TWO CENTURIES OF RUSSIAN-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS 1807-2007

ENCOUNTERS UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

EDITED BY

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RUSSIANS IN AUSTRALIA, 1804-1920: CONVICTS, SWAGMEN AND ANZACS

Elena Govor

The pre-revolutionary Russian community in Australia belongs to some of the most controversial pages of Australian and Russian history. Boris Christa has argued that 'it was the most transient and uncharacteristic' wave of Russian migration during which the activities of political émigrés in their midst 'had the most powerful impact and made the Australian public keenly aware' of the Russian presence (Christa 1992: 94). These radicals were at the centre of Soviet and Australian scholarly research scholars for decades (see, for instance, Chernenko 1978; Fried 1980; Evans 1992). Yet post-revolutionary Russian immigrants in Australia emphatically dissociated themselves from their countrymen living in Australia, branding them 'Red Russians' and claiming that they played no role in building 'Russian Australia', a view expressed by the editors of a recent anthology (Melnikova 2004: 129-31, 287). Thus, a whole era of the Russian presence in Australia was dismissed or misrepresented due to political sympathies and stereotypes. In truth, the pre-revolutionary Russian émigrés – thousands of peasants, workers and seamen – made an important contribution to Australian nationhood and its ethnic diversity. As convicts and miners, as swagmen and navvies, as wharfies and even Anzacs, they helped build this country along with their counterparts from British, German and Italian stock.

Charles Price's groundbreaking study of the ethnic-territorial origins of Russian émigrés, made on the basis of their naturalisation records, indicates that by the turn of the 19th century there was an enormous predominance of Jews, followed by a large number

of Finns, while eastern Slavs hardly amounted to 4 per cent of all Russian-born émigrés. This picture changed dramatically in the first two decades of the 20th century with a rapid influx of ethnic Russians and other Slavs. The calculations below show that by 1909-10 the Slavs among the new arrivals were beginning to outnumber other ethnic groups among Russian immigrants, and by 1921 they had grown to account for approximately 30 per cent of the total immigration from the former Russian Empire.

Dynamics of ethnic groups from Russia

Russians	Poles	Jews	Baltic	Finns
138	223	2249	164	598
2171	571	3010	547	1360
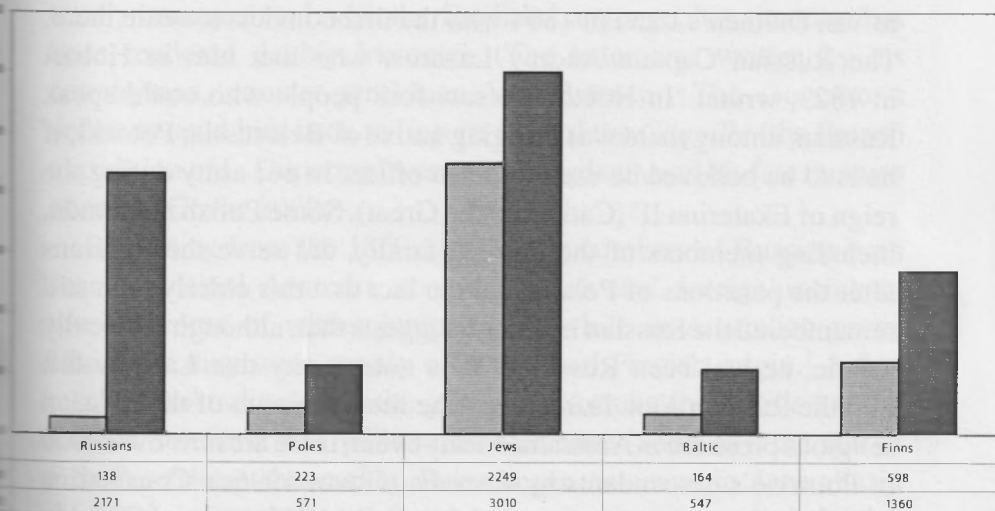
A database is now being constructed of all pre-revolutionary Russian immigrants in Australia on the basis of ship passenger lists, alien registrations, naturalisation files, enlistment records in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), ethnic names appearing in Russian newspapers published in Australia, Soviet 'Consul' Peter Simonoff's lists of Russians applying for repatriation c.1919, and other sources. This data indicates that while the number of ethnic Russians in Australia could indeed have reached around 2000 by 1921, as Price's naturalisation-based statistics suggest, the numbers in the previous years were much higher, numbering over 3000 between 1913-20. Many of these émigrés left Australia by the time of the 1921 census, died (some as AIF servicemen) or were never

naturalised (ethnic Russians, unlike other Russian-born émigrés, were prohibited from naturalisation from 1915 till the early 1920s) and thus are missing from census and naturalisation statistics.

The first Russians to reach Australia's shores were exiles convicted of crimes in the British Empire. John Brown, who testified at his trial at Old Bailey in 1785 that 'I am a Russian', was sentenced to seven years' transportation for stealing goods valued at 4s. Possibly he was pardoned as a foreigner as his name did not appear among the First Fleet's convicts.

John Potaskie[1] (1762-1824) was not so lucky and was deported to Van Diemen's Land in 1804 with the first convicts to settle there. The Russian Captain Andrey Lazarev, who met him in Hobart in 1823, wrote: 'In Hobart we saw four people who could speak Russian, among them was an aging native of Belorussia, Potocki; if he is to be believed he used to be an officer in our army during the reign of Ekaterina II' (Catherine the Great). Some Polish noblemen, including members of the Potocki family, did serve the Russians after the partitions of Poland and the fact that this elderly man still remembered the Russian language suggests that, although ethnically a Pole, he had been Russified. It is noteworthy that Lazarev left him the Russian *New Testament* – the first memento of the Russian religious presence in Australia. In any event, there are now over 2000 of Potaskie's descendants in Australia (Govor 1996c). Constantine Milcow, a horse-breaker born in Moscow in 1783, was convicted in London for stealing a piece of bacon, being a starving 'stranger in that part', and deported for seven years to Australia. Between 1816 and 1825 he was known to labour in the Sydney area. Abraham Van Brienen (1789-1844), born in Archangel (Arkhangelsk), was a merchant by trade, and an educated gentleman sentenced to transportation for forgery in 1820. His good education helped him to secure a position as a clerk in Sydney until a new conviction. In total, there were around thirty convicts in the colonies who had been born on the territory of the Russian Empire, although mostly of non-Russian ethnic origin (Govor 2000b).

Other Russians in Australia were seamen who had deserted their ships. The first ethnic Russian was a drummer from the

Blagonamerenny, P. Elizarov, who left his ship in Sydney in 1820. He was followed by several sailors from the *Otkrytie*. At least two of them were found and returned to their ship. Stanislaus Stankewitz (Stankevich) from the *Kreyser* was more successful. 'Feeling himself oppressed by the usage of his Captain', he deserted in 1823 during their call in Hobart. Soon he was arrested and imprisoned in Sydney Gaol, from where he applied to the Governor 'to be enabled to return to his native country' as 'having had all the time no other than prison allowance, of bread only, ... [he] is reduced to the last stage of indigence and distress, and being a foreigner, totally unacquainted with the English Language, his situation has been rendered doubly irksome'. (The letter was written by his countryman, convict-gentleman Van Brienen.) The Governor's orders to send him back to Europe aboard the *Coquille* (the French expedition of L. Duperrey) were not carried out, and his fate remains obscure (Govor 2000c).

Beginning from the 1860s, increasing numbers of Russian-born seamen visited Australia aboard Finnish and foreign merchant vessels, some of whom jumped ship while in Australian ports; ethnically they were mostly of Baltic and Finnish origin.[2] A few reached Australia during the gold rush. Among those killed at the Eureka Stockade was William Emmarmann (1834-54), the son of a St Petersburg shoemaker. Poles began to arrive in Australia in the 1830s, after their anti-Russian uprisings were crushed. Jewish emigration from Russia became especially numerous from the 1880s, following the waves of Jewish pogroms in the Pale of Settlement. Unlike other ethnic groups from Russia, Jewish immigrants often arrived in family groups with the intention of settling in Australia permanently.

While throughout the 19th century emigration of the eastern Slavs to Australia was rather sporadic, by the end of the first decade of the 20th century it had acquired a regular pattern.

As new arrivals in Australia, the eastern Slavs at that time can be divided into two large groups. Firstly, there were those who mostly arrived in Queensland having travelled via the Russian Far East; they were more homogenous overall, consisting predominantly of

ethnic Russians born in the central Russian provinces and Siberia. They comprised up to two-thirds of all newly arriving eastern Slavs. Secondly, more diverse both in terms of their birthplaces and their ethnic origins, there were the seamen or individual immigrants who reached Australia from the West – sometimes sailing directly from Russian ports but more often from western European, American or even South American seaports. They tended to arrive in Australia on their own, unlike the travellers from the Far East, who migrated in groups.

Travel via Siberia and the Far East was a particular feature of ethnic Russian immigration to Australia in the years preceding World War I. This choice of route was encouraged to some extent by the activities of emigration agents in far-eastern ports and the availability of regular steamship services to Australia. These Russians usually came via Harbin or Dairen and the Japanese ports of Moji or Nagasaki, from where Japanese and other steamships – the *Kumano Maru*, *Nikko Maru*, *Yawata Maru*, *Eastern*, *Empire*, and *St Albans* – sailed the Australian route. The journey from Harbin to Brisbane in third-class cost about £12.

The growth of emigration through Far Eastern ports was fuelled by various factors, such as the opening up of the Russian Empire's eastern frontier provinces in the latter part of the 19th century, which coincided with increased internal mobility within the Empire. The year 1905 brought renewed change in social and political conditions in the wake of the revolution, the end of the Russo-Japanese War and the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway. A highly fluid population had now become attracted to Russia's eastern provinces and, with the possibility of rail travel, the flow of people across Russia to the East became easier. Among those attracted to the new frontier were some families, but it was mostly young men on the lookout for adventure and new lives, escaping from their old lives for political reasons or, perhaps, trying to avoid conscription into the Russian Army.

Shipping records provide the exact date of the beginning of this mass immigration – September 1909 – when the *Nikko Maru* brought a group of twenty-four Russians to Brisbane. From then on the

migration movement assumed a regular character, 'each Japanese boat bringing to the eastern ports of this country several dozen of our countrymen', as the Russian writer and North Queensland pioneer settler, Nicholas Illin, described this process in his 'Letters from Australia' (1913). The number of arrivals steadily increased until the outbreak of war. In 1911-14 over 1000 Russians arrived in Australia each year (Govor 1996a: 232-3).

Some of those who came from western ports did not necessarily arrive in Australia by design, either. Many were discharged seamen or had jumped ship – and when they did hit land, it might be almost anywhere – unlike the travellers from the Far East who generally disembarked in Brisbane. Some were romantic youths from well-off families dreaming of adventure. For instance, George Kamishansky, a seaman, who later enlisted in the AIF, was the son of Pyotr Kamishansky, a St Petersburg court prosecutor and the governor of Viatka Province. Basil Greshner and Favst Leoshkevitch, two young sailors who left the *Gunda* in 1915, came from families with a military background. 'I must have had a streak of wanderlust in my blood from an early age', wrote Basil Greshner in his memoirs. His father, Captain Alexander Vasilyevich Greshner, the Nizhny Novgorod secret-police chief, was assassinated by the Socialist Revolutionaries in 1905. Greshner and Leoshkevitch also later became diggers (Govor 2005b: 2-4, 25-6).

These pre-war immigrants are often stereotypically labelled as 'revolutionary-émigrés' or even as 'escaped convicts' from penal servitude in Siberia rather than settlers. Indeed, many of these Russians, unlike Jews, saw themselves as emigrants rather than immigrant-settlers; in departing from Russia, they saw Australia as a good place to earn a modest fortune rather than a country of permanent settlement. As Nicholai Blinov (Blinoff) wrote of his compatriots employed on railway construction work in mid-1914: 'Among us were predominately people who simply dreamed of returning to Russia with money' (Blinov 1933: 10). It is not surprising that in the 1912-14 period, Russian departures from Australia amounted to one-third of the number of arrivals. Although not settlers, these emigrants were not political exiles

either. The number of 'professional revolutionaries' who escaped from Siberian exile or fled pending arrest would hardly be more than a couple of hundred. Others had merely become caught up in minor acts of opposition – in strikes or student activity, perhaps, or distributing leaflets – during the 1905-7 revolutionary ferment and its aftermath. At the same time some degree of political motivation coloured the reasons most emigrants had for leaving Russia. It needed only be something as non-specific as a vague desire for freedom, or a sense of dissatisfaction with social, ethnic or religious conditions in Russia. Even desertion from the Tsarist army could be seen as a political act.

Although Russian radicals were always the focus of attention of Soviet and Australian scholars, their names are mostly associated with separate groups, like the Bolsheviks centred around Artem (Theodore Sergaeff), or radicals involved in the Red Flag riots and their aftermath, such as Alexander Zuzenko, Herman Bykoff, and Peter Simonoff (see K. Windle in this volume). In reality, their political scope was much broader and so far remains unexplored. They range from Woldemar Larin, an anarchist from Carnarvon, Western Australia, who, according to a police report, 'wears hair very long and has a very wild appearance' (NAA: A1, 1921/25075), to a group of Latvian-Russian comrades-in-arms who immigrated to Australia from Nagasaki, including Rudolph Mahlit, Alexander Petroff, and Jacob Cilin or Silin (the Silin archive has recently come to light, in the possession of his relatives).

The majority of eastern Slav immigrants came from the non-professional classes – peasants, labourers and tradesmen. In Australia, almost all of them initially, regardless of social background, had little choice other than to seek labouring employment, mainly 'pick and shovel' work on railway construction, or as cane-cutters and miners.

There were some members of the Russian intelligentsia as well – better educated, professional men. Among them should be mentioned the writer and St Petersburg barrister Nicholas Illin, and the medical practitioners Alexander Platonov and Alexander Krakowsky. Krakowsky, before coming to Australia, lived in South

Africa and took part in the Boer War. Arkadie Wassilieff, an engineer from St Petersburg, 'for some time … had a very hard struggle, but conditions improved as he learned the English language' and he finally managed to return to his previous occupation, according to an Investigation Branch report (NAA: A1, 1924/19306). The arts were also represented. Alexander Yakovleff, a music hall artist and dancer, after touring Australia in 1913-14, started farming in Bankstown. His friend Haim Platkin came to Australia as an impresario on the eve of the Great War and later joined the AIF. Eugene Ossipoff, a musician and professor of singing, worked in Australia and New Zealand from 1910. Mischa Goflin, a musician stranded in Australia during the war, played in the NSW State Orchestra in Sydney.

A few refined women found refuge in Australia after, perhaps, suffering misfortunes in their private lives. Lydia Vetoshnikoff (later Whitham), who lived in Adelaide and Melbourne from 1910, entertained the Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont in Melbourne in 1912. Neila Baranoff and Violet Blom earned their living as lady companions. Catherine Tscheremissinoff worked in Australia and New Zealand as a teacher and was one of the first instructors of Russian in Melbourne. Vera Artemieff, after separating from her husband, earned her living as a music teacher in country towns of New South Wales and Victoria.

Especially remarkable was the history of a Russian woman from Viatka, Evlampia Holtze (née Mezintseva) (1848-1937). Among the first pioneers, she came to the Northern Territory in 1873 with her German husband, Maurice, and their three Russian-born children. Evlampia, who formerly belonged to the Russian nobility, now had to support the family by doing laundry. Gradually the family prospered and earned the respect of the whole community. Her husband and their son Nicholas were the founders of the Botanic Gardens in Darwin, while 'Ludmilla Creek' was named after Holtze's daughter. Their son Vladimir, known as 'Wallaby Holtze', worked for fifty years for the Overland Telegraph at Powell Creek. There is a road named after him, too (Ruediger 1988).

There were other Russian pioneers and swagmen in the Australian

outback. 'Russian Jack' (Ivan Frederick Kirkoss), a sailor from Archangel, became a hero of Australian folklore; his Herculean strength and mateship are commemorated with a monument in Halls Creek. Joseph Pacholkoff, another seaman from Archangel, landed in Sydney in 1871 from a New Zealand schooner. During the decades to come he would be 'travelling from place to place, never more than 13 months at one place'. When he applied for naturalisation in 1908, he still did not have a permanent address, beyond having camped 'near showgrounds, Bundaberg' (NAA: A1, 1908/11618). Others were deserters from Russian Naval ships. Erona Irafee Kyznecov [i.e., Erema Erofeevich Kuznetsov] from Tomsk deserted in 1888 from the *Naezdnik* in Brisbane, while a whole group of Russians escaped from the *Gromoboy* in Melbourne when it visited Australia to celebrate the establishment of the Federation in 1901. In Queensland, where Kyznecov carried his swag, he was known as 'Russian Joe'. Similarly, Alfroniza Morozoff from the *Gromoboy* changed his name to Jack Morris and worked as a bridge carpenter at Bunyip Swamp in Gippsland, Victoria. Another seaman, Joseph Hanne from Odessa, had probably also changed his name (his father Timofey was obviously an ethnic Russian), and after eight years at sea landed in Sydney in 1874. He became a prospector, mining all over Queensland, even venturing to look for gold for eighteen months on Sudest Island in the Louisiade Archipelago. George Nikiforoff engaged in mining after 1873 in the Australian north-west near Marble Bar. Vasilie Romanenko (known as Jacob Enko), from Eisk on the Azov Sea, came to Australia in 1889 after sixteen years in New Zealand and worked in Manly as a fisherman.

Valeri Borodin from St Petersburg was one of the few who embraced the Australian outback world. 'I am unknown by my native name, never having used same in Australia', he wrote, and applied for naturalisation in 1946 as William Brodie. Crippled since childhood, he inherited a fortune of £11 000 and for ten years toured the world until he landed in Australia in 1911. In his new country he prospected for opals in White Cliffs and south-western Queensland and finally moved to the Cania gold diggings near

Monto. 'Stations and mining fields too numerous to mention', he wrote, when requested to provide a list of his places of residence in Australia in 1946. When his mining efforts were unsuccessful, he resorted to trapping rabbits. But he was a vagabond with a twist. Not long before his death he registered his copyright for an album of Australian songs for which he wrote the lyrics and composed the music (NAA: A435, 1946/4/3722; A1336, 45748). His songs, full of Australian humour and slang, suggest that he took the spirit of this new land as his own. Not surprisingly, they were in demand in Brisbane concerts during World War II.

Many Russians who reached Australia in the second decade of the 20th century had a similarly unsettled lifestyle for years to come. The difference was that they often travelled and received employment in groups. Life compelled them to begin a practical acquaintance with the country immediately after arrival. The most common kind of work before the war in Queensland was navvying on railway construction sites. Blinoff remembered: 'They did not keep us long in the Emigration Bureau and offered [us] jobs. As we did not know the language almost all of us went on excavations. In Australia at that time new branch lines were being constructed and Russians worked on almost every railway under construction' (Blinov 1933: 10). Theofil Volkofsky, who came Down Under in 1909 by tossing a coin – 'Heads I go to Australia, tails I go to Canada' – experienced his full of physical difficulties. 'He could not speak a word of English and he had to take labouring jobs', his son remembers. 'He got work on the railways, just laying sleepers … It was terribly hard work, he got as many as 200 blisters on his hands' (Govor 2005b: 25, 35).

Other usual places of employment, according to Russian memoirs, were mines, cane-fields and meatworks. One of the main points of Russian criticism of conditions was the intensity of work or, as some put it, 'the sweating system', as well as the absence of labour protection, especially in the mining industry. Many Russians perished or were maimed in mining accidents. For instance, in 1913 the working conditions of Russians in the Richmond main colliery near Newcastle became the focus of attention in the press

and with state authorities. Eighteen Russians employed there were underpaid and worked in dangerous conditions. The investigation resulted only in a recommendation to translate the special rules of the colliery into Russian (New South Wales, Legislative Assembly 1913: 575-7).

Some Russians, usually with families, did aim to settle on the land; there were at least three Russian 'colonies' in Queensland on the eve of war. In 1910 the Illin family founded 'Little Siberia' on the Atherton Tablelands, which transformed tropical jungle into dairying pastures. The patriarch of the colony, Nicholas Illin, an eternal fighter for truth and justice, believed 'that Australia was a good country to bring Russians to for a colony' and, on inspecting the site, extended invitations to Russians arriving in Queensland to come north. A few months later he wrote: 'I have done all I can to make my Russian countrymen colonise in my neighbourhood and in consequence eleven lots in Gadgarra have been allotted to Russians'. His campaign was obviously successful, to judge from what his neighbour, Michael Gadaloff, wrote in 1911 to a Siberian newspaper, comparing 'Little Siberia' with another Russian colony near Roma: 'In Wallumbilla the selectors are mostly more simple people, where my selection is they are more cultured. For instance, lately eight young men have taken three selections of 160 acres each here, some of them are involuntary citizens of Australia'. (The term 'involuntary citizens' was a euphemism to mask the fact that they were political émigrés who had fled political persecution in Russia.) Not all of them stayed on their selection for a long time; some claimed a lot but never settled on it, others lost the battle with tropical 'scrub' and moved to places where it was easier to live. Only the most stout-hearted remained. They came from all walks of life – peasants, workers, soldiers, professionals, office employees – twelve men in their twenties and thirties, seven women and over a dozen children. Their heritage still lives in the local toponyms – Gadaloff Road, Lamins Hill, Strenekoff's Crater. It was here that Alexander Prokhorov, the Russian physicist and Nobel Prize winner, was born in 1916 into the family of Michel Prochroff (as spelt in Australian documents), who fled from Siberian exile to

Australia and returned to Russia after the revolution. The story of the Illins and their neighbours is told in *My Dark Brother* (Govor 2000a, ch. 'Little Siberia').

The colony in Wallumbilla, near Roma, centred around the large Klark (Gray) family. Pavel Ivanovich Klark (1864-1940) was one of the 'grandfathers' of the Russian revolutionary movement and a member of the 'People's Freedom' organisation since 1881. He was arrested several times and exiled to Siberia. After his active part in the Russian Revolution of 1905, he was sentenced to death, though the sentence was later commuted to penal servitude in Akatui (near Nerchinsk, eastern Siberia). From there he fled with his family to Japan and in 1910 landed in Australia, where they changed their name to Gray. In 1916 he wrote:

> I came to Brisbane with a large family from Russia on the 4th April, 1910. Previously I was a Commissioner for the Russian Government Railways. On arrival in Queensland I learned that this country was especially well adapted for cattle-breeding, dairying, and agriculture; therefore, I decided to go into mixed farming. Accordingly, together with my sons, I took up 2,220 acres of very good fertile land at Chadford, Wallumbilla.

His neighbour, Michael Zadorosky, a former university student (in Russia he had the name Shtetinkens) had little experience in farming, either. Together they mastered ringbarking, fencing, prickly-pear eradication and dairying. Soon other Russian families settled near them. 'My farm and the farms of some of my neighbours whose land was improved, standing in the middle of unimproved land, looked like an oasis in a desert. Queensland, undoubtedly, is the best country in the world for intending agriculturists to settle in', or so Paul Gray argued (Queensland Government... 1917: 56-9). Henri Alexis Tardent, a Swiss teacher and journalist who lived for a long time in Russia, visited the colony in 1911 and wrote a favourable report for the Queensland government about its progress. He was often instrumental in forming contacts between Australian authorities and early Russian émigrés, always defending them as law-abiding settlers.

The third group settlement of Russians was in the sugar-cane area around Cordalba, Central Queensland. Over a dozen peasant families took up farming there between 1911-14. Four men from this group enlisted in the AIF during the war, leaving their families behind. In the meanwhile, Australian authorities, disturbed by the increasing influx of Russians from the Far East arriving in Brisbane, explored the possibility of resettling them in a Russian colony in the sparsely settled Northern Territory. The Minister for External Affairs, Josiah Thomas, an enthusiast for the development of the Territory, arranged for two Russians 'to visit the Northern Territory to spy out the land, with a view to getting as many Russians as would come to settle there'. In 1911 the Russians' Christmas meeting in Brisbane elected two delegates, Leandro Illin and Konstantin Vladimirov, to inspect the Territory. Leandro, the son of Nicholas Illin, who grew up in the harsh conditions of the Patagonian (Argentine) frontier and knew English, was a good match for Vladimirov, a specialist in agriculture who had just arrived in Australia. In 1912 they explored the Territory for two months and compiled reports for the government. They concluded that the best results would come from family farming that engaged in mixed production. But it was impossible without initial government assistance. They argued that in spite of all its drawbacks, the Territory was a good country for people who 'do not need much money, but food and quiet living'. Illin appealed to the Federal government: 'Take the man who has nothing to lose, the people who starve … give them assistance and they will do well' (NAA: A3, NT1913/1156 Parts 1-3; Govor 2000a). Illin's report to the Russian community in Brisbane provoked much enthusiasm, but his and Vladimirov's proposals did not come to fruition, and instead of becoming farmers the majority of Russian émigrés remained itinerant labourers, whose radicalism grew under the influence of subsequent events.

The Christmas 1911 meeting, where the delegates to the Territory were elected, became a turning point in the destinies of the Russian community in Australia. The first Russian society in Brisbane was founded a year earlier by Lazar Kalinin, a clerk of liberal persuasions, who did not belong to any political party.

It aimed to unite the Russian community and to help the new arrivals. Incidentally, a similar benevolent society was formed in Sydney in 1909 (Grey 1915; Angars 1909). Consequently, two Russian groups with their different approaches towards the future confronted one another in Brisbane – those who wanted to use Australian conditions to fulfil the Russian peasantry's centuries-old dream of a free life in a free land, and a radical wing headed by the charismatic Bolshevik, Artem. He believed that the best way to help his compatriots – isolated, bewildered and lacking English in Australia – was by educating them in the spirit of the proletarian class struggle. Moreover, he aspired ultimately to turn them into champions of Marxist-Leninist ideas within the Australian workers' movement. He managed to seize the leadership of the organisation at this meeting in 1911 and to transform the benevolent society into the Union of Russian Emigrants, with an unambiguous socialistic direction. In December 1915 the Union adopted a new, more class-oriented name: the Union of Russian Workers.

Within six months of the Christmas coup of 1911, the Union launched a weekly in Russian, the *Echo of Australia*, which was published under Artem's editorship and naturally became an organ of propaganda for socialist ideas. The revolutionary nature of the newspaper led to its being banned by the authorities in September 1912. Its Russian-language successors – *News of the Union of Russian Workers* (November 1913-February 1916), *Worker's Life* (February 1916-December 1917) and *Knowledge and Unity* (1918-19) – shared the same fate.

The influence of the Union's ideology and the involvement of Russians in its activities increased gradually. By the end of 1916 the Union of Russian Workers had a central body and eleven local branches with nearly 500 members. While at the beginning, the political persuasions of the majority of Russian émigrés were hardly socialistic or Bolshevist, it was Artem's personality and even charisma, as well as his talent for organisation of the masses, that permitted him to change the Russians' attitudes. Already at the end of 1913, Artem approvingly remarked about the influence of the Union's leaders and their ideology: 'Nearly all of the Russians

are studying, nearly all join at once the class-conscious working movement' (Artem 1983: 126). Still, the Union's influence should not be overstated. 'While an enormous mass of the Russians was under the influence of the Union to some degree, nevertheless they remained outside its ranks', the official Union report of 1916 stated (*Rabochaya zhizn*, no.20, 1916). Characteristically, the Union was commonly referred to – both by Russians and Australians – as the Russian Association and its premises in Brisbane were known as the Russian Club. Indeed, the Russian community was a typical cross-section of Russia at the time, with idealists and pragmatists counterbalanced by a few crooks and criminals who had landed on Australian shores as well. The Brisbane police even employed a Russian detective, Alfonse Erosh, to report on the Russian-Jewish underworld (QSA: A/45328, [785M], Russians 1911-1915).

As a whole, the Russian community on the eve of conflict and during the Great War was a peculiar example of early Australian multiculturalism; its life went far beyond clichéd 'Bolshevik' propaganda and politics. Besides the Union of Russian Workers centred in Brisbane, there were several other émigré organisations with socialist or near-socialist positions – the Union of Russian Workers in Sydney, the Russian Workers' Society in Melbourne, the Section of Russian Socialists in Melbourne, the Jewish Workers' Association in Brisbane, the Ukrainian Workers' Society, and 'Dawn', the Latvian Workers' Society. They provided a framework for a variety of activities.

We may look more closely at Russian communal life during the period after 1910, using the example of Queensland, which is better-documented than other states. The majority of Russians at that time led a nomadic life, which gradually developed into a recognisable pattern. In summer they congregated in Brisbane for the Christmas break. Catching up with compatriots, gambling perhaps, and enjoying cultural and social activities organised by the Union, were the main attractions of these Brisbane reunions. In the New Year, when money ran out, they moved to the country – to build railways – and further north to cut cane. Some with a trade or business skills remained in Brisbane. Those without skills found employment at

the meatworks in Cannon Hill or on the waterfront. After earning some money the Russians returned to Brisbane – to relax and to meet their compatriots again – but their largest gatherings occurred around the Christmas festivities. Gradually an infrastructure grew up on the south bank of the Brisbane River, in the areas adjoining the Immigration Depot on Kangaroo Point, which catered for the Russians' needs. The area of Russian and Russian-Jewish settlement spread from South Brisbane, between Merivale and Stanley streets, and continued to the neighbouring suburb of Woolloongabba along Stanley Street and Logan Road, with a considerable Russian Jewish enclave, known as 'Little Jerusalem', on Deshon Street (Stedman 1959: 27). By the time of the war, Russian-born émigrés comprised the fourth largest ethnic community in Brisbane.

Half a dozen Russian boarding-houses grew up around Union headquarters, which was situated on Stanley Street (between Russell and Glenelg streets). George Kelemnuk opened his boarding-house and canteen, proudly named 'Moscow', next to the Union building. Benjamin Barcan also highlighted the advantages of this location in an advertisement for his business in 1915: 'After visiting a meeting at the Union do not forget to call in to a Russian tailor, just opposite Malinowsky's fruit-shop on Stanley St'. Rybakoff's boarding-house was also at a 'busy spot' on Russell Street, 'the third house from the Union of Russian Emigrants Club', with the proprietor boasting that it was 'always full of boarders'. (Later it moved to nearby Merivale Street.) The 'Adelaide' boarding-house, popular with Russians, and John Shouiupoff's shop, were a block to the west of the Union along Stanley Street. Two blocks to the east was Stoopachenko's boarding-house, with the 'Kiev' boarding-house further south-east in Woolloongabba. Russian communities sprang up in other towns as well. For instance, advertisements for two boarding-houses in Townsville in 1917 claimed that 'each Russian newcomer will meet his countrymen there'.

The best known boarding-house, however, the real centre of Russian life in Brisbane, was the Stepanoffs' house in Merivale Street, two blocks away from Union headquarters. It also acted as a poste restante for itinerant Russians: 'c/o Mrs Stepanoff' was the

address they usually gave to officials. The Stepanoff family came from Skopin, near Riazan in Central Russia. Michael Stepanoff (1867-1923) was an engineer who, according to his granddaughter Tania Grasbon, 'believed in the struggle of the worker, he believed ... in the Marxist way, ... in the equality of people. He brought up his children in that tradition'. By the early 20th century his large family had settled in Harbin but in 1911, after their eldest son Anatoly became involved in the political struggle and fled to Australia, the family followed him. Like most of his countrymen, Michael had no option but to work for a while on railway construction but found it too hard. So, in due course, he and his wife Anastasia opened a boarding-house for their countrymen in Merivale Street (Govor 2005b: 33; NAA: A659, 1940/1/6709). While Anatoly became actively involved in the Russian Association's activities, their second son, Nicholas, joined the AIF.

Russian and Jewish businesses grew up nearby. A Russian family with the English name of Douglas opened a 'Russian' fruit and grocery shop on the corner of Melbourne and Hope streets and supplemented their income with several boarders. Stephen Dimbisky's provision shop was on Stanley Street. Panteleimon Brovkoff offered his skills as a carpenter, Nicholas Shlensky mended Russian boots in the premises of his Victoria boarding-house on Albert Street, while Efim Crafti, a former political prisoner, had a well-established furniture business in the 'Coupon' shop at the Fiveways, Woolloongabba. Crafti also sold tickets on steamboats returning to Russia and acted as an interpreter. Another go-between was the Chehovski family. Joseph Chehovski, educated in America, made translations and acted as a real estate agent and adviser in legal issues. His wife grew up in the Far East, where her father worked on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Then her family moved to Fiji to cut cane and finally they settled in America, where she was trained as a nurse in an American family, changing her name from Tania to Emma. They spoke English at home, but she did not forget her Russian and helped her husband to run a shop popular with Russian customers, and acted as an intermediary for Russian women when they needed to see a doctor or had some other problems

(Govor 2005a: 24-36). In general, the role of women in this early Russian adjustment to Brisbane business life was very important. By running boarding-houses or shops, or working as domestic help, they provided a stable income while their husbands were engaged in politics or searched for a job. They all had children to raise as well. For instance, Anastasia Stepanoff had six children and Emma Chehovski – three youngsters.

The Russian presence was so noticeable by 1915 that many local businesses in the South Brisbane – Woolloongabba area started catering especially for their Russian customers. For instance, Signal Cash Store on Logan Road, Woolloongabba, advertised delivery of 'Fresh herring from Riga', and stocked 'especially for Russian customers sunflower oil, bay leaf and pork lard'. Other businesses – chemists, dentists, hairdressers, jewellers, photography and hardware stores, etcetera – employed a Russian-speaking shop assistant. Thus, Russians from all over Queensland could send their requests to the chemist in Russian, for example, and have the necessary medicine despatched to them. Similarly Joseph Mirgorodsky, the printer of the first Russian newspaper, also had a bookshop that sold Russian-English dictionaries, which were delivered to railway construction sites. A few bookshops ordered Russian books on demand and had in stock Russian gramophone records.[3]

The good wages that many Russians earned on labouring jobs allowed them to provide financial support for Union initiatives. The plan to have its own premises, mulled over by the Union since 1913, eventuated in 1915 with rooms on Stanley Street. They provided a place for weekly meetings and lectures as well as for the growing library, which numbered 1000 volumes by 1916. Besides books, many of which were donated by the Russians or bought overseas, the library subscribed to a number of Russian periodicals, published a catalogue and mailed materials on demand to Russians employed outside Brisbane. Russian libraries were established also in Melbourne, Sydney, Ipswich, Cairns, Port Pirie, Broken Hill and other places.

Russian newspapers published in Australia, in spite of their obvious pro-socialist tendencies, were instrumental in uniting the

community. They acquainted Russians with the local workers' movement and international affairs. They also provided a space for correspondence from Russians all over Australia, for debates on different issues like conscription, and even for poetry. At least one-third of available newspaper space was devoted to advertisements concerning social meetings, parties, and picnics, as well as to businesses providing services for local Russians.

The Union had a theatrical committee which organised performances for the Russians during their Christmas gatherings. The Jewish Workers' Association produced also several Russian-language plays as part of the holiday entertainment. Sometimes Russian and Jewish socialists clubbed together to raise money and to provide entertainment. Thus in 1915 they jointly organised a masked ball with prizes for the best 'ideological' costume. Russian revolutionary songs were also in demand, but it would be unjust to portray such parties as purely ideological in tone. Above all, it was about socialising and having fun. Australian newspaper reports described in detail such exotic Russian entertainment as 'balalaika concerts', while V. Nasedkin remarked of those years that 'to marry, especially after the perfect evenings organized by the Russian colony, was not in the least difficult as the [Australian] girls dreamt of Russian dances and songs'. Russians in Melbourne organised a Musical Circle and Balalaika Orchestra, while Christmas parties were held in other towns where Russians congregated as well. For instance, Russians in Mount Morgan organised in 1915 'a comradely party with choir, music and dances' (Stedman 1959: 26; Nasedkin 1933: 54).

The Union was instrumental in organising a Russian school in Australia, which dates back to 1912 when evening classes were opened under its auspices (*Ekho Avstralii*, no 9, 1912). The classes did not last long, though. In 1915-17 several attempts were made by Ekaterina Gray and Eugenia Modrak, educated Russian women, to provide classes for Russian children in South Brisbane. On the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution, a Russian calling himself 'Az' appealed to the Russian community to support the efforts of the Union to organise a school for children, with a view to their eventual

return to a free Russian Republic (*Rabochaya zhizn*, no. 83, 1917). The school was finally established in September 1919 by George Naimooshin and Paul Gray (Klark) who held classes twice a week at the Alliance Hall in Woolloongabba for around fifty children. In the application for a permit, it was stressed that 'neither Religion or [sic] Politics will be introduced into the matter' (Advertisements in Russian newspapers; QSA: A/45328, [785M]).

In the absence of a Russian Orthodox church, the Union occasionally took its place as civil celebrant of marriages. 'We took vows before the Russian Association', one of the Russian women, whose partner had run away, testified to police. A dissident Russian priest, Nicholas Manowitch (1872-1925), landed in Australia in 1909 amidst this religious vacuum. Being a socialist, he had earlier fled Russia and gone to Canada, where he was ordained in the Orthodox priesthood by a bishop, but by a 'wrong' bishop, that is, one unrecognised by the official Russian Orthodox Church. From Canada he went to Dunedin in New Zealand, where he started up an Orthodox church, but was soon discovered and expelled. The Russian émigrés in Australia, disenchanted with state-supported Orthodoxy and searching for new spiritual ways, provided fertile soil for him. He travelled all over Australia visiting Russian communities, before settling in Brisbane and beginning weekly services for Russians in St Mary's Church at Kangaroo Point. Meanwhile the Criminal Investigation Branch received information that the Russian Orthodox Church considered him to be an impostor. What happened then followed the usual methods of the police, be it in Russia or in Australia: he was forced to inform on the activities of the Russian radicals to avoid disclosure. In 1916 a 'proper' priest, Iakov Korchinsky, visited Australia to combat Manowitch's influence. As for Russian Jews in Brisbane, feeling themselves alien among English Jewry, they organised their own Deshon Street Synagogue. (Govor 1997b, 1998a; Suvorov 1998; Stedman 1959).

The climax of Russian immigration to Australia coincided with the outbreak of World War I. At least a quarter of all male Russian

immigrants in Australia, a total of around 1000 men, joined the AIF. There were more servicemen in the AIF from Russia than from any other non-Anglo-Celtic nation. Russian Slavs among them amounted to nearly one-third of the total, with an equal proportion of Finns. One-quarter were Baltic peoples and 13 per cent Jewish. At one stage there were even plans to establish a Russian unit within the AIF, and although this plan did not eventuate, each battalion had between half a dozen and a score of Russian-born servicemen.

The presence of the Russian Anzacs in the AIF remained practically unknown until research was undertaken for the book *Russian Anzacs in Australian History*. It would be tempting to suppose that this mass Russian enlistment in the AIF, a volunteer army, might be explained by the Russians' patriotic feelings towards their adopted country. That would mean, if true, having to reassess the traditional view of these early Russian immigrants as 'radicals'.

In reality, the causes of Russian enlistment were diverse – as diverse as the 'Russians' themselves – and feelings of duty towards Australia were not uncommon among them, notwithstanding the influence of the radicals opposing enlistment. For instance, William Averkoff, who came to Australia with his parents at the age of twelve, added two years to his real age of eighteen years to enlist, and was killed in Belgium. The sons of several other Russians proudly remember their fathers' commitment to Australia, too. 'When World War I broke out', Justin Gooliaeff's son George relates, 'he decided to join the 1st AIF: his idea was that if a country was worth living in it was worth fighting for' (Govor 2005b: 69). Nevertheless, the majority of Russians enlisted for pragmatic reasons; seamen stranded in Australia after the outbreak of war joined out of necessity. This happened, for instance, with Basil Greshner and Favst Leoshkevitch after they jumped ship in Geelong. The pressure of the Russian Consulate also influenced enlistments of Russians in Australia (see Yuri Aksenov and Alexander Massov in this volume).

Australia was just as keen to get the Russians to join up as were

consular officials. In October 1915, the Australian Department of External Affairs decided, as a measure to compel the Russians to join the army, that no Russian aged between eighteen and fifty would be granted naturalisation. This denial of naturalisation significantly affected Russian immigrants: they would not, for instance, be able to buy real estate or receive freehold rights over farmland that they themselves had improved. More immediately, it had the effect of fostering increased suspicion of them amongst some Australians as non-naturalised aliens. Under the Alien Registration Act introduced in October 1916, all aliens, including Russians, had to register with the police and report to a police station whenever they changed their place of abode; failure to do so would result in stiff fines. Initiatives came from other quarters, too. In April 1916 Russian miners employed by the Mount Morgan Mining Company complained that, 'a number of Russians who could not produce passports were discharged and told that they have to enlist ... Our boss is distributing a letter with [the] Russian Standart [flag] on [it]. This letter is demanding us to enlist' (NAA: A1, 1915/11795). Technically, such victimisation was illegal, but in practice Russians were finding it harder and harder to get any employment.

Thus, although formally the Russians were never compelled to enlist in the AIF, they found themselves in a desperate position by 1916: 'enlist or starve'. A Russian's letter to *Worker's Life* provides a snapshot of their ordeals: 'Those who have been to Mt Morgan know that here, instead of work, you get an offer to enlist. Waiting for a job for several days, a man could spend his last shilling and, still no nearer getting a job, would decide to enlist to end his hunger. That's probably why Mt Morgan has provided such a high percentage of Russian volunteers.' (*Rabochaya zhizn*, no. 21, 1916). In practice, Russians would often join up in groups. In Rockhampton, for instance, a group of eight Russians enlisted in the AIF in April 1915, followed by a group of four in July and another group of six in August.

While in 1912 Russians complained in the pages of *Echo of Australia* that they lived besides Australians, but did not mix with them, they now found themselves right in the midst of Australians,

often learning English in the trenches from their new comrades. But, although wearing Australian uniforms, Russians did not become Australians overnight. The process of adjustment was long and painful, but finally some of them won the right to be called 'mate' (Govor 2005b, chapter 'Being Russian Among Australians').

Meanwhile, with the onset of the Revolution in November 1917 and Russia's withdrawal from the war, the fate of the Russian community in Australia took a turn for the worse. The 'Red Flag' riot, which gripped Brisbane on 23 March 1919, was the climax of the Russians' misfortunes. On that day several hundred Russians, together with other left-wing radicals, held a rally under the prohibited red flag to demand repatriation for Russians who wanted to return to Russia, the repeal of the War Precautions Act, and an end to Allied intervention in Russia. By that time Russians stranded in Australia were in a desperate situation: they were being refused naturalisation in Australia and denied conditions of equal employment with Australians. In addition, they were being denied permission to return to Russia, since the Australian government believed that they might join the revolutionary forces in the civil war that was raging at the time. In Brisbane, 'loyalist' groups, mostly ex-servicemen, took revenge in response to the 'red flag' rally and returned, the following day, to attack the Russian Association headquarters in Merivale Street. According to intelligence reports, the lodgings of Russians on Merivale Street – this was the Stepanoffs' boarding-house – 'were the centre of the disturbance on 24th March 1919, when returned soldiers and other loyalists came into conflict with the Russians in this Street, and the Police with rifles and fixed bayonets protected Stepanoff's premises from destruction by the incensed crowd' (NAA: A402, W302). The loyalist mob wrecked other Russian businesses in the area, too.

These events were followed by the arrest, conviction and deportation of some of the participants in the rally, along with an Australia-wide targeting of Russians – sackings, evictions, boycotts of their businesses, physical abuse and other humiliations. This affected not only the radicals (many of the political émigrés left

soon after the March Revolution with the support of the Provisional government), but ordinary Russians as well, including returned servicemen. Now many Russians tried to leave Australia. Peter Simonff, the unrecognised Soviet consul in Australia, lobbied for their return; one of his lists included 600 Russians.

The ban on naturalisation and departure from Australia was lifted only in the early 1920s, but Russians were still scrutinised in respect to their political sympathies. Several hundred Russians did leave Australia during the 1920s, many of them subsequently perishing in Stalin's GULAG. A few, like members of the Stepanoff family, after a brief Soviet experience, managed to return to Australia. The Chehovski family, however, struggled to return to Australia for over fifty years. Their son Edward, born in Australia, perished in the GULAG (Govor 2005a).

The anti-Russian sentiments in Australia taught the Russians remaining there to 'be as far [removed] from Russia as we possibly can', as a friend advised Walter Kalasnikoff, a returned serviceman, after the Red Flag riots (NAA: MP367, 512/1/898). This first Russian émigré community, which still numbered nearly 2000 in the 1920s, was soon overtaken in numbers and in Australian perceptions by a new wave of immigrants – so called 'White Russians' – who were distinguished by their Orthodoxy, conservatism (especially monarchism) and hatred for any radical sentiments. Those who arrived before the Revolution were now labelled 'Red Russians' in contradistinction to this new wave, and hardly ever partook of the Russian cultural and religious life which began to flourish with the arrival of the Whites. The old guard of the pre-revolutionary émigrés gradually vanished, the bloody events in their motherland probably facilitating their reconciliation with Australian reality. Still, as late as 1959, a handful of them gathered to meet a Soviet journalist, Viktor Maevsky (one of the first visitors from Soviet Russia after the Petrov affair and the thaw) to share with him recollections about their young 'fighting' years in Australia and hand him a valuable gift – sets of the issues of the first Russian newspapers published in Australia.

The role of this first Russian community in Australia goes

far beyond its radicalism. It is true that they contributed to the Australian nation with their rebellious spirit but, on the other hand, many of them were just ordinary 'good Russians'. Some were ex-servicemen settled in soldier settlements, a number became successful businessmen, others remained eternal swagmen – but they all helped pave the way to Australian multiculturalism. Raising their Australian families with their Russian or, more often, Australian wives, they switched to English. Many never spoke about their Russian past with their children, let alone taught them Russian. The most remarkable transformation was that of the Illin family, which was always guided by the ideals of truth and justice. Leandro Illin married an Australian Aboriginal woman, Kitty, from the Ngadjon-ji tribe in 1915. Their descendants, who consider themselves Aborigines, number over 200 now and belong to the vanguard of the Aboriginal struggle for justice. Still, the heritage of these early Russians was not lost. Many Australians are now rediscovering their Russian roots and piecing together the unconventional life stories of their heroic Russian forefathers.

Notes

1 Throughout the text the names are spelt in the form used by their owners in Australia, particularly in their naturalisation certificates.
2 Details about them are available from the database 'Mariners and Ships in Australian Waters' http://mariners.records.nsw.gov.au/
3 This data comes from advertisements in Russian newspapers published in Brisbane in 1912-17.