



GLOBALISATION AND THE POLITICS OF RACE

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The 'race debate' in Australia has dominated the political landscape in recent years. Conflicts at One Nation events, major shifts in immigration and migrant re-settlement policies, and increasingly polarised public argument over the rights of indigenous people and ethnic minorities have accompanied the debate. So too has a rise in the incidence of 'hate crime', continued media distortion of 'Aboriginal issues' and the electoral appeal of a 'law and order' politics of which a major target are 'ethnic youth gangs'.

Much of the public discussion of Pauline Hanson and her supporters has centred on 'racism', and the negative consequences for the country as a whole flowing from the popularisation of attitudes and policy proposals framed in explicitly racist terms. Underpinning the 'race debate', however, are larger questions about a society which is increasingly divided economically, politically and socially. The contours of the divisions and fissures in the national social fabric are central to this paper. Specifically, it will be argued that the rise and intensity of the 'race debate' is symptomatic of deeper changes and conflicts in the core political economic relations of contemporary Australia.

Attempts to resolve the issues at the centre of the race debate must take into account the impact of the restructuring of basic institutional relationships in our society, and the struggle by competing sectoral interests to assert their own particular economic and social agendas. It is

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important in this regard to be sensitive to different *types of racism*. It can manifest itself in the form of overt racist attitudes held by individuals (e.g., 'everyday racism'), or organised groups with a serious racist agenda (e.g., white supremacy groups). It can be used as a vehicle to achieve specific political and economic ends which in themselves may not be racist (e.g., reductions in immigrant numbers). It may be the objective consequence of written materials and ideas (e.g., information on investment patterns) which were not intended by the originators to be racist. It may be linked to ruling class interests to exploit migrant labour, or working class efforts to exclude potential competition for jobs. There are, then, many different racisms. At the same time, there is nevertheless a 'unity of racism' insofar as it plays a particular role as a process of social differentiation in sustaining and reproducing the basic social relations of capitalism (see Vasta & Castles, 1996).

The aim of this paper is to explore the politics of race by considering the material basis for differing perspectives on issues such as immigration, indigenous land rights and multiculturalism. Consideration of these issues needs to acknowledge a central paradox: on the one hand, *global economic reconfiguration is being fashioned in inclusive and non-racist terms (both ideologically and materially)*; on the other hand, *the social management of economic change at the level of the nation-state increasingly manifests itself in the form of major debates over citizenship and national identity*.

The nature of this paradox is such that the 'race debate', and the practical policy and ideological responses associated with the debate, will necessarily have a number of apparently contradictory dimensions. These dimensions are, however, entirely consistent and compatible with the broad framework of restructuring characteristic of global capitalism. The paradox is only 'real' if we ignore the deeper issue of how capitalist restructuring demands both the freeing up of the movement of capital at an international level, and, simultaneously, transformation of state policy at the domestic level in order to facilitate accelerated globalisation.

Globalisation and International Trade

The foundations of the 'race debate' lie in the historical shifts which have occurred in the capitalist mode of production over the last few decades. Major changes have taken place in production processes, labour markets, investment patterns, consumption practices and in the general ideological climate of late capitalism. Greater attention to these processes is not possible here. However, the phenomenon of 'globalisation' is essential to consider if we are to understand the nature and dynamics of racism in Australia today.

There are a number of different views regarding the nature and meaning of 'globalisation', and where Australia as a country fits into the 'new world order' (see for example, Ohmae, 1996; Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Bramble, 1996). Certainly internationalisation is not a new process; it is a broad historical tendency and imperative of capitalism as a mode of production. Globalisation, in this light, can be seen as an ideology which both legitimates and helps to shape the contours of internationalisation in the contemporary period.

An important feature of the internationalisation of capital, one which is particularly relevant to the present discussion, is that strategic partnerships must be forged for business to go ahead. This involves both links between different capitalist enterprises with diverse national bases, and ties between particular businesses and different nation-states. As Bramble (1996: 51) observes:

The great majority of manufacturing corporations in the two major powers, the USA and Japan, still have the majority of their assets concentrated in their home base which is at the same time their major market for goods and services. Thus companies are required to sustain long-term relations with their home states. They also have to develop good relations with host states as strategic business alliances are created not just to tackle advantage of economies of scale, but also to get access to national markets and national political influence.

This observation is particularly important in understanding the response of Australian capitalist enterprises to globalisation, in the pursuit of their

own interests. For the internationalisation of multinational corporations (MNCs) based in Australia requires the support of the host nation trading partners. This support is, in turn, partly dependent upon the cultural and ideological climate surrounding issues such as 'race'. The Australian state has an important role to play in facilitating the entry of domestic corporations into foreign trade circles, both directly through such things as consular contacts and support, and indirectly through domestic policies which will ensure the promotion of an image of Australia that is broadly conducive to smooth trading relations with other nations.

It is part of the 'globalisation' ideology that greater levels of unrestricted international trade are essential to the national (read, private corporate) interest. The drive to engage on the world trading stage has been powered by adoption of the 'competitive advantage' economic model (see Bryan, 1995; Murray, 1996). This model is premised on the idea that there is or ought to be an international level playing-field, upon which individual corporations are to compete on the basis of best productivity, innovation, use of technology and service - all of which are linked to the low cost of labour.

Internationalisation implies two-way movement and negotiation. That is, it involves both the movement of capital and trade off-shore, and the opening up of foreign investment and trade within the domestic national sphere. Different industry sectors have been affected differently in this process. For example, the reduction in tariffs and industry protection has resulted in major job losses in areas such as chemicals, textiles and clothing manufacturing.

Free trade policies have also been linked to the commodification of a wider range of services and products which were formerly state-owned and operated for public benefit (although this is not to say that privatisation can be simply reduced to globalisation *per se*). Education, water and power are being sold as profit-making enterprises. Buying into such investments is often expensive, and in many cases has involved consortiums of Australian MNCs and overseas MNCs. In some instances, such as education, the commodity is tailored for both a domestic and an international market.

The commodification of utilities and public enterprises has, in turn, been intertwined with the implementation of competitive advantage ideologies and practices. Not only are 'uncompetitive' companies and sectors allowed or forced to close down, but the workplaces in most industries have been transformed. The adoption of policies such as Individual Workplace Contracts and Enterprise Bargaining have undercut the pay and working conditions of most workers, while ostensibly increasing the competitiveness (read, profit margins) of the enterprises. Importantly, the new industrial relations regime and climate is one which entrenches insecurity and the threat of job loss into the very structure of work performance itself. This creates the ground for major social fallout. In particular, the impact of globalisation, as expressed in the ideology of competitive advantage, is to make ordinary workers extremely vulnerable economically and psychologically.

Ideologically, 'economic rationalism' has put the stress on user-pays, individual self-interest, customer service and competitiveness. Citizen and welfare rights have become contingent upon economic status (as in contributory superannuation schemes, or as evident in differential policing of public space). Social differences in schooling or attaining paid work or wealth have been reduced to personal attributes and attitudes, a matter of individual hard work and intelligence rather than class. The role of the state has continued to be one of encouraging citizens to 'do it for themselves', albeit without the previously provided supports (as in free tertiary education), while simultaneously cracking down via law and order campaigns on those who apparently cannot.

The contemporary politics of race has to be seen in this context: the internationalisation of capital, and the social dislocations and values shifts accompanying this. As well, it is important to acknowledge the peculiarities of the Australian situation which makes aspects of 'race' politics particularly acute for business off-shore dealings. Broadly speaking, world economic trade is concentrated within the advanced capitalist countries. This, in turn, however, is being influenced by the re-positioning of trading partners into defined sectoral or geo-political blocks, as represented in the European Community, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the Association of South-east Asian Nations. In each of these trading blocks Australia presently has 'outsider' status.

The precarious trade position of Australia relative to Asia in particular, makes the 'race debate' a particularly sensitive issue for specific industries, although, on the whole, the economic crisis in Asia will have more impact on Australian economic fortunes. This is illustrated, for example, in recent media reports of a sharp decline in tourists from the Asian region, with potentially dire consequences for that industry.

The economic impetus for a peculiarly Australian form of internationalisation varies. For instance, Australian MNCs are attempting to break into markets with much larger population sizes, as in the case of China. Meanwhile, money migration from Asia is being fostered through business migration programmes and direct investment opportunities. One implication of this is that it is essential to maintain formally racially/ethnically non-discriminatory immigration criteria. Immigration has always been restrictive; however, the class-based terms of selection are now becoming sharper and more openly apparent (see below). Furthermore, investment in new projects, including those arising out of the privatisation of public enterprises, has meant a search for overseas partners, both for domestic projects and for projects in other countries.

An ostensibly non-racist social and political climate is strategically useful in making Australia appear to be a stable base for foreign investment and trade, and to facilitate the movement of domestic MNCs onto the international stage. It is also important in the selling of Australian-based services and goods to overseas buyers, both internally (e.g., education, tourism) and externally (e.g., off-shore education, minerals, agriculture).

The basic contradiction is this. On the one hand, the internationalisation of MNC activities lends itself to a standpoint which is ostensibly non-racist and non-discriminatory. Business does not need ideological and material impediments (such as exclusionary racist policies) which will make investors, exporters or clients nervous. A leading mainstream economic commentator, for example, has emphasised the strategic economic importance of states being inclusive, as welcoming any contribution, foreign or domestic, in economic development (Ohmae, 1996). Thus, Malaysia is touted by Ohmae as a prime example of a society which is successfully multiracial which, in turn, is seen to be a major key to its economic success in recent years (an argument which

ignores the tensions between the minority Chinese and ethnic Malays, and the institutionalisation of ethnic differences in that country). Simply put, racist and exclusionary policies based upon ethnic or racial identification are seen as bad for business by Ohmae and the interests he ideologically represents.

On the other hand, the potential benefits of increased involvement in international projects, both domestically and off-shore, are seen by corporate and state leaders to reside in making Australian industries and workers more competitive on a world scale. This has been accompanied by concerted efforts at the state and firm level to reduce the power of organised workers (via, for example, revamping industrial relations laws), to foster greater flexibility in workplace practices (as evidenced in the massive growth in part-time and casualised labour in recent years), and to increase profit margins through various efficiency measures (such as investing in high technology).

The consequences of such strategies, however, are a growth in and persistently high levels of unemployment, and greater insecurity for those businesses which do not have the organisational or financial power to compete successfully in the global marketplace without particular kinds of state assistance. This sort of internationalism thus contributes to an economic climate in which discontent and vulnerability is widespread. One social expression of these can be found in the 'race debate'.

The Politics of Race

The material basis for the populism of Pauline Hanson, and the growing criticism of immigration and multiculturalism, thus lies in the terrible social costs and real fears generated by economic re-structuring. The 'race debate' taps into a broad range of ideological and organisational currents, with the result that support for Hanson and her ilk is not simply reducible to a far-Right lunatic fringe. Indeed, there is certainly fertile ground upon which a racist response to economic re-structuring can be built, drawing upon the traditions and legacies of both the Right and the Left, institutionalised worker organisations and businesses - as well the

traditional strongholds of conservative thought such as country areas and the National Party.

The discourses of 'nation' and 'citizenship' have historically been important in reflecting and informing the way in which particular kinds of class and race relations have been constructed in Australia. From the early days of British invasion, settlers were imbued with a kind of 'British race patriotism' which served to mark off the Anglo-Australian from indigenous people and 'ethnic' workers (McQueen, 1986). The imperialist ideology of white racial superiority had a significant influence on the thinking and actions of 'white' workers, many of whom identified with the ethnocentric perspectives and dominant cultural patterns of British society.

The vestiges of this ideology are apparent today in the position of conservative intellectuals such as Geoffrey Blainey, through to the perspectives held by the so called 'lunar Right', which includes groups such as the League of Rights and National Action. The presumed moral and social superiority of 'white' Anglo-Australians is also apparent in commentaries which view Australian 'national culture' in exclusive Anglo-Celtic terms (e.g., to read English literature, revere cricket), but which ignore indigenous and non-Anglo migrant contributions to national cultural life.

The resonance of this perspective among some members of the dominant white-Anglo working class is due in no small part to the general dislocations they are experiencing in their lives due to job losses, declining social security and political disenfranchisement (see Castles, 1996). Furthermore, personal anxiety and insecurity have been accompanied by a sense of loss of national identity insofar as multiculturalism is perceived by some to undermine Anglo-Australian culture. As Vasta (1996: 56) points out: 'Their sense of loss is not itself racist, but it can often be expressed through racist discourse and practices'. At a cultural level, therefore, racism provides one avenue for the re-assertion of identity and status in the face of major institutional and structural changes.

Concerns over immigration have tapped into this sense of loss and threat. Here the racist strategy revolves around ideas such as Australia being

'swamped by Asians' (Hanson, 1996) to the extent that existing cultural mores and institutions will inevitably be subject to a form of 'Asianisation'. Coupled with fears that unrestricted immigration (which has never existed) leads to job losses for established Australians, the myth of Asian invasion strike a powerful chord with those who are already insecure economically and whose social worlds are generally in turmoil. The theme of protecting 'ourselves' from 'outsiders' is a form of xenophobia incorporating labour market, investment and cultural elements, and which expresses itself in the drawing up of stereotypically defined ethnic boundaries.

Another axis for the emergence of particular forms of racism is that pertaining to concerns over the environment. Major problems are apparent in the urban infrastructures of our larger cities, in areas such as sewerage, transportation, housing and public spaces. The class effects of inequality are also becoming more acute, as evidenced in the unequal spatial distributions of poverty at a neighbourhood level (Gregory & Hunter, 1995). The state of the cities and the allocation of resources in the urban environment is ultimately a political economic question. But the link between disparities in wealth and power, and environmental problems, is not always at the forefront of debates over how best to improve life for city-dwellers.

It is notable, for example, that some sections of the environmental movement have portrayed anti-immigration policies as a central plank in sustainable development at the nation-state and city planning level. Distinctions can be drawn between racist and non-racist opposition to immigration by different environmental organisations (Jupp, 1995). However, racism has accompanied some efforts to push certain environmental perspectives, as in the case of some 'deep ecology' proponents of population control (see White, 1994). The environment debate has also been seized upon for more directly racist, rather than ecological, ends. For instance, the active engagement of groups such as Australians Against Further Immigration in 'green' debates and participation at EcoPolitics conferences is strategically calculated to link far-Right racist politics to environmental concerns. Regardless of the ideological predisposition of the organisation raising the issues, migrants are often targeted as being among the major culprits in environmental

degradation (even if only in terms of numbers, rather than composition). This in turn contributes to a social and political context within which racism directed at the 'outsider' may well flourish.

Race and economic issues have long been constructed in terms of preservation of a 'national' culture and the protection of Australian business and workers from the perceived threats of overseas investment and labour migration (often excluding the British, which itself is a legacy of colonial investment patterns). It is important here to recall that economic policy was explicitly forged at the turn of the century in a way which created a racist, nationalist agenda. New Protection tariff legislation, the development of the Arbitration system and the imposition of the Immigration Restriction Act constituted a class compromise between small business, some sections of unionised 'white' workers and particular fractions of capital (i.e., industrial capital). This compromise was struck in the midst of a struggle between different capitalists over a centralised wage fixation system (i.e., the Protectionists' versus the 'Free Traders'), and a similar struggle between Queensland plantation owners and southern industrialists over the restriction of immigration (White, 1997). For workers and their unions the compromise was sold on the idea of stopping the importation of cheap labour which might undercut wages and working conditions. While many workers resisted this sort of class compromise and understanding of the issues, it did have widespread appeal. However, immigration in fact did not stop, even though the migrant population was basically restricted to 'white' Europeans.

The calls to further restrict immigration today bear a strong similarity to the calls of yesteryear. As in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and indeed the late 1940s and early 1950s, there is a marked racial flavour to the public debate. *But the debate is not simply reducible to racism per se.* That is, the critique of immigration and multiculturalism, and the calls for greater protectionism, are founded upon class-related economic fears and motivations, as much as a conscious effort to exclude people on the basis of race. Nevertheless, racist ideologies are important components of the strategic manoeuvres to secure support for alternative economic policies.

Class Interests and Political Agendas

It is essential here to acknowledge that the combination of domestic policies designed to enhance the competitive advantage of Australian business and the push for internationalisation of trade and commodity production has affected different economic sectors in different ways. Discussion of the 'winners' and 'losers' accompanying open-door globalisation strategies highlights the contradictory nature of contemporary economic re-structuring. Crucially, it provides insight into the different class agendas underpinning the particular racisms associated with the contradictions of economic transformation.

For example, the relative degree and type of reliance on state support and intervention has important implications for different sorts of capital (e.g., finance, productive, commodity capitals), and thereby different industry sectors (see Bramble, 1996). A recent survey of top business executives in Australia, for example, found that most companies (of which the majority were MNCs, that is, operating from an Australian base) are overwhelmingly committed to the 'competitive advantage' model (Murray, 1996). However, important differences exist in how different sectors view its full implementation. While the financial sector fully supports competitive advantage, members of the productive sector, especially manufacturing, were more divided, with some still maintaining a commitment to tariff protection. Different fractions of capital stand to benefit or lose depending upon the policy framework ultimately set into place by the Australian state.

The workers attached to the more vulnerable industries are likewise more likely to lose out, in the form of mass retrenchments, over and above the general pressures on workers as a whole to take pay cuts, work longer hours and endure poor working conditions. Historically, white-Anglo workers have materially benefited from the 'race dividend' insofar as ethnic minorities have been concentrated at the bottom end of the occupational structure, or virtually outside of the occupational structure in the case of indigenous people (Collins, 1988, 1996; Armstrong, 1996). There is, then, a material basis for attempts to construct a cross-class 'white consensus' which serves to sustain racially based privileges, albeit within the context of a general deterioration of working class conditions

and labour market opportunities (Macdonald, 1998). The historical antipathy of white-Anglo workers towards particular migrants at particular times (e.g., Chinese in the late 1800s, Italians in the 1950s) was based on discrepancies in pay and conditions between the different groups of workers, as well as competition for jobs. Everyday racism among ordinary workers has been fostered by the institutionalised dominance of white-Anglo culture, as well as labour market segmentation and competition.

However, solidarity between workers, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, has also been a significant feature of union activity over the last three decades. Labour struggles have been important sites for the forging of unity across diverse ethnic groups, including the dominant white-Anglo workers. Solidarity among members of particular ethnic groups can foster and sustain militancy in the context of particular strike actions. Conversely, it can also undermine wider workplace struggles when one particular group votes en bloc to return to work, contrary to the wishes of other groups of workers (see Tierney, 1996). The fight for better pay and conditions, and for job security and redundancy payouts, can provide an effective counterweight to racism within the existing workforce.

The composition of the established workforce, however, is itself a factor which may contribute to the emergence of new types of racism. For example, the immediate post-war migration experience is one which has seen the consolidation of groups such as the Greeks and Italians into the national mosaic under generally favourable economic conditions (e.g., expanding labour market opportunities). These migrant groups have settled in large numbers and concentrated geographical areas. They now extend across second and third generations, and as such are established in this country in much more secure terms economically, socially and politically than is possible for many newly arrived migrants such as the Vietnamese. The downturns in particular industries within which migrant workers have been concentrated, and the intensification of job competition generally, may lead to resistance to increased immigration intakes which threaten already diminishing labour market opportunities. The history of anti-Asian sentiment in Australia, coupled with the ethnic composition of the post-1976 immigrant intake, provide further impetus

for a racialisation of the immigration debate based upon divisions between established migrant workers, and newly arrived Asian workers.

Over and above any emergent divisions between established and newly arrived migrant groups, the division of the working class ideologically along race and ethnic lines is actively fostered through concerted campaigns which tap into the basic insecurities of ordinary white-Anglo workers. As Macdonald (1998: 13) observes:

The means are a lot of rhetoric about 'privileged minorities' versus the 'Aussie battler' (code for white worker), sensationalised stories about funding rorts by Aborigines, relentless jingoism about workers in Asia undercutting Australia's international competitiveness and a ratcheting up of the 'immigrants take our jobs' propaganda.

Globalisation has meant not only a huge growth in unemployment worldwide, but also the dismantling of the welfare apparatuses of the state. In the context of widespread cuts to health, education, welfare and transport services, it is not surprising that part of the attack on 'migrants' and 'multiculturalism' reflects concern over the allocation of state resources. Here it is essential to unpack the shifts in state revenue collection (which places ever greater tax burdens on workers) and state expenditure (which privileges private profit-making over public service). The froth and bubble of electoral politics is aimed precisely at legitimating and reshaping the ideological terrain upon which the welfare state has been constructed - and racism has no small part to play in this process.

The deterioration in workers' job opportunities and living conditions has also been framed in terms of the impact of foreign investment. Resistance to such investment cuts across the political spectrum, from the far Right to the far Left. How the issue is constructed, however, has major ramifications for the ongoing politics of race. For example, regardless of anti-racist sentiment some Left interventions on the issue have nevertheless reinforced the idea of 'white' Australia being at risk. Opposition to 'foreign' investment for instance has often centred on 'Asian' capital as the key problem (see, for example, David & Wheelwright, 1989), a position which has been remarked upon and

supported by extremist rightwing groups such as National Action (see White, 1997).

There may well be good reasons to support the development of a national strategic economic plan involving direct state intervention on an industry basis. Protection from foreign imports, and foreign take-overs, may be a central plank in such policy prescriptions. The issue at hand, however, is not so much 'protectionism' *per se*, but how protectionism is conceived and popularised (including whether it is construed as a cross-class 'nationalist' project or based upon specifically working class interests and internationalist outlook). Ideologically, the protection of industries and jobs is often portrayed by the media in terms which assert an 'Australian' (white) identity versus the threat posed by 'foreigners' (people of colour). It is this dimension of the debate over protectionism which has been seized upon by Pauline Hanson. Protectionism has accordingly been utilised as a strategic avenue for the promotion of a larger racist agenda.

A numerically significant group which is also acutely feeling the stresses and strains of economic transformation is the petty bourgeoisie - including shopkeepers and farmers, self-employed professionals, and especially those engaged in small retail and service businesses. Characteristically, petty bourgeois ideology rests upon notions of self-reliance, independence, individualism, hard work, self-sacrifice and an antagonism to both big business and organised labour. The appeal of Hanson and affinities to racist ideology in this case rests upon what has been called 'the politics of grievance' (Brett, 1997). Specifically, notions of 'special treatment' for indigenous people and newly arrived migrants are grist for the mill when it comes to those who are struggling on a day-to-day basis to keep things afloat financially. Small business support for Hanson can be interpreted as an expression of petty bourgeois concern about government support for newly arrived immigrants, and resentment against the perceived 'extra rights' of indigenous people.

The major support base for racist politics tends to be found in rural areas among farmers and pastoralists (among whom, not uncoincidentally, groups such as the League of Rights have been most active). This is due to the historical dynamics of white settlement and indigenous dispossession in the country. It is also due to the fact that many rural

areas have low levels of ethnic diversity compared to the large metropolitan urban centres, and have been less strongly influenced by progressive movements on issues relating to multiculturalism and anti-racism. It is also the regional centres and rural towns, however, which have been particularly negatively impacted on by government cuts to services and private sector rationalisations. As Boyle (1997: 16) comments:

the neo-liberal offensive has distributed unemployment and poverty unevenly. Studies show clear regional concentrations of stagnation, much of it centred on smaller towns, thus adding to the pain and insecurity of small farmers and former small farmers driven off the land...The regionalisation of unemployment and poverty tends to stir up a reactionary mood in the middle class, upper working class and retired workers in these areas. Hanson's strong support in the Gold Coast is an example.

The translation of the economic concerns of the petty bourgeoisie and vulnerable workers into agendas which may be readily aligned with racist ideologies and policies is made easier by government reluctance to embark upon significant job creation, regional development projects and industry assistance. But this reluctance to do so is, in turn, related to the current dominance of those fractions of capital fully behind the 'competitive advantage' model which stresses the benefits of an unfettered 'free' market. It also stems from a conscious decision to exchange corporate welfare for social welfare, and to shift the burden of paying for this 'welfare' to workers via the taxation system (e.g., the increase in PAYE contributions as a proportion of overall tax revenue).

It is important to recognise that the Howard government has been able to play the 'race card' in a way which has facilitated significant changes to the migrant composition, and to the level of state welfare support made available to recent arrivals. While not explicitly condoning the positions of One Nation, the Prime Minister has used the 'race debate' as a cover for enacting more restrictive immigration and welfare laws. This has been presented as merely a matter of economic expediency. In the one case, regardless of evidence concerning the economic contribution of migrants, immigration levels have been unproblematically equated with (un)employment levels and have subsequently been reduced (a position

supported by prominent ALP figures such as Premier Bob Carr of New South Wales). In the other case, re-settlement policy which restricts welfare support is consistent with economic rationalist attempts to streamline and tighten up the welfare apparatus of the state, a process which began under the previous Labor governments. Each change has important implications regarding how migrants in general are ideologically presented.

Constructing Difference

The position and role of immigrants in the class structure is a contentious issue in Australia, as it is in many European centres. Different forms of migration, and different patterns of migrant integration, have engendered very different types of social response depending upon national context (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope & Morrissey, 1990). For example, the movement of large numbers of migrants from peripheral industrial areas into the advanced capitalist countries is evident in the case of southern Europeans, Turks and North Africans moving to Western Europe, and of Mexicans moving into the United States.

The circumstances under which this migration occurs has a major influence on the politics of race in each of these regions. Thus illegal migrants moving into France or the USA, and the historical recruitment of migrants as temporary contract labour within 'guest-worker' systems, as in Western Europe and the Middle East, has enormous implications for the citizenship rights and social status of these people. The denial of basic rights as part of state policy means that immigration controls and aggressive policing of migrants, especially in periods of high unemployment, are finding popular favour in countries such as Germany and France. Additionally, a robust anti-immigration stance does not generally pose a major trade threat for these countries insofar as the major trading partners are within the European Community itself.

In Australia, however, immigration this century has generally been on a 'settler' basis, with full citizenship rights being available to migrant workers who choose to live in this country. Particularly in the post-war period the realities of a polyethnic society (constructed through a

vigorous and extensive migration programme) has ensured the development of 'multiculturalism' as official state ideology. This approach to the settlement process was designed to ensure compliance on the part of the established working class to the non-Anglo migrant intake, and to stem the departure of migrants who were unwilling to assimilate under previous policies. Its establishment was part of the process of replacing the racist 'White Australia' policy with a more inclusive immigration policy in order to bolster domestic labour and consumption markets.

The term 'multiculturalism' is used in a myriad of different ways, from simply a description for an ethnically diverse population, to public policy, through to an anti-racist strategy. As a *state ideology*, which at a practical level has involved limited expenditure on selected 'ethnic' welfare services and programmes, multiculturalism has served mainly to facilitate the integration of migrant workers into the dominant political, industrial and ideological relations of Australian capitalism. The specific features of multiculturalism have changed over time (see Jakubowicz, 1989; Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart, 1995; Vasta, 1996). Thus, the terms under which 'multiculturalism' is defined, the policies which support particular kinds of re-settlement processes, and the response of the state to specific migrant concerns (e.g., welfare, law and order) are part of an ongoing political process.

This political process is inseparable from questions of class division and class power. For example, multiculturalism as a state ideology does have a progressive role insofar as it may prevent or contain inter-ethnic and racist violence, and provide a platform for anti-racism groups and coalitions (Vasta, 1996). However, it simultaneously constructs a form of 'unity' and social cohesion based upon the denial of class struggle and entrenched economic division. The present emphasis, for example, is on toleration of cultural and linguistic diversity, rather than structural inequality and anti-racist interventions. The organisational form which it generally takes is one which privileges the upwardly mobile and the petty bourgeoisie within the migrant communities, and which undermines more militant, progressive organisations and campaigns (Jakubowicz, 1984; Kakakios & van der Velden, 1984; Tierney, 1996). It

is premised upon elite 'ethnic' community structures rather than on mass, democratic organisational forms.

Multiculturalism as an *ideal* nevertheless has a dual character, in which ethnicity is a site of struggle: 'it is simultaneously a discourse of pacification and emancipation; of control and participation; of legitimisation of the existing order and of innovation' (Vasta, 1996: 48). The fact that over 170 different cultural and national groups are now represented in the Australian social mosaic means that overt 'White Australia' discourse or policies are no longer politically acceptable or possible for mainstream parties. The composition of the population simply does not allow it, particularly in electoral terms. The existence of a polyethnic society, however, needs to be distinguished from 'multiculturalism' as a state ideology. The former describes the actual composition of the population, a pattern of migration and settlement which is shared by most of the advanced capitalist countries in the world today. The latter refers to the specific interventions of the state to reproduce the dominant social structure - in a manner which does not challenge racism as a central part of social and political life (Castles, 1996). Hence, multiculturalism as a form of 'official anti-racism' has not eliminated racism across the social institutions (such as the labour market, media, education) and there remains a large gap between policy pronouncement and the actual lived experiences of migrants (Vasta & Castles, 1996). Some groups are affected by this more than others.

For example, the recent debates over 'race' have been constructed around very specific groups - indigenous people and 'Asians' (a highly contentious and heterogeneous category). The history of invasion and intervention in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the oppressive social conditions and persistent state controls imposed upon indigenous people, and negative images of 'Aboriginality' perpetuated through the media and political discourse make indigenous people an 'easy target' for racial vilification and attack. The repudiation of the Wik decision and the undermining of the Reconciliation process is perfectly consistent with the historical and continuing colonial relationship between indigenous people and the Australian state. Furthermore, there are strong financial interests behind the attacks - in

particular the mining companies and large pastoral lease-holders - which have much to gain by dealing with the 'Aboriginal problem'.

It is important as well to acknowledge the historical relationship between the Australian state and people from Asian backgrounds. For instance, the late 1800s to the 1970s is replete with examples of the imposition of restrictive entry barriers, special residence taxes, deportations, exclusions from welfare benefits, and restrictive work opportunities, aimed particularly at the Chinese (White, 1997). Add to this, war experiences (Japan, Korea, Vietnam), and the hyperbole surrounding the threat posed by the 'Yellow Peril' (and later 'Communists') to the North, and it is easy to understand why anti-Asian racism has a certain resonance amongst some (particularly the older white-Anglo) sections of the Australian population.

In reference to Asian migrants to Australia, it is important to acknowledge that immigrants in the post-1976 period have been especially disadvantaged in the labour market, a significant proportion of whom came from Indo-China. One of the most vulnerable groups are the Vietnamese, who suffer amongst the highest rates of unemployment and who fare particularly badly in the labour market even when education, English proficiency and length of residency are held constant (Moss, 1993). The Vietnamese are also over-represented in negative media discourse on law and order issues, particularly in respect to 'gangs' and 'drugs'. The low social status and poor economic position of these migrants makes them easy targets for vilification and exclusionary rhetoric. They are seen as 'bad' for Australia, and symptomatic of the problems with recent immigration and re-settlement policies.

Nevertheless, today, the livelihoods of many who might hold racial prejudices against 'Asians' (for whatever reason) is often contingent upon inclusive economic relationships with consumers and businesses from precisely this region. Many industries and businesses rely on Asian markets both here and overseas for their products and services (e.g., tourism, retail, agriculture, mining, education). Indeed, this economic reliance is increasingly being accommodated within the 'race debate', in the form of a re-casting of the debate into ostensibly non-racist discourse.

For example, Pauline Hanson places great stress on the idea that all people in Australia should be treated 'equally'. The argument hinges upon both the promotion of the view that some people (read, indigenous people) currently get 'special treatment', and that there is a homogenous Australian culture within which no group (read, non-English speaking migrants in particular) should be allowed to receive 'special privileges' (especially via state funding) to engage in 'un-Australian' religious, cultural and social practices. The critique of official multiculturalism thus is transformed from straightforward racist attack to one which denies being racist. Egalitarian language is used in order to diffuse opposition to what are, in the end, racist aims and objectives.

The acknowledgement of the potential political losses associated with one-plank racism is also manifest in the increasing care by the One Nation movement to distinguish between different types of Asian immigrant or settler. Calls for restrictions on Asian immigration are now starting to be accompanied by the qualification that those with money or special skills should be allowed into the country. In this, the ideas of the movement very much dovetail with the Howard government's recent policy initiatives in the area.

They also begin to parallel the contribution of big capital to the race issue. The main argument of business leaders and conservative commentators on the Hanson phenomenon has been that the 'race debate' harms Australian business opportunities in the Asian region. But a further specification of what multiculturalism means for business shows that it is not solely concerned with garnering investment and trading partners, or maintaining a national reputation which might facilitate this. It is also about specifying which 'Asians' are best for business, and which are not. Just as domestic policy relating to welfare provision and citizenship rights is increasingly framed in terms of economic status, so too is immigration policy. Racism is seen as a 'bad thing' by business, the state and the media, for instance, when it is directed against valued workers who work hard and conscientiously. But a line is drawn between impoverished and unskilled immigrants who are not immediately employable, and those migrants with money and professional and technical skills. Labour productivity and investment

chances are, in effect, the ultimate arbiters of what counts under this conception of multiculturalism.

Ideologically, an implicit distinction is thus being drawn between those Asians seen in 'race' terms, and those seen predominantly in 'class' terms. Traditional working class and peasant migrants are viewed as superfluous to domestic production needs. As such, they carry with them all of the negative features of their 'race' or 'ethnic group', such as criminal dispositions, being troublemakers, holding foreign religious beliefs and so on. The hue and cry about 'ethnic youth gangs' and moral panics about 'Asian criminal syndicates' imply fundamental differences between 'us' and 'them' and reinforce the idea of threats posed by 'outsiders'. Such propaganda also serves to legitimate further cuts to programmes such as the humanitarian and family reunion schemes, and cuts in migrant re-settlement services and benefits.

Simultaneously, however, other categories of Asians are presented as ideal migrants. Business leaders and professional workers such as engineers, corporate lawyers and accountants, particularly if they have ongoing connections in South-East Asia, are welcomed with open arms. These people are not assessed on the basis of 'ethnic difference', but according to shared economic interests and ideological commitments. A racially/ethnically non-discriminatory immigration programme, without the baggage of 'cultural difference', is all that is necessary. Further to this, as Vasta (1996: 61) suggests, these highly skilled, English speaking migrants 'seem more interested in socio-economic assimilation than in cultural maintenance'. As such, they have no particular interest in multiculturalism, either with regard to specific service provision or in terms of maintaining a distinct minority identity.

Differences in perspective can also be discerned within the established Asian migrant communities themselves. For example, business leaders within these communities may be more than willing to put up with the denial of rights and benefits to newly arrived migrants who need assistance, for the sake of maintaining control and leadership positions within the community (often via government grants) or simply because they agree with government policies which emphasise market forces over public expenditure of this kind. Similarly, concerns about issues such as 'ethnic youth crime' often strike a law and order chord with those

businesspeople who may feel vulnerable to or threatened by criminal victimisation. The calls by Asian small business proprietors for stronger police action in certain neighbourhoods is not uncommon. Such strategies, however, sometimes inadvertently rebound negatively on these selfsame businesses. For the publicity surrounding a high police presence reinforces the ideas of 'dangerousness' and 'criminality'. Somewhat ironically, then, the result may be heightened public fear of certain ethnic groups, and thus a deterioration in the local business environment.

It is notable that when business and political leaders speak about their trading partners in the Asian region, they do so in ways which reinforce 'ethnicity' rather than 'class'. The idea of 'Asian values', for instance, is used to legitimate and justify continued trade, military and investment relations with nations which do not conform to the ideals of liberal democracy. This device is actively used by the business and government leaders of various Asian countries (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia), with the complicity of Australian elites. Difference is constructed and used here as a means to facilitate business internationalism. The denial of human rights and oligarchic rule in some countries is dismissed in cultural terms, for the sake of economic collaboration between the ruling elites of Australia and our South-East Asian neighbours. In class terms, the form of political power becomes relevant only when it does not allow for open access to markets, opportunities for business partnerships, relative social stability and the maintenance of a docile and flexible workforce. Presumptions about specific race and ethnic cultures are thus utilised in these circumstances as an ideological cover for particular types of class rule. The hegemony of the ruling classes in the region is constructed in and through ethnocentric discourses which best serve the interests of its business leaders.

Thus there are layers and complexities to the politics of race which have major implications for how we 'read' and interpret the various responses to the One Nation phenomenon. The apparent unanimity of opposition to Hanson from sections of the Right and the Left, from business leaders and union officials, belies important ideological differences and class

agendas. The latter are crucial in the framing of different political responses.

Conclusion

On 30 October 1996, the Prime Minister moved a motion, supported by the Leader of the Opposition, which said, among other things, that parliament 'reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect, regardless of race, colour, creed or origin'. In practice, however, neither the Liberal Party nor the Labor Party has demonstrated any significant shift away from the maintenance of existing power relations and the inequalities associated with these. Overt racist laws and policies may have been abolished, but 'racism without race' persists (see Vasta & Castles, 1996), very often under the terms expressed in this parliamentary motion.

Meanwhile, John Howard has continued to lend tacit support to the ideas of One Nation through a range of symbolic and practical measures. He has led the attacks on the critics of Pauline Hanson, as in his description of Brisbane Lord Mayor Jim Soorley as 'unintelligent, over the top and uniformed'. He has attacked 'political correctness' to the extent that it is now seen as bad form to call a racist a racist. He was silent on Hanson's book of myths and lies. He is effectively diminishing the rights of indigenous people through proposed legislative responses to the Wik decision. He has significantly altered immigration policies and undermined migrant research and services, in ways consistent with the One Nation platform.

The response of many business leaders and mainstream conservatives (such as Robert Manne formerly of *Quadrant* magazine, Paul Kelly of *The Australian* newspaper, and Gerard Henderson of the Institute of Public Affairs) has been to chastise the PM for his lack of leadership and vision on the 'race debate'. Yet the practical measures introduced by the Commonwealth government do not in fact constitute a threat to the basic economic interests of Australian business; indeed, they reaffirm many of the finer distinctions and class-based policy directions favoured by business, as discussed above. Rather, the critique has largely centred on

the inability of John Howard to protect the reputation of Australia in a period when business is attempting to step up its role as a significant player in international capitalist networks and trade relations.

In effect, the 'race debate' actually serves the interests of Australian capitalism at a wider structural level, even while superficially there is resistance to One Nation from some sections of the business community. This is because the focus on specific population groups (indigenous people and 'Asians') distracts attention away from how capitalism, as a mode of production, operates to the detriment of the majority of the population. The cutting of wages, privatisation of public institutions, decay of public services and high levels of unemployment, accomplished under the ideological umbrellas of economic rationalism and competitive advantage, have wrought havoc on many Australian workers and their communities. These are people who will *never* get the benefits of economic restructuring (nor were they intended to), and whose lives have been shattered by the process. Racism directed at certain groups of 'losers' in the new world order provides one outlet for the casualties of change - people who themselves increasingly lack control, security and power in their everyday lives.

Globalisation is about the ideological justification for and re-organisation of capitalist economic relations internationally. Translated into domestic policy, it is aimed at the social management of economic transformation through the imposition of narrow definitions of citizenship and entitlement, accompanied by the dismantling of the welfare apparatus of the state in favour of enhanced corporate welfare. These processes allow for 'difference' only within a class-based framework of discrimination and resource allocation. The construction of 'difference' at an international level in 'ethnic' terms is likewise consistent with the class interests of the corporate elite.

The missing element in the 'race debate' so far has been any real discussion of *social justice*. The political disenfranchisement of large numbers of people, and the enforced economic marginalisation and immiseration of growing layers of the population has been met with deafening silence by our political leaders. Into this void, the archetypal anti-politician, as represented in figures such as Pauline Hanson, can easily take on the mantle of the 'voice of the people'.

If racism is to be defeated, then other voices will have to be heard. But, more than this must happen for racism to lose its populist appeal. The focal point of political discourse must be critique of the (un)social values which reign supreme today, and change to the institutional structures which entrench social inequality. Social need, political empowerment and public interest are concepts which demand expression and a central place in the politics of race. Without this, the progressive agenda will continue to be dominated by reactive responses premised solely on the evils of racism. Failure to deal with the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, however, will only perpetuate an environment within which 'race' issues will flourish rather than diminish.

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