australia*, but the nation itself is historically contingent, constructed discursively by politically and economically motivated groups competing for dominance. This then, was the *sine qua non* of Australian politics generally, and Labor politics specifically; that the nation exists, that those within it are equal in rights, at least theoretically. One could identify those who enjoyed equal rights in that community at least partly by their appearance, or at least the ideal member of that community could be identified that way, both before and after Labor made its policy changes. Australians knew there were ‘Others’ within the community, but that they were a minority and that their way of doing things was not going to become dominant.

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Australia was not going to adopt the tribal governmental system of the indigenous people of Northern Australia or Papua New Guinea, despite Australian control over their territory. Nor would it adopt the patriarchal religious systems of the recently arrived Mediterranean migrant communities. While fear of Papism was still occasionally expressed, mostly these things could be left unsaid, as they were unthinkable, unimaginable. The new migrants, would be citizens, not ideal citizens, but tolerated on the understanding that they would not interfere with the dominant culture, and probably be assimilated into it over time, as Bishop Burgmann had hoped. This idea helped forge a national teleology of an expanding community that would extend over time to include migrants born in Asia, despite the illiberal rumblings of nervous old fear-mongers like Calwell. As Whitlam said, the Australian nation was big enough, strong enough, liberal enough, to welcome anyone who would ‘contribute to the community’. So nationalism remained the foundation of Labor’s mission, and the 1965 and 1969 changes were the beginning of a more liberal, but still nationalist attitude to immigration and race.

Whitlam’s views on immigration were a liberal interpretation of Labor’s mission of equality which had previously relied on exclusion of Others. When he was firmly entrenched as Leader, having taken over from Calwell in late 1966, Labor’s policy was


265 Gough Whitlam on ‘Socialism’ at the Queensland Labor in Politics Convention, 10 May 1965, Curran, Power of Speech, pp.92-3.
amended to make it even clearer that race was not to determine whether someone could become an Australian. The 1971 Federal Conference changed the policy to reflect the ascendancy of the liberal view in the Party. Labor resolved that, henceforth, immigration policy should be based on ‘the avoidance of discrimination on any grounds of race or colour of skin or nationality’. The fear that further change would split the Party did not eventuate, but the change ‘did not occur without tension within the Labor Party and recrimination among its senior hierarchy’. The fact that the Party did not split over this increasingly liberalised attitude was due to Whitlam’s rising power and authority, and the hopeful expectation that Labor would finally, after a generation in the wilderness, be led by Whitlam to power. There were however consequences to this liberalised policy, as in some respects more real change occurred in 1971 than 1965.

Moving from spoken to silent racialism; thence to anti-racism; meant a change in the discourses and narratives about race and immigration from the uniquely Labor perspective. Labor's policy became Liberalised as it became liberalised. There were, during the reform debates of the 1960s, assurances that immigration of non-Europeans would be based on the same principles as previous migration by other non-Britons, that is, that they would not threaten the industrial awards, union rights and living standards

266 Brawley, 'Long Hairs and Ratbags', pp.211-212.


269 Don Whittington, 12th Man?, p.176.
of Australian workers.\textsuperscript{270} This was an acknowledgement that Labor had a legitimate argument for immigration restriction based on the prevention of economic competition from Asian migrants.\textsuperscript{271} Under a liberalised regime, there was less emphasis on the needs of Australian workers, perhaps because at the time the Australian worker was not under much threat. The national consensus was that the worker deserved his wage and that unions were legitimate.\textsuperscript{272} Union membership was very high, as were tariffs on imported goods that competed with union-made products.\textsuperscript{273} Federal and State Governments of both persuasions supported the need to protect workers’ rights through state owned enterprises and other market interventions. So labour was acknowledged as being affected by any changes, and was therefore joined, co-opted even, to the liberal discourse. Nationalist liberal arguments for restricted, but not ‘racial’ immigration became the labour movement’s arguments as well. Control, not colour bar, integration, not exclusion. All were equal, as long as you were part of the Australian polity, and the polity decided who was allowed to be in said polity.

This replaced the labour argument that Australia was a unique experiment in equality, where the worker was privileged to the same extent as his boss. The basis for the labour approach to nationalism was not just that the people of Australia were born equally of British stock, but also because the workers had pioneered and built the new

\textsuperscript{270} Harold, “Submission to ALP Committee on Migration”.

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{272} McGregor, \textit{Profile of Australia}, pp.103-104 and p.322.

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid, p.334.
land, and were entitled therefore to a fair share of its resources, an argument understood by some Asian diplomats when discussing the White Australia policy.\textsuperscript{274} As the radicals of the nineteenth century’s democratic struggles asserted, there were no prior gentleman, no natural nobility.\textsuperscript{275} All in Australia had made the land anew, built a civilisation from ‘nothing’ and all therefore had a right to participate in its civil institutions, in a formation where a ‘kind of egalitarianism and racism go together’.\textsuperscript{276} Struggles had been fought to establish these facts, but they were the agreed settlement of the 1850s democratic revolutions as well as the Federation debates, and the subsequent early Labor administrations.\textsuperscript{277}

There was a labour story of the nation, and restriction of coloured immigration was part of it. Labor built its social and economic policies, its national project upon the basis of a homogeneously white population. As Hancock said, ‘the policy of White Australia is the indispensable condition of every other Australian policy’.\textsuperscript{278} Non-whites would not only fail to assimilate into democratic culture of Australia, they were also not entitled to the benefits of Australia’s bounties because they had not worked for them. As demographic research in the 1960s showed, ‘non-British immigration is the main focus of labor

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Keith Hancock, \textit{Australia} (London: Ernest Benn, 1930; reprint Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1966), p.59.
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hostility. The differentiation between British and non-British is one of the great continuities in Australian labor history, and derives from the conception of Australia as a transplanted British society’. The land, transformed from scrub, untilled, unproductive, had been made abundant by the hand of white men. Not only had the white man made it wealthy, he had created a culture, laws, institutions, a civilisation, and then he had defended it against the land-hungry Japanese. Post-war labour justifications for racially restricted immigration had been nationalist, but illiberal. Migrants would have to earn their place in the nation- they would have to toil and pay their union dues while they did so, and then would have to assimilate. The reward was acceptance into Australia, and the physical resemblance to the previous Australians was important, because to become a New Australian required some erasing of the previous loyalty, and if your looks were too obviously non-Australian, that would make you stand out too much. One had to earn one’s place in the nation through hard work, according to Labor, and then become a loyal Australian.

Branch members and unionists put forward various labour nationalist positions both before and after the term White Australia was dropped from the Party’s Platform. People and unions in the ALP wanted immigrants to pay their dues, literally, by being obliged to

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281 Alexander Downer, Minister for Immigration, reply to F.E. Chamberlain, 12 May 1961, regarding support for Thomas Palmer, rejecting his application for citizenship, as he was ‘predominantly non-European in appearance’. WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC7265/A9, WA State Library.

join their union upon arrival. They wanted them to agree to work for and not against
democratic rights for workers, and therefore wanted to exclude ex-Nazis or right-wing
activist refugees. They argued that immigrant bosses using workers from one
background alone was unfair, and that immigrants should refrain from attacking their
standard of living by changing work practices and hours. Labor argued that
immigration should be reduced until full employment had been reached, or that small
increases in unemployment should reduce immigrant intake significantly. Varying it
was put forward that only skilled workers or only family members be allowed to come.
On a more theoretical level, Labor argued that the purpose of immigration was to assist
Australia in its mission to bring peace and prosperity to its own people and also to the
people of the world. In one way or another, these were all ideas supported, moved as
motions or written into policy by the ALP between 1945 and 1972.

283 F.E. Chamberlain, ‘Report to the British Labour Party and Trade Union Council Re UK Migrants to
Australia’, 2 February 1963, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A9, WA State Library.

284 M. Jurjevic, “War Criminals in Australia- We Accuse Menzies and the DLP”, 10 September 1963,
Yugoslav Settlers Association of Australia, Brunswick, WA. ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A9, WA
State Library.

285 Minutes of Perth Labor Women meeting condemning employment of thirty Malayan Pearl Divers on 17
pounds per week, 4 May 1962, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.

286 Ken Trainer, Secretary, WA ALP University Branch, letter to F.E. Chamberlain, 17 August 1970, that a
quota be set each year according to economic conditions. WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC7562/A10, WA
State Library.

287 F.R. Black, Secretary, Carlisle Branch, letter requesting migration be restricted to families of people
already resident in Australia, 28 June 1971, and also Ken Trainer, Secretary, WA ALP University Branch,
letter to F.E. Chamberlain, 17 August 1970, that a quota be set each year according to economic
conditions. WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC7562/A10, WA State Library.

288 ALP, Official Report of the proceedings of the 24th Commonwealth Conference, held at Canberra on
Calwell was insightful when he said in November 1961: ‘All immigration policies are illiberal, but Australia is no more illiberal in this respect than most Asian countries’. Labor, under Whitlam and his team of World War Two-era liberals, decided that being more liberal was necessary and justifiable. There were caveats naturally. Whitlam’s liberalism was integral to his nationalism. In the ALP and the Australian public no less, liberalism and nationalism had racial roots as characteristics of white settler men.

While Whitlam immediately took the removal of the words ‘White Australia’ to mean that Labor had reformed, and trumpeted the ALP’s modernising outlook, he did not envisage that the policy change would mean a large intake of Asian immigrants. At the 1972 election, the Party distributed speaker’s notes for the Leader and candidates that emphasised that Labor’s non-racial immigration policy may actually result in fewer Asian immigrants because the overall immigration intake would be cut. After the Whitlam Government was elected, the Immigration Minister Al Grassby claimed that the White Australia policy was ‘dead and buried’. The sentiments of the new Labor Government were summed up by Grassby’s declaration in Manila in April 1973:

> Wherever they were born, whatever their nationality, whatever the colour of their complexion, they should be able to become Australian citizens under just the same conditions.

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292 Dimond, The Swinging Front Door, p.31 quoting A. Jordens, Redefining Australians: Immigration, Citizenship and National Identity (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1995), Ch.9, note 11.
This was civic nationalism triumphant. The final nail in the policy’s coffin was Labor’s 1975 Racial Discrimination Act which made it illegal to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of race.\textsuperscript{293} Despite the continuities that are apparent, namely that changes to the wording of the Labor Party’s platform in 1965 did not change the underlying cultures of whiteness and Australian liberal nationalism, the Platform adjustment was certainly a change. The prevailing view in the ALP was that immigration restriction should be based on economic and cultural assimilability rather than appearance and skin colour. What is also apparent is that Labor, both in 1965 and in 1973, envisaged that the existing Australian community would continue to dominate the political and institutional life of the nation, and that the nation itself would continue essentially in its previous form.

As historians of Australian whiteness have said, it took ‘considerable discursive and legislative work to inscribe settler colonies as “white spaces”’.\textsuperscript{294} That work was not being discarded when the White Australia policy was ended, either in the ALP or by the Australian Government. The space would remain Australian, which in the minds of the people at the time meant white dominated, because to be an existing citizen of Australia meant being white. Existing Australians would continue in their dominance and the entire population control system was set up for their benefit. Citizens, new or old, would

\textsuperscript{293} Dutton, \textit{One of Us}, p.84.

conform to white performances and expectations of behaviour. This extended to their performance of work. The bargain for the labour movement was that the new non-white workers would be treated, and expected to behave, as the new non-British workers had been since the war. They would be paid white men’s wages, as determined by the white men’s state. They would adhere to the rules of white men’s representative democracy, refraining from excessive asociality or individualism, while also steering clear of Asian subservience. They were to be helped in doing so by making sure that Asians would not find themselves dominant in low paid occupations.

For Labor, ending the White Australia policy did not mean ending a White Australia. The Liberal Government’s incremental changes were not intended to change White Australia either. The Liberals were divided between those who outright opposed change, such as Menzies and W. C. Wentworth, and those who wanted to relax the policy but ‘not to the extent of changing its (Australia’s) Anglo-European basis’. David Dutton has shown how the Government in the 1960s slowly moved away from the White Australia policy as loyalty could be sought, demanded, gained and supposed of non-British migrants, and social and cultural ‘homogeneity’, a deliberately vague term, became the policy goal, rather than maintaining strict racial limits of nationality. Citizenship could be

295 Harold, “Submission to ALP Committee on Migration”, and Saphin, letter and submission of 3 July 1964 to F.E. Chamberlain, WA ALP Records, MN 300, ACC 7562/A10, WA State Library.

296 Ibid.

297 London, Non-White Immigration, pp.98.

298 Dutton, One of Us, p.67.
granted to non-whites because it was assumed that their loyalty could be garnered to
the national cause irrespective of race.

It is worth noting Leigh Boucher’s theory of ‘analytic’ and ‘empirical’ whiteness in the
nineteenth century, which accounts for the fact that colonial politicians did not often
express the term ‘white’ until about 1880.\textsuperscript{299} The implication of whiteness was apparent
in every discussion about Britishness, civilization and ‘European-ness’ versus
‘Aboriginality’ in liberal political discourse in the colony of Victoria before 1880. Yet the
word itself was rarely, if ever used. This is borne out by looking at the language of the
radical Deniehy in a similar period in NSW in reference to both Chinese and Aboriginal
people, indeed in contrast to Africans and all people of colour. Deniehy was explicitly in
favour of a pan-European nationalism in Australia, but nowhere in his speeches or
writing did he speak of his desired migrants as ‘white’.\textsuperscript{300} The disappearance of the
White Australia language from the policy of the ALP can be interpreted as a return to
the analytic whiteness of pre-1880s Australia. Australian nationalism was still to be
linked with the behaviours and ideas of whiteness but the explicit use of the term could
be retired in order to emphasise the liberality and fairness of the Australian people, its
colour-blind attitude to migrants, as long as the person could contribute to the Australian
nation.

\textsuperscript{299} Leigh Boucher, ‘Whiteness before White Australia’, paper presented at the Historicising Whiteness

\textsuperscript{300} Daniel Deniehy, ‘Editorial: Our Country’s Opportunity’ in \textit{The Goulburn Herald} 10 June 1854 , in \textit{Our
First Republicans: Lang, Harpur, Deniehy}, Eds. David Headon and Elizabeth Perkins (Melbourne: The
There was still a question of what would happen to White British, ‘Anglo’ Australians in such a national regime. If Australia was not White or British, what was it? After Britain entered the European Common Market, Australian politicians began searching for new ways to define Australian nationhood with varying degrees of success.\(^{301}\) Menzies had stuck fast to the old ways, even as the British trade and immigration door was closed.\(^{302}\) Holt and Gorton tried a few different formulas, but Whitlam most effectively and eloquently defined the new Australian nationalist project.\(^{303}\) Whitlam’s speech at Eureka in 1974 is definitive of this liberal internationalist Australian nationalism.\(^{304}\) He launched this new nationalism that was meant to replace British Race Patriotism by saying:

> There is nothing coarse or intolerant or xenophobic about this new type of nationalism. It does not mean closing our society to beneficial ideas from abroad. An authentic Australianism can readily accommodate foreign influences and foreign cultures, just as we have prospered from the post-war program of immigration. They were migrants, after all—Irish, European, American—who provided the backbone of the Eureka uprising.\(^{305}\)

This neatly sums up the way whiteness persisted in the new nationalism. Whiteness, as a social category, had persistent power, attractiveness and utility. Whitlam gave great impetus to the new nationalism at the same time as advocating abolishing finally and completely the racial selection of migrants. The two strands are related and almost

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\(^{302}\) Ibid

\(^{303}\) Ibid.


\(^{305}\) Curran, *Power of Speech*, pp.122-123.
coeval. Yet the historical antecedents of Australian nationalism were still to be found amongst white men, ‘Irish, European American’. Calwell had said in 1972 that nothing could remove the White Australia policy from the hearts of Australians, even if it had been removed from the official policies.\textsuperscript{306} So where did British race patriotism go? If it was a deeply held belief, the dominant ideology of the Australian people, as Australians, then surely it should have persisted in other ways. It may have morphed or melded into an Australian Whiteness, that reasserted itself as a discourse of belonging to the dominant national polity, a discourse of ‘the real Australian’. This discourse was given power through the new nationalism.

Historicising the previously elided natural and neutral category of whiteness ‘has illuminated the significance of whiteness as a discursive formation that has material effects, shaping the lives of both white and non-white people.’\textsuperscript{307} Furthermore, as Ghassan Hage’s \textit{White Nation} showed, whiteness uses both liberal and racist discourses to maintain its position.\textsuperscript{308} White Australian attitudes persisted in the Whitlam era and beyond. White Australia did not just persist \textit{in spite of} attempts to redefine Australian nationalism as non-racial civic nationalism. The new nationalism actually, perhaps unwittingly, reinforced white nationalism. Once whiteness was no longer a necessary prerequisite of belonging to the polity, anxiety about cultivating belonging manifested itself in attempts to define Australian-ness, both more broadly, in the sense

\textsuperscript{306} Calwell, \textit{Be Just and Fear Not}, p.120.


\textsuperscript{308} Ibid, p.vii-ix.
that colour was not definitive, but more narrowly, in that ‘Australian-ness’ came to be emphasized in language, attitudes and behaviour, and norms became more proscriptive.

The 1970s saw an explosion of Australian nationalist imagery and cultural production. Representations of Australia changed. The ABC no longer required broadcasters to speak ‘received pronunciation English’ and allowed general Australian accents to be used. The images and cultures of ‘Aussieness’ almost always utilized previously identifiable images, which happened to reflect white and traditional Australian nationalist values, that is, democratic egalitarian liberal values. With access to few other recognisable motifs or forms, the new nationalists had to use the previous century’s memes and discourses. Films like *Ned Kelly*, *Gallipoli* and *Breaker Morant* have a message of anti-authoritarian egalitarian Australian nationalism, but just about every Australian in them is white in appearance, and the films perpetuate myths that contrast settler men with either metropolitan Britons or coloured ‘Others’.

As Marx’s *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* says ‘Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please’, and each revolution drags out symbols borrowed

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from the previous one.\textsuperscript{312} Australia’s new nationalists, having dropped the ‘British’ in British Race Patriotism as Britain itself turned towards Europe, and having dropped ‘Race Patriotism’ by redefining citizenship as non-racial, had to use the symbols of the past in new ways to define themselves and the nation. Those symbols, those discourses of the past, were not intentionally racialised, quite the opposite for the young liberal nationalists who were promoting them, but being symbols adapted from a racist past, they still transmitted images and narratives of that past. It is very difficult to disrupt a discourse as strong as Australian White privilege. Whitlam’s nationalism therefore had unintended consequences, in that Australian nationalism, while meant to be lightly worn, became a slightly worn white.

Attempts to turn Australia into a civic nationalist country were tinged with anxiety that such a project would inevitably fail due to Australians’ attachment to a self-image defined by race, birth, and a distinct dialect of English.\textsuperscript{313} The very discourse of ‘We can all be Australians regardless of race’ reveals, like Foucault’s discourses of sex in the early modern period, a ‘will to knowledge’ about race and racial difference.\textsuperscript{314} The productiveness of the discourse of race is evident in the work of Keith Windschuttle, the only author of a monograph that purports to explain the White Australia policy from a


liberal conservative view.\(^\text{315}\) He displays his own anxieties when he proclaims that the White Australia policy faded from consciousness so quickly and successfully because Australians (a subset of the British race themselves) had never been racist. Australian nationalism was defined by its civic attachment to democracy and other liberal systems and symbols.\(^\text{316}\) In fact, as if to confirm the racial basis of liberality, Windschuttle maintained that no former British colony had been racially constructed ‘with the exception of South Africa after 1948’, that is once the non-British Boers had taken over.\(^\text{317}\) In Windschuttle’s view any attempt to revisit the White Australia policy’s political and social impacts is special pleading by vested interests, trying to garner sympathy and tenure by painting Australia’s past as so shameful as to require redress in the present. The policy itself was never racist, just as Labor and other politicians always said, but simply about protecting industrial standards and local culture.\(^\text{318}\) Once removed it was almost forgotten, if it were not for activist historians trying to dredge it up for political advantage. So Australian nationalist racism did not, and does not exist, Australian identity was not and is not racially based.\(^\text{319}\) In some ways Windschuttle is presciently insightful. His is the perfect example of the experience of moving inside the parameters of the discourse of Australian nationalism. In his worldview, the Australian state is legitimate and moral, and things done to protect it and help it thrive, while


\(^{317}\) Ibid.

\(^{318}\) Ibid.

troublesome in some ways, are justified due their ‘greater good’ to the Australian polity, and coming from pure motives, cannot be racist in intent, even if they were in practice. In this way, the Australian polity is not itself racialist, although for convenience it adopted racialist forms for its first six or seven decades of existence. Once the polity became a little more enlightened and secure, it could open up to migrants from anywhere and expect them to become Australians. Not picture perfect Australians, but Australians all the same, helping to develop, exploit, colonise and continue the Australian national project.
Conclusion

The slogan ‘Australia for the White man’ for decades had encapsulated the ideas of men and women in the Australian labour movement about what their role in the society was, what their relationships with others in and outside of the nation meant, and what they expected materially and socially from the world in which they lived. These self-conceptions did not change as clearly and quickly as the official policies and slogans of the ALP, which transformed from overtly racist to deliberately silent on race in the 1960s. Cultures, language and ideas of whiteness, Britishness and Australian nationhood had predominated amongst members of the ALP as they had in wider Australian society.

The ALP’s competing streams of socialist, liberal, nationalist and Catholic thought flowed over a bedrock of common cultures and language that had at their core ideals of whiteness and Australian nationality. Presupposed in those ideas were: that there were white people and non-white people both in and outside of Australia; that white people had control over the physical spaces of Australia, and that white Australian people shared a certain history and characteristics that entitled them to the resources, both material and social, of the continent and the wider world. The terms on which those resources were to be shared were often contested but it was always the case that Australia was a ‘white’ country; that the people dominant within it were white, and the resources it produced should be controlled by white people.
The removal of the White Australia policy from the ALP’s platform, seen from the perspective of analysis of discourses of whiteness, is an episode in the continuation of the liberal nationalist white project. There is of course a break from the overtly racialist past, the term ‘White Australia’ is removed from the Party’s Platform. The essential Australian white nationalist mission endures in a slightly more liberal form. Labor remained a nationalist political movement even if it was no longer a white nationalist party. Labor sought to condition the inhabitants, whether new or old, to a hierarchy of behaviours, the most privileged of which were those that adhered to an ideal that was represented by White Australians and White Australian behaviour. Immigration was to continue to be strictly controlled by the agents of the existing polity. Spaces and bodies would be surveilled, questions would be asked, character assessed, examinations undertaken, to determine whether people met the standards, the ideal, that Labor people, as white Australians, privileged.

For the ALP there were reservations and debate, but removing White Australia was not the cause of a split in the Party like the attitude to communism or conscription had been. The arguments surrounding the change emphasised the expected maintenance of ‘Australian living standards’. This narrative, of immigration being controlled to labour’s benefit as much as the rest of the nation was soon subsumed by more liberal national ideas. The ALP had adopted a liberal nationalist view, just as most of Australia had, that Australia, meaning white, democratic, liberal Australia, had control over the continent, control over the society and culture, control over the potential migrants bodies, their ability to settle here, and control over their behaviour.
Decisions on immigration would continue to be made in the interests of the imagined Australian community. Australia was not Algeria, where the whites were sent back ‘home’ after several generations in the sun. Nor was it South Africa where vulgar racist policies entrenched an illiberal minority government. It was like the USA, welcoming people of all ethnicities to live under an agreed common civic culture. Like its Asian neighbours, Australia was a successful post-colonial nation, standing on its own feet independent of its colonial protector, able to create its own polity, shaped in a fashion of its own choosing. It had shared values and a common language, with minimum standards in living conditions that grew from its racially exclusive past. It was a white country that no longer talked about race as a qualification for citizenship. However the culture of whiteness that underlay Australian identity persisted, perhaps even buoyed by the new demotic nationalism that emerged to fill the gap left when official British and white race patriotism was dropped by the governing elite.

Looking at the period when the ‘global colour line’ was erased in the ALP bears some interesting fruit. Not discussed here but worthy of examination is the interplay between the end of the policy and conceptions of Australian gender roles. Future work in this area may also better draw out the transnational links between Australian Labor and sister movements in other ‘white men’s countries’. The Australian nation continued much as it had been before the erasure: the polity was not seen as something completely different, not totally transformed. When racist policies were abandoned in South Africa, the nation began again in an entirely new form, its symbols and institutions
fundamentally changed. While decolonisation was transformative of many nations, for New Zealand, Canada and of course Australia, when immigration was reformed, white control and privilege remained. However Australian white privilege could no longer rely on overtly racist laws and practices. An effort was made to redefine the nation, based on received values, language, economic and social standards of behaviour, values previously co-located with Britishness, whiteness and European-ness. The change to the White Australia policy in the ALP shows how a more liberal nationalism emerged. With the recession of overt empirical whiteness worldwide due to the association of any racially based policy with Nazism, political labour came to the view that control over their nation could be maintained without racially exclusionary immigration policies.
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