

A Socialist Worker pamphlet

FIGHT RACISM!



Pauline Hanson's racism has shocked thousands of Australians at a time when the Liberal government is attacking migrants and Aboriginal people. By refusing to condemn Hanson's outrageous comments, prime minister John Howard has given a green light to racists everywhere.

With racist attacks on the rise, many had hoped that the Labor Party would stand up to Hanson. Yet opposition leader Kim Beazley has barely raised a single criticism, despite the fact that many in his party want to see racism fought.

But that doesn't mean to say that we can't fight back. This pamphlet exposes Hanson's lies and shows how Howard is using them. It also explains Labor's motives and provides the arguments and ideas that will be central in organising resistance to the racists.



THE SOCIALIST ANSWER TO
HANSON AND THE LIBERALS

by David Glanz

\$3

**FIGHT RACISM!
THE SOCIALIST ANSWER TO HANSON AND THE LIBERALS**

by David Glanz

Published by Bookmarks Australia, PO Box A338, Sydney South 1235. November 1996.

About the author

DAVID GLANZ is a journalist with *Socialist Worker*. He is a leading member of the ISO and author of the pamphlet *Why is Labor so rightwing?*

Socialist Worker

This is a *Socialist Worker* pamphlet. *Socialist Worker* is the paper of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO). If you would like more copies of this pamphlet to sell to workmates or friends, or if you want to find out more about the ISO, contact:

Sydney

PO Box A338, Sydney South 1235
Tel: 02-9261-4862
Fax: 02-9261-3404

Melbourne

GPO Box 1473N, Melbourne 3001
Tel/Fax: 03-9386-4815

Canberra

PO Box 111, ANU 2601
Tel: 06-299-2906

Adelaide

PO Box 23, Rundle Mall PO, Adelaide 5000
Tel: 08-8370-6124

Brisbane

PO Box 1823, Toowong 4066
Tel/Fax: 07-3871-1446

Perth

PO Box 384, South Fremantle 6162
Tel: 09-319-3223

Elsewhere...

There are organised socialists in a number of towns and cities, including:

- NSW: Bathurst, Wollongong, Lismore, Katoomba
- Qld: Toowoomba
- SA: Ceduna

To get in touch, contact the Sydney office

New Zealand

Socialist Workers Organisation, PO Box 8851, Auckland NZ
Tel: 649-634-3984

**FIGHT RACISM!
THE SOCIALIST ANSWER TO
HANSON AND THE LIBERALS**

by David Glanz

Contents

Introduction—Racism rears its ugly head	5
1 How did Hanson get elected?	7
2 Exploding the myths	10
3 Where does racism come from?	13
4 Why is Labor so silent?	19
5 What about free speech?	21
6 The case for socialism	23
Sources	26

Introduction—Racism rears its ugly head

PAULINE HANSON'S maiden speech to federal parliament in September 1996 has caused turmoil in Australian political life. Her public recycling of the myths that we are being "swamped" by Asians, that migration causes unemployment, and that Aborigines live well on government handouts, has every bigot cheering.

Within weeks she made a further speech to the rightwing Australia Reform Party in Melbourne calling for an end to all immigration and a defence of Australia's "Anglo-Celtic-European heritage, Judeo-Christian beliefs, English law and the Westminster parliamentary system". She told *The Bulletin* magazine: "Maybe I do come on like a Sherman tank, [but] how else am I going to say that I want a halt on Asians coming into the country. You tell me. How would you say it?"

This disgusting racism did not come out of the blue. Among the first acts of the newly elected John Howard Liberal government was a cut in migration and an assault upon the so-called "Aboriginal industry".

The main cut to migration was aimed at family reunions, with the media acknowledging that this was code for reducing the number of Chinese entrants, relatives of those marooned here by the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. The attack on indigenous people was led by Aboriginal Affairs Minister Senator John Herron. His accusation (later disproved) was that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was being torped.

Howard and Hanson's racism has created an atmosphere where hardened racists feel more confident to speak. The mayor of Port Lincoln in South Australia, a supporter of the anti-semitic League of Rights, told the media that people born to mixed marriages were "mongrels". Bigots crowded talkback radio and newspaper letters pages.

In the wake of the foul arguments has come the violence. Two Filipino women in Toowoomba were spat on. Singaporean soldiers in Townsville were beaten up. A Chinese woman in Sydney was bashed with a hammer. Thomas Teng and his retired father were bashed late at night in Canberra. "We didn't know them at all. They attacked us because we were Asians," Thomas told the *Canberra Times*. The federal Race Discrimination Commissioner has received an "unprecedented" number of complaints.

At every step of the way, Howard has made sure that the "debate" continued. He encouraged the racists with nod-and-a-wink comments about "free speech". He refused to condemn Hanson. He defended anti-migration sentiments against charges of bigotry. His government virtually boycotted the inquiry into the "Lost Genera-

The International Socialist Organisation is part of an international grouping of socialist organisations that includes:

- **Australia:** International Socialist Organisation, PO Box A338, Sydney South, NSW 1235
- **Belgium:** Socialisme International, Rue Lovinfosse 60, 4030 Grivengée
- **Britain:** Socialist Workers Party, PO Box 82, London E3
- **Canada:** International Socialists, PO Box 339, Station E, Toronto, Ontario, M6H 4E3
- **Cyprus:** Ergatiki Demokratia, PO Box 7280, Nicosia
- **Denmark:** Internationale Socialistler, Postboks 642, 2200 København N
- **France:** Socialisme International, BP 189, 75926 Paris Cedex 19
- **Germany:** Sozialistische Arbeitergruppe, Wolfgangstrasse 81, 6000 Frankfurt 1
- **Greece:** Organosi Sosialistiki Epanastasi, c/o Workers Solidarity, PO Box 8161, Athens 100 10
- **Holland:** Groep Internationale Socialisten, PO Box 9720, 3506 GR Utrecht
- **Ireland:** Socialist Workers Party, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8
- **New Zealand:** Socialist Workers Organisation, PO Box 8851, Auckland
- **Norway:** Internasjonale Socialisterr, Postboks 9226 Gronland, 0134 Oslo
- **Poland:** Solidarnosc Socjalistyczna, PO Box 12, 01-900 Warszawa 118
- **South Africa:** Socialist Workers Organisation, PO Box 18530, Hillbrow 2038, Johannesburg
- **Spain:** Socialismo International, Apartado 563, 08080, Barcelona.
- **United States:** International Socialist Organization, PO Box 16085, Chicago, Illinois 60616
- **Zimbabwe:** International Socialists, PO Box 6758, Harare

Fight racism

tion"; those Aboriginal people who had been seized from their families and forcibly assimilated. At the same time Howard attacked what he called the "black armband" view of Australian history, meaning any attempt to recognise and remember the attempted genocide carried out by the European invaders.

This stirring of the racist pot has been quite deliberate. It is the sordid, calculated move of a government that was elected on the lie of making life "relaxed and comfortable" but which is determined to savagely attack working class living standards and jobs. What better way of diverting attention from \$8 billion of cuts, the privatisation of the CES, redundancies at universities and higher HECS, the attempted sell-off of Telstra, and anti-union laws than trying to set workers at each others' throats over the colour of their skin or the country where they were born?

But from the beginning there has been resistance, too. A demonstration at Melbourne University forced the Australia Reform Party to make a last-minute change of venue for Hanson's speech. The NTEU campus workers' union at Melbourne later passed a resolution condemning university authorities for allowing the bigots to make the booking in the first place. Thousands have signed petitions, passed union motions or written letters to show their disgust with racism.

The best response came from November onwards. First more than 4000 people marched through Brisbane on a Unity Against Racism rally. The demonstration attracted not just migrants and Aborigines, but Australian-born people, unionists, students, Labor branches and socialists. A few weeks later, many thousands more demonstrated in Sydney, Ipswich, Perth, Canberra and Melbourne.

Despite the tremendous Unity demonstrations, to many anti-racists it can still seem a grim situation. With Hanson's picture on front page after front page, with radio talkback audiences coming down on her side, it can appear that the bigots are on the march, with a majority of Australians behind them.

This pamphlet sets out to explain the situation. It will explode the racist myths surrounding migration and the situation of indigenous people. It will outline Australia's racist history, but also show that there has always been a fighting, anti-racist opposition. It will look at the roots of racism and argue that racism can be beaten. It will ask what the current wave of racism tells us about Australian society and argue why we need a fight for socialism.

But first we need to challenge the myth that Hanson is virtually unstoppable.

1 How did Hanson get elected?

THE FEDERAL seat of Oxley is centred on the industrial city of Ipswich, just west of Brisbane. It had been a Labor stronghold for decades and was held for 20 years by former party leader Bill Hayden. How did Pauline Hanson achieve the 20 per cent swing she needed to win at the March 1996 federal election?

Many people fear that she triumphed on the basis of her racism. This is not the case. Hanson won because she was, to all intents and purposes, the Liberal candidate. Her disendorsement by the Liberal Party for racist remarks came *after* the close of nominations. No official Liberal stood against her, and she appeared on the ballot paper as a Liberal.

Local Liberal branch president Steve Wilson admitted later that party members campaigned for Hanson. "There were still 'Pauline Hanson, Liberal' signs up right up to election day," he told the media.

Hanson benefited from the enormous groundswell of discontent among working class people against a Labor government that had used and abused them for 13 years. All across the country, unknown Liberals were swept into office in former rock-solid Labor seats by unexpectedly high majorities. Oxley voters were no different. They voted even more heavily against Labor for the senate, despite there being no racist standing. Nationwide, 55 per cent of those who voted for the Coalition did so because they disliked the other parties—just 39 per cent backed the Coalition because they liked them.

Oxley is not a bastion of redneck bigots. Despite the overall swing, Hanson still did not win a majority of the primary vote. The working class voters who did switch to the Liberals were protesting at the rundown of the mining industry, the closure of the railway workshops, high unemployment, cuts and privatisations—attacks imposed by the ALP at federal, state and even council level. The largest swings were among pensioners, the unemployed, and new families, those hardest hit by Labor's economic rationalism.

The ALP's own post-election survey confirmed the national picture:

The exit polling indicated a spectacular drop in Labor's vote amongst people whose household income was less than \$20,000. Among those with household incomes of \$50-60,000 Labor's vote (while still behind the Coalition) held up pretty well...

In 1993 when economic circumstances were harder, voters chose between fear and anger—fear of the GST and anger at the Labor Party. Without the GST we were exposed...

Hanson did not win because of her racism. If that was the case, other open racist candidates would have done well in the federal election, too. In practice they got

denisory votes. The racist group Australians Against Further Immigration (AAFI) won 3 per cent or less in most seats. The Nazi group National Action stood several candidates in Adelaide and polled even more poorly. At the Lindsay by-election, held at the height of the Hanson phenomenon in October and with migration a major media focus, AAFI could still manage only 6 per cent.

Hanson won because she rode a nationwide wave of hostility to Labor. Some workers simply could not stomach voting once more for an ALP they felt had betrayed them. The danger, however, now is that she is using her platform in parliament to scapegoat some of the worst-off people in society for unemployment and cutbacks. By doing so, she is trying to make racist views publicly acceptable in a way they have not been in decades.

The battlers' friend?

Hanson justifies her racism by saying she's standing up for ordinary people, that she's the battlers' friend. It's a piece of disgusting hypocrisy.

Her mother is a millionaire who believes that we are in danger from the "yellow hordes". Hanson owns a 45-hectare property, a house worth around \$450,000 in an area where a worker's house would cost around \$80,000, and has eight casual workers frying the fish and chips for her in her shop. In 1991, as an Ipswich city councillor, she set up a consultancy business. The only client was Ipswich City Council, then led by corrupt Labor Party mayor Dave Underwood.

She has always been a racist. Her former husband, Mark Hanson, told the Brisbane *Courier Mail*: "People should know what sort of person Pauline Hanson is. The public is being conned by her untruths." As a plumber in Ipswich, one of Mark Hanson's clients was the Kambu Progress Association, an Aboriginal organisation. "Pauline liked the Aborigines while they were paying us money," he said.

But she contacted the Moreton Shire Council and the Queensland Housing Commission to try to get a neighbouring Aboriginal family evicted from their house. "She has always been a racist as far as I am concerned. She always referred to Aborigines as 'black bastards'," said Mark.

The real giveaway is Pauline Hanson's response to the threat of job losses and cutbacks affecting working class families. Since her election to parliament sackings have been announced for public servants, ABC staff, university workers, and Telstra workers—not to mention redundancies in the private sector by employers like the ANZ Bank and BHP. If Hanson was driven by genuine concern over unemployment and its impact on working class families she would have spoken out against these attacks, even called for support for workers fighting back.

In practice her response has been silence. Far from helping the battlers, she has been providing a smokescreen for Howard and other bosses as they get away with their vandalism.

So why has she made such an impact?

For most working people, society is going backwards. Around 9 per cent are jobless—and the official figures seriously underestimate how many want to work but can't. Those people with jobs are working harder and often doing unpaid overtime. Having a job no longer brings security. Too many people either are unemployed, fear unemployment or have a family member or friend in poverty.

At the same time, racism is deep-seated in official society. It is reinforced by governments, both Labor and Liberal. It was Labor that created the virtual concentration camp at remote Port Hedland in WA that has been used to lock up tiny numbers of boat people, some for four years or more. Labor made migrants wait six months for welfare rights—the Liberals are now extending that to two years. Even the ACTU and conservation groups give ground to the idea that Australia cannot afford to take "too many" migrants.

People are looking for answers. And some, let down by the major parties, will grasp at desperate arguments, scapegoating migrants and Aborigines for problems they didn't cause and suffer from themselves. The furore over Hanson's remarks shows that we cannot be complacent about challenging racism wherever we find it.

2 Exploding the myths

RACISTS DELIGHT in creating myths. It's important that we show them up for the liars that they are.

The migration myths

Hanson has argued: "We are in danger of being swamped by Asians." But the main sources of immigration are still Britain and New Zealand—24 per cent of migration in 1993-94, compared to 8 per cent from Vietnam or less than 5 per cent from Hong Kong. The largest group of people who overstay their visas are British.

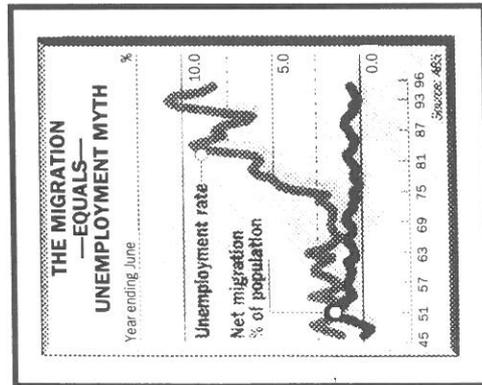
Socialists say that Asian migrants are welcome here in any number—although in practice they make up just over 4 per cent of the Australian population. Racists talk as if "Asians" are all the same, but Asian migration has come from countries as different as Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Vietnam, whose people have languages, culture and religion just as diverse as among Europeans.

Hanson has won widest support with her contention that "immigration must be halted in the short term so that our dole queues are not added to by, in many cases, unskilled migrants not fluent in the English language". The argument is built on a series of lies and fallacies.

A 1992 study of 4445 first and second generation migrants showed that those receiving welfare benefits are evenly spread among all ethnic groups. Only 12.7 per cent of first generation migrants and 11.9 per cent of second generation migrants have received unemployment benefits. The figure for Anglo-Saxons is 12.8 per cent. Most migrants work and pay tax.

A 1992 study by the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research (since shut down by Howard) found that "the immigration rate has no effect on the current aggregate unemployment rate". In 1991, a study by the National Population Council concluded: "Recent research indicates that on balance immigration benefits existing residents materially...Migrants in the past have usually created as many jobs as they have taken."

Every new migrant is simultaneously a new pair of hands to work and a new consumer, creating demand for industry and services. Migrants are likely to bring resources in with



them. They have often been educated and trained before arriving. They are younger and fitter than the average person, and therefore less likely to use health and welfare services.

It's even clearer that migration does not cause unemployment if you look at the question over time. In the 1930s, unemployment in Australia hovered around 30 per cent, yet migration had virtually halted. By contrast, the government keenly encouraged migration in the 1950s and '60s to provide labour for expanding industries and unemployment was tiny. Today, the highest unemployment in the country is in Tasmania, yet that state takes a minute proportion of new migrants.

In practice, the unemployment rate is connected to whether bosses feel they can make a profit by employing someone. When rates of return on a company's investment fall too low, workers are sacked. When the profit rate increases, bosses are keen to find new workers, whether women previously in the home, the unemployed, or migrants.

If migration can help the economy, why are Australian bosses so keen on immigration controls? The first reason is that controls allow them to turn the labour supply on and off like a tap—bringing in more workers when there are profits to be made and reducing the flow when demand for labour is lower. The second reason is that immigration controls are an ideological weapon. Bosses push the argument to workers on the dole or in fear of losing their jobs that the problem is "too many migrants" rather than sackings and closures. Our rulers can make it look like they are "doing something" by reducing the migrant intake.

Socialists are opposed to immigration controls. The rich and powerful can move themselves and their money around the world at will. Workers and their families should have the same freedom. Why should we be able to travel freely between Melbourne and Sydney and not between Melbourne and Shanghai, or vice versa? Immigration controls are inherently racist. They feed the idea that "foreigners" are to blame for our problems. Even if migration was perfectly weighted to reflect the different peoples of the world, the very fact of setting quotas implies that the arrival of newcomers is somehow a problem.

It is the bosses who create our problems, not migrants. Victorian Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett has cut more than 55,000 jobs since 1992. Telstra is sacking a further 22,000 workers. The ANZ Bank is looking for mass redundancies. Stopping migration would not save a single one of these jobs. What's more, conceding the notion that migration contributes to unemployment can let these bloodthirsty employers off the hook and lead workers to blame each other.

Aboriginal people—the real story

Perhaps the most disgraceful part of Hanson's maiden speech was when she asserted that: "I do not believe that the colour of one's skin determines whether you

are disadvantaged...[there are] privileges Aboriginals enjoy over other Australians." Nothing could be more calculated to rub salt into the wounds of indigenous Australians.

It is no coincidence that charities active in the Third World send organisers to Australia. Aboriginal people are profoundly disadvantaged. Their situation is the biggest single indictment against Australian capitalism today.

● Aboriginal people have a life expectancy between 18 and 20 years lower than for other Australians. This is partly because Aboriginal infant mortality rates are three times higher.

● More than 10 per cent of all Aboriginal people now over 25 were removed from their families as children, some as recently as 1969.

● The rate of Aboriginal imprisonment is 18 times higher than for non-Aboriginal people. Among juveniles, Aboriginals make up more than one third of the jail population—compared to less than 2 per cent of the total population. More than 100 Aboriginals have died in custody since 1989.

● The government spends \$1034 per head a year on health care for the general population, and just \$370 a year on Aboriginals. This neglect, coupled with the general impact of poverty, has led to a 10 per cent increase in the death rate from diabetes among indigenous men over the past decade.

● Aboriginals get exactly the same benefits as other people, apart from minor after-hours study facilities under the Abstudy scheme.

The real difference between Aboriginals and others is that, by choice, more than 40 per cent of Aboriginals work for the dole. Their payments are made through ATSIC—meaning the largest component of its budget is simply normal dole payments under another name.

● ATSIC is not "rotting" the system. In 1994-95, it had just \$210 million to spend on community services while mining and transport companies got \$1.4 billion through the diesel fuel tax rebate.

The recent "special audit" forced on ATSIC by Minister Herron cost the commission \$1 million. Yet accounting firm KPMG concluded that the requirements ATSIC placed on Aboriginal community groups were "very detailed" and that most breaches resulted from lack of experience rather than corruption.

● Aboriginal people are not heavier alcohol users than non-Aboriginal people. In fact they are more likely to be non-drinkers, according to studies in rural and remote areas. Neither do they get free or subsidised cars.

As the government document *Rebutting the Myths* put it: "The continued currency of this myth owes much to continued ignorance, prejudice and ill-will towards indigenous people. It certainly owes nothing to a respect of the truth."

3 Where does racism come from?

RACISM HAS been central to Australian society since 1788. The roots of it lie in Australia's formation as a colonial settler state—an outpost of white British imperialism in Asia.

Britain "took possession" of Australia in order to expand its empire, provide a base in the region and keep it from the French. To make its new possession secure, it sent prisoners from its overcrowded jails to settle here. The new rulers brought with them an ideology that argued that white people were "naturally" superior.

This concept of racism was relatively new. In pre-capitalist societies, people distinguished between themselves by factors like culture or religion—but not by *inherited* group characteristics like skin colour. In the Roman Empire, for example, slaves came from many different racial backgrounds and at least one emperor was black. It was open to people to switch from being a "barbarian" to a Roman by adopting the empire's culture.

Racism as we know it today arose with the European slave trade, that stole people from Africa to work the American plantations, which in turn fed raw materials to the new capitalist factories in Britain and elsewhere. But the same capitalists who were engaged in slavery were also fighting their own feudal rulers for political freedom under such slogans as "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". How could they resolve the contradiction—on the one hand arguing for the liberty of the individual, and on the other profiting from the slave trade?

The answer lay in developing an ideology to "prove" that black people were less than human, and therefore not worthy of the notional equality being demanded in white society. As the era of the slave trade gave way to the massive imperialist plunder of the colonial world by Europe's great powers, more and more effort was put into developing a "scientific" basis for this discrimination, using quack ideas like measuring skull shapes and bumps to "justify" the unjustifiable.

In fact, the entire idea of race is a furphy. The genetic variations that lead to skin colour are only a tiny proportion of the total genetic variation among all humans. Eighty five per cent of all known genetic variation are between members of the same "race", meaning that most differences in shape, size and looks are among people who are supposedly the same. Why does society distinguish between people on the basis of skin colour and not hair colour or height or the shape of one's ears? The answer is to be found in the capitalist drive for profit at any cost.

Dink-di racism

The racism brought to these shores by British imperialism was illustrated simply in the notion of *terra nullius*—that Australia was an empty land. Aboriginal people

were not to be counted among the human population until after 1967.

The rise of the wool industry alongside Britain's booming textile manufacturing provided the foundations for a "home-grown" Australian capitalist class with its own distinct interests. It was to be just as racist as its imperial parent. The expansion of the wool industry led to a war against the Aboriginal people that nearly resulted in genocide. At the same time, traders and merchants began scouring the Pacific islands for trade and plunder. Kanaks (Pacific islanders) were "blackbirded" into working on Queensland plantations as virtual slaves.

In conquering the Australian continent and the South Pacific, Australian capitalists were in the front-line of British imperialism. As a result, they were more pro-imperialist and more racist than the imperialist power itself.

There is a nationalist myth which portrays Australia as being forced to do the bidding of the British. But the Australian ruling class knew its interests were best served by having Britain maintain the strongest possible military presence in the region to keep out other European and Asian rivals. When Australian bosses came into conflict with Britain, it was not to break with imperialism but because they thought Britain was not imperialist enough.

So in 1883, Queensland grabbed eastern New Guinea on behalf of Britain. Australia put pressure on Britain to seize other colonies as well such as Fiji, the New Hebrides, Samoa and the Cook Islands. The intensification of imperialist rivalry towards the end of the 1800s was felt acutely by Australia. There was outrage for example when Britain "allowed" France to seize New Caledonia.

Being in the front-line of British imperialism in Asia had led to constant fears among the ruling class of "Asian invasion". But in the late 1800s as Japan began to emerge as a power in the region, paranoia about Asians reached fever pitch. The media was in a continual frenzy about the supposed danger of an "invasion" by the "Chinese hordes" and Chinese immigration was completely banned. This laid the basis for the White Australia Policy which was brought in with federation in 1901.

From the outset, Australian capitalists needed immigration. Australia had a huge coastline to defend and the development of industry was hampered by a shortage of workers. They believed Australia would have to "populate or perish". But they only wanted white migrants, in particular British migrants, who would be loyal subjects of the Empire and who could be counted on to defend it. They hoped British immigration to Australia would commit Britain to a presence in the region.

"While Britain is behind us and her naval power is supreme, Australia will be what Australians want it—white, pure and industrially good," was how NSW Labor premier JT McGowan summed it up. It was this kind of thinking that saw Australia enthusiastically join Britain's wars.

Racism became the most important part of the emerging Australian nationalism. *The Bulletin* wrote at the time: "To England, the Chinese question is a matter of

profit and loss...But to Australia the problem is one of life or living death, and her sons have to choose between the establishment of a great nation and a new life, or the founding of a mongrel community."

Almost every historian portrays the White Australia Policy as growing out of racist demands of the workers' movement. The reality is that it arose out of the needs of Australian capitalism and British imperialism. Support for White Australia in the working class was fostered by promoting the threat of "cheap Asian labour". It was used to get white workers to identify with the interests of their white bosses.

It encouraged workers to identify with the white Australian nation rather than with workers of other nationalities and countries. The dynamic was clearly seen in the seamen's strike of 1878. The shipping company ASN sacked some of its Australian crews and replaced them with Chinese seamen paid half their wage. The response of the trade union leaders was not to lead a strike which targeted the bosses but to start a campaign against Chinese immigration.

Because the Labor Party saw itself as "the party of nation" and the trade union leaders tried to reconcile workers' interests with the "national interest", they were unable to consistently oppose the racist ideology of the ruling class.

The very first objective of the Federal Labor Party, written in 1905, was "the cultivation of an Australian sentiment based on the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community".

While this racism was taken up by workers, it was never in their interests. It only divided and weakened workers' struggles against the bosses. Some unions such as the Australian Workers Union in the Queensland canefields refused to organise Kanak workers. This attitude only helped the bosses to use the Kanak workers as scabs and keep everyone's wages low.

In Victoria in 1891, 20 per cent of the workforce in 16 trades were Chinese. Their wages were 60 per cent less than those of white workers. This was not because they were "docile" or any other racist rubbish. They often went on strike. In 1892, there was a major strike by Chinese furniture workers over massive wage cuts forced on them by their Chinese bosses. They received only contempt from white trade union and Labor Party leaders.

Despite the terrible racism they faced, when the big strikes by shearers and maritime workers took place in the 1890s, Chinese workers took up collections for the strike fund. When the trade union officials who were running the shearers' strike found out where the money came from, they demanded it be returned.

But there is another tradition in the Australian working class—one of unity and solidarity even during the days of the White Australia Policy, which was not disbanded until the 1960s. Socialists have always been central to this anti-racist struggle.

The revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World, whose heyday was World War

One, opposed White Australia and immigration controls. They tried to organise workers in one big union, regardless of their colour or background. As their paper *Direct Action* put it: "Instead of 'where do you come from?', workers should ask 'what are you—worker or parasite?'"

The Communist Party, although weakened by its Stalinism, also managed to be one of the most consistent fighters against racism, using its influence inside the unions to good effect. Just after World War Two, union bans by CP-influenced maritime workers were instrumental in helping Indonesia win independence from the Dutch colonial power. Again it was CP-influenced unions that were central to organising solidarity for Aboriginal stockmen fighting for equal pay during the 1966 Gurindji strike.

Why does racism continue today?

The origins of racism—the slave trade and the white conquest of Australia—are far behind us. So why is racism still so strong in today's society?

The common explanation is that it reflects ignorance and fear, especially among less educated workers. The answer is posed as more education. But as we have seen, this theory only makes sense by ignoring racism's history and purpose. Racism was developed by people at the top of society and the key people pushing it today are still our rulers and their journalists, politicians and intellectual apologists.

Australian bosses still need racist scapegoats to divide and weaken the working class. They still need racist stereotypes to get support among workers for Australia's involvement in imperialist wars. The mining companies and pastoralists still use racism against Aborigines to undermine support among workers for land rights. That is why the seemingly common-sense idea that we need to ask employers to join the fight against racism—to make it as broad-based as possible—can only weaken the anti-racist struggle.

Official racism is heavily underpinned by nationalism. The media, politicians, religious leaders and others constantly push the line that we should be proud to be Australians, that whatever our differences, we are all in it together. The message is reinforced through sport and culture. It is pushed hard in the workplace, where we are told we must sacrifice to make "our" economy efficient on the world scale. The net effect is to encourage people to see things as Australians versus the rest. From there it is only a short step in desperate times to seeing "the rest" as rivals, even threatening enemies.

The Keating Labor government took a hard line against boat people to deflect attention from the cutbacks and privatisations that it was carrying through. Being tough on "illegals" (Asian ones only, of course) could win votes among racists, and instill among a wider group of workers the idea that problems in society were being caused by "too many people" coming here and "queue jumpers". It started charging

non-citizens upfront HECS to study at university—encouraging the idea that "foreigners" rather than government policy were to blame for oversized classes.

The Howard government moved very quickly to foster further racist sentiment by cutting the migration program and further limiting welfare rights for new arrivals. Such tactics made perfect sense for a government unleashing \$8 billion in spending cuts and sacking public servants, university workers and others.

Our rulers face a problem, however. On the one hand racism suits their domestic needs by weakening potential opposition from below. On the other, their major trading partners are increasingly to be found in South-East and East Asia, where any hint of a return to the White Australia Policy can cost billions in exports.

So our rulers zig-zag between encouraging racism and damping it down. When the Hanson debate emerged, John Howard clearly signalled with his talk of "free speech" that he sympathised with her racism. Protests from the tourism, education and farming industry about the danger of lost trade forced him to agree to a wishy-washy parliamentary bipartisan statement against racism to reassure regional trading partners. Within days, however, he was playing up to his domestic audience again, defending Hanson from Paul Keating's accusation about "the ugly face of racism".

Racist ideas do get taken up by workers. But it is not fear of strangers that is to blame, but fear of unemployment. Racism feeds on the idea that the person next to you in the dole queue or on the bus is the one who has taken your job, rather than the employer or the government who has sacked you. It can seem that stopping migration will save you from the sack, when really it is militant union action that is needed to stop retrenchments.

Migrants and Aborigines suffer most from racism. But because it divides the working class, all workers lose out including the white majority.

Is there hope?

Certainly. Two factors work in the favour of anti-racists. The first is that the working class is highly integrated. Millions of Australian-born people know migrants, work with them, are friends with them, are married to them.

There are 132 nationalities represented among people living in the city of Moreland, which covers Brunswick, Coburg and part of Glenroy in Melbourne's northern suburbs. Australian-born and migrants from the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, southern Europe and elsewhere live, work and play together side by side.

A 1992 University of Queensland study found that fewer than 8 per cent of people objected to having an Asian work companion, fewer than 10 per cent to Asian neighbours and only 11 per cent to having close Asian friends.

Dr Ghassan Hage, a senior anthropologist at Sydney University, reported in November 1996 that the Liberal Party's conception of the mainstream "as if it was

largely Anglo and as if it was haunted by the problem of immigration" was wrong. Interviews with hundreds of people in Sydney's western suburbs had revealed "very little sign of the virulent kind of uninformed prejudice [Hanson] has exhibited".

He told *The Australian* that racial groups connected through their children's friendships, at clubs, at bingo, in dancing and swimming activities. "In the interactions, people are racist one second and not racist another second, or racist and not racist at the same time. It is a very fluid thing...The people who voice the so-called concern of the racists are in fact people who are trying to build the very thing which they assume, or say, exists."

The second factor is that the same capitalist system that encourages competition between workers also brings them together and encourages collective organisation. Working together encourages workers to see themselves as part of the same class.

To fight the boss successfully, unity is essential. In general, the higher the level of class struggle, the greater workers' militancy, confidence and self-organisation, the weaker is the hold racism has.

During the 1965 strike at Mount Isa Mines, workers from 47 nationalities fought alongside each other. In the 1970s, the union shop committee at the Ford Broadmeadows car plant brought together workers from Greek, Italian, Turkish, Yugoslav, Anglo-Australian and Vietnamese backgrounds. In the 1980s, Vietnamese and Australian workers organised united union action against Australia Post bosses who deliberately used racism to try to undermine working conditions.

The strike by CRA workers at Weipa in December 1995 shows the potential for racism to be fought. The predominantly white strikers linked up with traditional Aboriginal owners to fight their common enemy. They were given permission to launch their pickets from Aboriginal land. Three hundred Aborigines signed a petition supporting the strike.

As union delegate Nigel Gould put it: "We are so united. We've all pulled together. The media are shocked at how well everyone gets on. We've got all sorts—different ethnic minorities, traditional land owners. There's a Croat and a Serb who've worked here for 22 years. They're comrades."

4 Why is Labor so silent?

FEW PEOPLE would have been surprised at John Howard's evasive and mealy-mouthed response to the Hanson furore. It was Howard himself who in 1988 suggested a cutback in Asian migration. The Coalition is still stuffed with racists today. An academic survey of Coalition candidates before the March election found that 54 per cent thought government help for Aborigines had gone too far. Thirty-five per cent thought equal opportunities for migrants were also too generous.

But many people will have been disappointed that Labor has not taken a clearer stand. Federal Labor leader Kim Beazley spent weeks urging Howard to criticise Hanson, while not actually doing so himself. Then, when NSW Labor secretary John Della Bosca told a state conference that Howard was a racist and received a standing ovation, Beazley refused to support him. "He can use his own words. I don't go down the road of characterising John Howard like that."

There are three reasons why Beazley has lagged behind even many Liberal backbenchers when it has come to taking a stand over the racism Hanson has brought to the surface. The first is that federal Labor sees itself as a party of nation. Its opposition to racism is compromised by its support for state-imposed measures like immigration controls that are necessary to maintain domestic stability. Labor's priorities are set primarily by the needs of Australian business and Australian bosses, rather than by the union members who help vote it into office.

In his speech on the October 30 bipartisan motion, Beazley deplored racist violence. But he spent most of his time discussing why racism was a problem for Australia's bosses trading in the region.

We cannot survive as a nation with a market...of 18 million people. Therefore, the policies that we pursue are not just about the nature and character of our society, vital though those are; they are also utterly critical about the nature of the future survival of this country...

It is absolutely critical that...this motion, when it is passed, goes out as a signal to the region...that Australia is still in business as a decent society...

The second reason for Labor's weakness is that it has just spent 13 years imposing the cuts, privatisation and austerity on working class people that created an opening for racist agitation. The Labor leadership understands that full employment and higher living standards would undercut the appeal of the Hansons of this world. But it also knows that it cannot deliver such improvements—and even to promise them would open the party up to ridicule because of its record.

The third reason flows from Labor's assessment of its defeat in March 1996. As the official postmortem noted:

Labor's willingness to do deals with sectional interests was often questioned

[by party members], environmental and multicultural issues came up most often as examples of this...There was deep uneasiness about some aspects of multiculturalism. Tolerance is one thing, but to many battlers multiculturalism was seen as "special pleading" or a "free kick" not available to everybody...

The reality of this agenda was that Labor had a policy record on immigration which was quite opposite to the popular perception—we were stung both coming and going on this issue.

The report noted that "there was a disturbing degree of community misinformation", but Labor's conclusion was not to combat the myths. Instead, it opted for going quiet. Labor exists to win elections, and therefore gathering votes is its number one priority, whatever the political cost. As Beazley noted in mid-November, the Hanson debate was apparently pulling some Labor voters towards the Coalition. So in practice, the party's response was to mute its anti-racist stand—to pander to racist voters rather than confront and win them over.

Many Labor voters and Labor members are active on the ground against racism. But they are let down time and again by their party's commitment to electoralism and the health of Australian capitalism. The politics of Laborism are a barrier to thoroughgoing, consistent anti-racism.

5 What about free speech?

A COMMON complaint among anti-racists is that the media is to blame for turning Hanson into a household name. But the media phenomenon might never have taken off if it had not been for John Howard giving editors a signal with his comments about free speech.

When he told the Queensland state Liberal conference that: "People can now talk about certain things without fear of being branded a bigot or a racist," it was a green light to every reactionary in the country. He backed up the point by refusing to condemn Hanson or her maiden speech. Even while speaking to the bipartisan motion, a moment when he was supposedly making "a stand" against racism and intolerance, he went out of his way to assure the anti-migrant lobby that they still had an ally in him.

We can win our ranks have legitimate debate about the size of our immigration program...It is natural that people, particularly those who feel themselves at the sharp end of challenge and anxiety in industries that have seen extensive job losses, should feel some sense of anxiety about immigration levels.

The idea that Liberals are the defenders of free speech is laughable. Liberal governments in WA and Victoria have introduced Voluntary Student Unionism specifically to make it more difficult for students to speak out and organise against attacks on education and Austudy. Liberal cuts to the ABC were partly justified by Communications Minister Richard Alston because the ABC devoted too much time to "Aboriginal issues and racism". He later called on the ABC to delay or abandon coverage of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

A Victorian public servant was fined \$2000 by the state Liberal government and transferred for commenting on the government's child protection policies. Victorian teachers have been banned since Jeff Kennett's election from talking publicly about the condition of the state education system. The federal Liberals refused space in parliament house to an East Timorese photographic exhibition because it featured pictures of the 1991 Dili massacre.

More generally, the Liberals and the media have campaigned throughout the 1990s against so-called "political correctness" or PC. They have seized on (or parodied) attempts to challenge racist and sexist language, using them as an excuse to attack any measure that might benefit oppressed people. In the US, the anti-PC brigade won a referendum in November 1996 outlawing affirmative action in California. The net result will be to make it more difficult for black or Latino people to attend university or get jobs. In Australia, the anti-PC hysteria has been used to smear anyone who attempts to argue for Land Rights, or rights for migrants, women, gays

and lesbians.

Howard's tactics are deliberate. He wants to bolster the Liberal vote by pulling racists in behind his party. More importantly in the short-term, he wants to create a smokescreen behind which he can hide the damage his government is doing to working class families. Hanson serves him well. He can give a nod and wink to her supporters that he agrees with her arguments while distancing himself officially if it becomes necessary to reassure trading partners.

Many of Hanson's supporters have taken the hint, using thinly veiled code comments like "it's a matter of free speech" or "she's only speaking her mind" to show their backing for her racism. But some anti-racist civil libertarians are genuinely confused and worried that to attack Hanson is to infringe her rights. To them, socialists say that no decent person would tolerate a public platform for someone advocating rape or child abuse—why should racist venom be treated any more kindly? That is why we shed no tears over the banning from this country of the so-called historian David Irving, whose ambition is to whitewash Hitler's responsibility for the Holocaust.

Hanson has already been given "free speech" by the truckload by the billionaires' media, the same media that gives precious little space if any to leftwing or alternative views. It has led to racist attacks and cast a pall over the lives of many people, especially those of Asian background. Irving would use a visit to rally Australia's small Nazi gangs and give them the confidence to go out and hurt and maim.

Socialists are vitally concerned about civil liberties and free speech for the oppressed and exploited. Building an effective opposition against Hanson and any racist movement that might coalesce around her is the only way to guarantee freedom from fear for Asians, Aborigines and the rest of Hanson's targets.

6 The case for socialism

MANY PEOPLE hope that Hanson will just fade from the scene. But whether she remains a national political figure or is elbowed aside by other rightwing types, the social conditions which allowed her to stir up racism are not about to fade away. So long as large numbers fear unemployment, so long as society keeps slipping backward, then the likes of Hanson can get a hearing.

Europe—warning and inspiration

In Europe, forces much further to the right than Hanson—outright fascists and Nazis—have begun to make frightening headway against a backdrop of social crisis and misery. In Italy, fascists were briefly members of a coalition government cabinet in 1995. In Germany, Nazi gangs were responsible for firebombings that claimed the lives of migrant women and children.

In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front won 15 per cent of the vote in the 1995 presidential election and now controls two city councils. Le Pen has tried to present a "respectable" and "patriotic" face. But behind the scenes he is moving to turn passive electoral support into a fully-fledged Nazi street army.

In Austria, the Freedom Party, led by Nazi Jorg Haider, made a breakthrough in elections held in October 1996. It won 28 per cent of the vote for seats in the European parliament and the same proportion for council elections in the capital Vienna. Most who voted for Haider did so because of his verbal opposition to the European Union. But the party's core contains hardened Nazis. Haider addressed veterans of Hitler's crack Waffen SS regiment in 1995, calling them "dear friends" and "decent men" of "spiritually superior" character.

In each case the far right has moved into political space opened up by the misery, unemployment and cutbacks inflicted by mainstream parties. In Austria, the Freedom Party's success came as the Social Democratic Party (equivalent of the ALP) lost control of the Vienna council for the first time since the fascist coup of 1934. In France the National Front's breakthrough came after years of Socialist (Labor) Party government.

At the same time, other events in Europe have demonstrated a completely different way out of the crisis. Mass strikes have swept the continent. Each time, the far right has been marginalised as workers have come out on to the streets, white, African, migrant, Arab—all arm in arm in common struggle against government cutbacks.

In France in December 1995, more than two million public sector workers went out on strike over three and a half weeks. Many more joined massive demonstrations that swept through every city and major town. The strike was a huge success,

community activists to nail the British National Party for the Nazis they are through leafletting, meetings and posters, and to prevent them from organising by demonstrating whenever they try to rally. It is no coincidence that Britain is the one country in Europe where the far right has failed to make a breakthrough.

At the heart of the ANL are the 10,000 members of our sister organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, who are also active against the Tory government, supporting strikers, opposing immigration controls, and arguing for socialism.

Australia—bitterness and anger

Millions of Australian workers feel that things are going backwards—and they are right. Coles-Myer boss Peter Bartels gets a \$1.2 million rise while a Coles supermarket butcher loses \$1500 a year “because times are hard”. The Howard government increases subsidies to private schools while the Kennett government tries to shut another 114 state schools. The number of homeless rises, but there’s money to spare for military equipment and for banquets to welcome President Clinton. Workers put in longer hours while unemployment queues lengthen.

The situation breeds bitterness, and people lash out. The anger can go to the right or the left. The same frustrations that feed the Hanson phenomenon also created the militant demonstration at Parliament House on August 19. The same people who think that cutting migration might save jobs desperately want the unions leaders to lead a fight. Many of the workers who voted for Hanson in Ipswich would cheer if unionists at Telstra or BHP decided to make a stand for their jobs.

Racism festers where there are deep and intractable social problems. That is why well-meant appeals for tolerance fall short of the mark. What is needed is the kind of fight we have seen in France, a fight that has the potential to marginalise the racists and offer real, tangible solutions to the many working class families trapped in an economic nightmare.

Thousands want to see such a fight. University workers came out in unprecedented numbers across the country in June 1996. Public servants reacted enthusiastically to a national strike call in July. About 100,000 construction workers struck and won compensation for having travel allowances taxed. Maritime workers walked off the job in November against the anti-union law.

But two things make the prospect of a fightback more difficult than it should be. The union movement has been weakened by 13 years of retreat under a Labor government. Our industrial muscles have been made flabby by collaboration.

Furthermore, the leaders of the working class movement, both in the ALP and in the unions, have by and large accepted the arguments that unions must be responsible partners in industry, that militancy is the way of the past, that competition is the key to survival. This political paralysis has seen much of the anger against Howard diverted into futile attempts to lobby the minor parties in the Senate or into the

Fight racism

forcing the Chirac government to abandon a series of austerity measures and back down on slashing the railway system and part-privatising the French Telecom.

There were further massive strikes in 1996 against austerity. In Spain there was a nationwide day of strikes and demonstrations in October. In Germany in June the unions held their biggest demonstration since 1945. In October more than 400,000 metal workers struck against cuts to sick pay. In France, up to half a million demonstrated that month against renewed government attacks.

The struggle showed workers who had been tempted by the simplistic answers of the racists that there was another solution to misery—united working class resistance. As the British socialist Chris Harman wrote about the 1995 French strike:

*The symbols of the struggle were, everywhere, from France's revolutionary traditions, even though many of the strikers and demonstrators had clearly not voted for the left in last spring's elections and a substantial minority of workers had voted for the National Front. The strike was often strongest in towns and cities in the south of the country where the Front does particularly well electorally. In Toulon, where the Front runs the council, 25,000 demonstrated in support of the strike in a city of 100,000; in Marseilles, where the Front has long had a strong base, there were three demonstrations in less than a fortnight of 160,000 to 200,000 people in a city whose population is around 800,000. Everywhere there were red flags, and a marked feature of all the demonstrations was the singing by thousands of people of *The Internationale*.*

The need for politics

Such strikes push back conservative governments and marginalise the far right, but they are not enough. As the struggle subsides, the fascists re-emerge to take advantage of any ebbing of confidence. The cutbacks have been postponed, but governments regroup and come back for a second or third time. Unemployment and welfare cuts mean that misery continues to fester.

In such circumstances there is no guarantee that the anger against politicians and their system will go to the left. Le Pen told young party militants in mid-1996 to prepare for a “revolution” as “the worm-eaten structures of our system collapse”. The revolution he has in mind would be modelled on Hitler's seizure of power in 1933.

Socialists need to build organisations that not only participate in strikes, but that take up the arguments that divide workers and hold back the struggle. Do migrants take jobs, should illegal migrants be deported, where does unemployment come from, should we all sacrifice for the “national interest”—these are just some of the questions where if the left does not supply an answer, the right will.

One example of what is possible is in Britain, where the Anti Nazi League brings together hundreds of thousands of socialists, Labour Party members, union and

Fight racism

argument that we should wait for Labor's re-election.

In this situation socialist politics are indispensable. Socialists are for rebuilding a tradition of struggle and solidarity. We are for fighting for every job, regardless of management blather about "world's best practice". We are against every kind of oppression and every backward idea that divides workers and weakens our struggle.

We are for a workers' fightback that unites Australian-born and migrant, Aboriginal, white and Asian—against the capitalism that breeds racism, breeds cutbacks, breeds despair. And to make that fightback a reality and a success, we need socialists in every workplace, every campus, every suburb, ready to argue back against rightwing ideas, ready to give a lead, ready to link every struggle and put the case for an end to this rotten, racist system. Why don't you join us?

Sources for the pamphlet include:

- Alex Callinicos, *Race and class*, Socialist Worker (Great Britain) 1993.
Alex Callinicos, *The fight against racism*, Socialist Worker (Great Britain) 1991.
Tom Bramble, *Asians are welcome here: The boat people and the fight against racism today*, Bookmarks (Australia) 1995.
Diane Fields, *The fight for black rights*, Bookmarks (Australia) 1995.
Rebutting the myths: Some facts about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, Office of the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 1992.
Socialist Worker (with particular thanks to Alison Stewart for her article on Australia's racist history), *The Bulletin*, *The Australian Financial Review* and *The Australian*.
- Bookmarks and Socialist Worker publications listed above are available from Bookmarks, PO Box A338, Sydney South 1235 (prices on request).

ISO

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION

IF YOU have enjoyed what you have just read, remember that the International Socialist Organisation offers you more than just political analysis of the world—it also offers you a way of becoming involved in changing it.

the strikes, campaigns, demonstrations and fightbacks in their area.

If you would like to join the ISO, or if you would simply like to know more about what your local branch does and what the organisation does nationally, fill in your name and address below and we'll get in touch.

We have branches around the country which meet weekly and get involved in all

- Please send more information I want to join the ISO
 I want to subscribe to *Socialist Worker* (special offer \$5 for 5 issues)

Name

Address

Phone

Fill in and send this form to ISO, PO Box A338, Sydney South 1235