

## SUGGESTIONS AND DEBATES

### Confronting White Labourism: Socialism, Syndicalism, and the Role of the Scottish Radical Left in South Africa before 1914\*

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**SUMMARY:** Dominated by the ideas of the “communist school”, the early history of the socialist and revolutionary syndicalist movement in South Africa has (until relatively recently) been largely overlooked by labour historians. From this approach emerged the view that the dominant voice of white workers in South Africa was British, and to a lesser extent Australian, and that their blend of class and racial consciousness resulted in the widespread support for the common ideology of white labourism. Indeed, support for this system of industrial and racial segregation was prevalent across the British Empire, was widely supported by the imperial working class, and in South Africa was never seriously challenged or confronted before 1914. Over recent years, however, South African labour historians have made efforts to rethink their national labour history by examining the early labour movement and the ideology of white labourism in a global context. This article adopts a similar approach and argues that the politics of white labourism was not uniformly embraced by the imperial working class, and that in South Africa there was a vocal and active non-racialist movement which sought to confront racism and segregation, dispute the operation of the “colour bar”, and challenge the white protectionist policies of the labour and trade-union movement. In conclusion, it will be argued that the campaign to confront white labourism was disproportionately influenced by radical left Scottish migrants who adhered firmly to the colour-blind principles of international socialism and revolutionary syndicalism.

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## INTRODUCTION

In his article “The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself ‘White’: White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa Before the First World War”, Jonathan Hyslop carefully outlined what was meant by the term “white labourism”. The use of the term “white labourism” is now fairly ubiquitous in South Africa labour history and it is used quite freely – often with little need for explanation. Influenced by the ebb and flow of workers and ideas drawn from across the British Empire, many of the main components of labour politics and socialist thought in the white English-speaking world were to be found in South Africa. White labourism can therefore be understood to the result of the fusion of class and racial consciousness that prevailed among the white working class and which led to the emergence of a well-defined structure of industrial segregation in South Africa.

From the early days of the mining industry the first migrant workers from Australasia, America, and Britain (largely although not entirely confined to tin miners from Cornwall) refused to accept coloured (mixed-race) or black workers into their ranks, rigidly imposed a “colour bar” on black and coloured workers, and refused to consider organizing non-white labour. This was a trade-union and labour movement that existed purely for the benefit of white workers, and, in Hyslop’s view, was analogous to the White Australia policy adopted in 1901. It was the Australians in combination with the Cornish miners of England and British skilled artisans who formed (as Hyslop defined it) the “three vectors” of the white labourist movement and inexorably led to the growing racial solidarity of white workers in South Africa.

This attitude became even more deeply entrenched post-1902 (from the end of the second Anglo-Boer War), and between then and 1914, as Australian and British workers began to settle in greater numbers in the northern territories and the mining districts of the Witwatersrand. The new arrivals quickly embraced the ideology of white labourism and racial segregation, supported the operation of the colour bar, and the exclusion of black workers from membership of the South African Labour Party. They also opposed the non-racial franchise which operated in the Cape

Carnegie Trust. I would also like to acknowledge the help and encouragement of Jonathan Hyslop (Deputy Director of the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research) and Lucien van der Walt (School of Social Science, University of Witwatersrand). Lucien and I shared a platform at the Berlin conference in 2004 and found that our work was developing along the same lines: investigating the issue of race, anti-racism, and the developing revolutionary syndicalist movement in South Africa – my interest being Scottish migrant involvement. It was Jonathan Hyslop’s early work on “Scots in southern Africa”, however, that encouraged me to look more closely into this topic. That some of my opinions differ from his does not in anyway detract from the outstanding quality of his research and scholarship.

Colony – where there existed a degree of “interracialism and interaction” between white and coloured workers. This was an imperial working class who, Hyslop asserts, uniformly embraced a common ideology of white labourism which by the early twentieth century was prevalent across the British Empire. The cause of international labour was therefore identical with the cause of the globalized white labour diaspora.<sup>1</sup>

Hyslop has amended and adjusted his position on “white labourism” since the publication of his original and path-breaking article in the *Journal of Historical Sociology* in December 1999. But his central assertion – which stresses the attachment of white workers to the commonly-shared ideology of white labourism – is more or less unchanged. This provides an opportunity to put forward some counter-argument, and to reflect on the extent to which Hyslop’s thesis is in part influenced by the communist school of historical thought (discussed in greater detail in the following section which considers the historiographical and theoretical context for this discussion).

Hyslop readily acknowledges the ideological commitment of some small and non-racial left-wing groups in South Africa, and their campaign to improve the working lives of African labour, but they did not take any practical steps towards unionizing black workers. Their “non-racialism” was thus essentially “an abstract principle” for, in practice, even those on the non-racialist and anti-segregationist left who found themselves taking a leadership role were forced to work “within the boundaries of the existing, white, labour movement”. These small left-wing groups, therefore, never seriously confronted the entrenched ideology of white labourism in South Africa before the outbreak of war in 1914.<sup>2</sup>

This article intends to take issue with certain elements of Jonathan Hyslop’s “white labourist” thesis; principally, to widen the discussion around the issue of class and race in South Africa before 1914, and, importantly, to come to a better understanding of where British, and more particularly Scottish, workmen stood on this issue. It will argue that the non-racialists and anti-segregationists did mount a serious challenge to the prevailing ideology of white labourism and, through the dissemination of local and international left-radical, socialist, and revolutionary

1. J. Hyslop, “The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself ‘White’: White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa Before the First World War”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12 (1999), pp. 398–421 (this article articulates what “white labourism” is, but importantly sets the foundation for many of the counter-arguments, amendments, and adjustments that were to follow); *idem*, “The World Voyage of James Keir Hardie: Indian Nationalism, Zulu Insurgency and The British Labour Diaspora 1907–1908”, *Journal of Global History*, 1 (2006), pp. 343–362 – where Hyslop’s definition of “white labourism” is restated.

2. Hyslop, “White Labourism”, pp. 407–409, 418–419; see also *idem*, *The Notorious Syndicalist J.T. Bain: A Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2004), pp. 191–192.

syndicalist newspapers, they offered South African workers an alternative to the industrial policy of racial segregation.<sup>3</sup>

This article will further argue that, in this determined drive to undermine the ideology of white labourism, the movement was disproportionately influenced by radical-left Scottish migrants who firmly adhered to the colour-blind principles of international socialism, industrial unionism, and revolutionary syndicalism, and in doing so formed an anti-racialist vector which confronted the system of racial and industrial segregation in South Africa. This debate and the issues raised are considered in greater detail below, but this article will first briefly discuss the historiographical and theoretical context of how labour history has dealt with the issue of race and class in the past, and how the historical method and approach to the study of labour history in South Africa had changed over recent years.

#### LEFT-WING GROUPS AND THE EARLY SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR MOVEMENT

The decades leading up to World War I proved to be stirring and turbulent times in the history of the South African labour movement. Yet, as Evangelos Mantzaris argued, the study of the “early labour movement [...] and the radical groups, associations and parties representing it” suffered from severe neglect in South African labour history. He suggested a few exceptions to the rule and pointed to the work of such writers as Jack and Ray Simons, David Ticktin, Sheridan Jones, Elaine Katz, Brian Bunting, Edward Roux, R.K. Cope, and important autobiographical accounts by activists such as socialist Wilfred Harrison.<sup>4</sup> “Fresh research and insight” was “urgently needed”, he argued, to help “stimulate discussion and add new dimensions to our knowledge” of this early period.

3. Wessel P. Visser, “‘To Fight the Battles of the Workers’: The Emergence of Pro-Strike Publication in Early Twentieth Century South Africa”, *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004), pp. 400–434, 407–411; Lucien van der Walt, “Anarchism and Syndicalism in an African Port City: Cape Town, the IWW, and the ICU, 1904–1924” (paper presented to the 7th European Social Science History Conference, Social Science, Lisbon, February–March, 2008); H.J. and R.E. Simons, “White Labour Policies”, in *idem*, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850–1950* (Harmondsworth, 1969), ch. 4.

4. *Ibid.*; David Ticktin, “The Origins of the South African Labour Party, 1888–1910” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1973); Sheridan Jones, “The Birth of the Communist Party of South Africa”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 3 (1976), pp. 371–400; Elaine N. Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy: A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913* (Johannesburg, 1976); Edward Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man’s Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (London, 1948; updated and republished: Madison, WI, 1964); *idem*, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography* (biography of the father of Brian Bunting) (Cape Town, 1944; republished Belville, 1993); R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill: The Times and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers’ Leader* (Cape Town, 1940); Wilfred Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1949).

His own work on Jewish trade unionism (1903 and 1907) and the cigarette makers' strike in Cape Town (1906–1907) did shed new light on the early labour movement developments in the Cape Colony. But his focus shifts quite sharply away from the Cape and to the events of 1914; and, in particular, the split from the South African Labour Party (SALP) led by anti-war dissidents who went on to form the International Socialist League (ISL) in September 1915. For Mantzaris, and for many other historians of his generation, this was *the* pivotal moment in the history of the radical movement in South Africa: “firstly because the splinter group so formed started organising, on a *regular* basis, the working class in the Transvaal along class and not race lines [...] and, secondly, because it was the first radical organisation in South Africa to base its tactics and strategy on *broad* Marxist lines”.<sup>5</sup>

What we see in the work of Mantzaris is an example of the influence of the “communist group” of South African socialist history, inspired by the work of a leading group of writers who had a close association with the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), including Bunting, Roux, Cope, and Jack and Ray Simons. Crucially, their views influenced the generations that followed, and as a result, labour historians tended to overlook and even disregard what was occurring within the ranks of the South African left prior to the formation of the CPSA in 1921. From their theoretical standpoint, the radical and revolutionary left stood accused of making little effort to confront South Africa's ideology of “white labourism”, and the system of discrimination and inequality that had taken root in the Transvaal and the northern territories. According to Lucien van der Walt, the reasons were simple: there was little evidence to suggest that the revolutionary left had anything in common with the “‘political socialism’ of classical Marxism and social-democracy, which insisted that political parties be built to take state power for socialist purposes”.

This is also linked to Lenin's aristocracy-of-labour viewpoint and, as occurred in other developed countries, proposed that the skilled artisans in South Africa had been effectively bought off by employers and the state. In the South African context this led to the emergence of the racist and discriminatory white labour policy. The radical left, the socialists and the revolutionary syndicalists, lacking an adequate policy regarding racial discrimination, thus chose to ignore the racial question and in line with Hyslop's argument even pandered to “white

5. E.A. Mantzaris, “Labour Struggles in South Africa: The Forgotten Pages, 1903–1921” (Collective Resource Publication), summary, ch. 1 (first appeared as an article in *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, IV (Cape Town, 1981). See also *Labour Struggles in South Africa: the Forgotten Pages, 1903–1921*, available at <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources>; last accessed 29 April 2009.

chauvinisms”.<sup>6</sup> Van der Walt strenuously challenges this view, arguing that it was “the core ideas of revolutionary syndicalism” that held sway among a broad section of the South African left, rather than the implantation of Marxist political thought. Indeed, he points to Hobsbawm’s view that during the period 1905 to 1914, what was occurring in South Africa was in line with most countries where “the bulk of the revolutionary left was anarcho-syndicalist, or at least much closer to the ideas and the mood of anarcho-syndicalism than to that of classic Marxism”. But importantly, van der Walt would add, South African revolutionary syndicalism was already well into the process of developing a “critique of racism” and through revolutionary syndicalism sought to provide a solution.<sup>7</sup> This arguably marks a decisive historiographical shift in South African labour history and the development of an alternative historical approach that challenges the view of the communist school of labour history.

It is evident that over recent years there has been a revival in labour history studies in South Africa which culminated in the international conference, “Re-Thinking Worlds of Labour: Southern African Labour History in International Context”, which met in Johannesburg in July 2006. It brought together scholars from across Africa and further afield to consider the issue of globalization and, from the South African perspective, there emerged a general consensus that they would have to rethink their national labour history and place it more firmly “in an international framework”. The conference argued that in response to the impact of globalization today that workers might learn from the struggles during the “first globalization” that occurred between the 1880s and the 1920s during the era of South African industrialization.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis was on “connections and comparisons” and the aim was to open up wider discussion of the importance of transnational labour history.

6. Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, pp. 191–192.

7. Eric Hobsbawm, “Bolshevism and Anarchism”, in *idem, Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays* (London, 1993), pp. 72–73; see also Lucien van der Walt, “Bakunin’s Heirs in South Africa: Race, Class and Revolutionary Syndicalism from the IWW to the International Socialist League, 1910–1921”, *Politikon: The South African Journal of Political Studies*, 30 (2004), pp. 67–69.

8. Nicole Ullrich and Lucien van der Walt, “Labour History Revival: Learning From the Past”, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 30:4 (2006). It was reported that the conference inspired the local revival of labour history, and closer connections between scholars in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. A special issue, “Transnational and Comparative Perspectives on Southern Labour History”, appeared in *African Studies*, 66:2/3, in August 2007. This 2006 conference was part of a series of initiatives across the world with the aim of “globalizing labour history”. A second conference “Labour Crossings: World, Work and History”, was organized in September 2008 at Witwatersrand University.

As the work of a growing number of historians, including Jonathan Hyslop,<sup>9</sup> Lucien van der Walt,<sup>10</sup> and Wessell P. Visser,<sup>11</sup> clearly demonstrates, South Africa's labour history was already being examined in the global context. By adopting a firmer comparative historical approach, however, more light has been shed on the common values shared by workers in South Africa and other areas of the industrialized world in terms of their commitment to international socialism, syndicalism, and industrial unionism. But this approach has also opened up new lines of enquiry and importantly challenges the long-held view that the policy of "white labourism" in South Africa – a view that Jonathan Hyslop's work would seem to support – was never seriously confronted or challenged in any meaningful way in the years before the outbreak of World War I. That this history had hitherto "been so thoroughly lost, so thoroughly forgotten", asserts Van der Walt, "is testament to the influence of the communist school" in South African labour history.<sup>12</sup>

#### RACIAL SOLIDARITY AND THE "THREE VECTORS" OF WHITE LABOURISM

As noted above, Hyslop's "white-labourist" thesis began to take shape in an article first published in December 1999. Therein, he sought to demonstrate the "racial solidarity" of the white working class by identifying "three vectors" of white labourism apparent in the South African industrial context. This was closely tied to the influence of the Australian labour movement in generating the "white labourist political model"

9. Jonathan Hyslop "A Scottish Socialist Reads Carlyle in Johannesburg Prison, June 1900: Reflections on the Literary Culture of the Imperial Working Class", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29 (2003), pp. 639–655; *idem*, "The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself 'White'"; *idem*, *The Notorious Syndicalist*; *idem*, "The World Voyage of James Keir Hardie".

10. Lucien van der Walt, "The Industrial Union is the Embryo of the Socialist Commonwealth: The International Socialist League and Revolutionary Syndicalism in South Africa, 1915–1919", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, special issue on "South African Labour and the Left", 19 (1999), pp. 5–28; *idem*, "Bakunin's Heirs in South Africa"; *idem* "Reflections on Race and Anarchism in South Africa, 1904–2004", *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, 8 (2004), pp. 1, 14–16; *idem*, "The Influence of the IWW in Southern Africa", *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, 42/43 (2006), pp. 31–38; *idem*, "The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the IWW and the ICU, 1904–1934", *African Studies*, 66 (2007), 2/3, special issue, "Transnational and Comparative Perspectives on Southern African Labour History", pp. 223–251.

11. Wessell P. Visser, "The Uneasy Electoral Relationship between Socialist and the South African Labour Party, 1910–1924", *Historia*, 47 (2002), pp. 83–104; *idem*, "To Fight the Battles of the Workers: The Emergence of Pro-Strike Publications in Early Twentieth Century South Africa", *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004), pp. 400–434; *idem*, "Exporting Trade Unionism and Labour Politics: The British Influence on the Early South African Labour Movement", *New Contree*, 49 (2005), pp. 145–162.

12. Van der Walt, "Anarchism and Syndicalism in an African Port City".

promulgated in the White Australia policy of 1901 and which formed an intrinsic part of a wider Australian labour ideology.

By the early years of the twentieth century it is estimated that there were some 5,000 Australians in Johannesburg, and that between 1902 and 1914 they played an important role in the development of white trade unionism and the racially exclusionist and segregationist policies they came to adopt. Australian Peter Whiteside, for example, led opposition to the importation of Chinese workers, and he and fellow Australians were active in campaigns to exclude native and coloured workers from the franchise in the Transvaal. The Australian activists were influential because their racial ideology “squared with the aspirations and prejudices of trade union supporters” in South Africa, and two other Australians, Robert Burns Waterston and J.J. Ware, were influential in formulating the white racial policy of the SALP.<sup>13</sup>

The second vector relates to the role of the Cornishmen who, Hyslop argues, were a central component of the imperial working class. Like the Australians, many were drawn from mining communities and their “social cohesion abroad” meant that they exerted an impact within the imperial context well out of proportion to their relatively small numbers. They were a clearly identifiable occupational community and the ideology of “white labour” lay at the very core of their belief system. By 1905, it was estimated that there were perhaps as many as 7,000 Cornish-born English miners in the Rand – although other sources suggest a lower figure of between 4,000 and 5,000 for 1909.<sup>14</sup> Hyslop argued that they were fully fledged supporters of “white labourism” and as such “must have played a remarkable role” in its emergence in South Africa.<sup>15</sup>

Cornishman Tom Mathews, for example, was a very important and influential leader of the miners in the Transvaal, and a firm segregationist figure who supported the Australian policy of Chinese exclusion. He would no doubt expect the support of the Cornish miners in defence of white-labour policies.<sup>16</sup> But relative to their overall number, however (which was considerable greater than the Australian mining community), it would seem that, with the exception of Mathews and some others, the Cornishmen of England did not take a major leadership role in the South African labour movement.

The third and last white labourist vector relates to the role of the British artisans and specifically the members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), who acted as a socially unifying organization insofar as they maintained trade-union branches throughout North America, Australia, and latterly South Africa. And it is here that Hyslop’s research is built

13. Hyslop, “White Labourism”, p. 407.

14. Ticktin, “Origins of the South African Labour Party”, p. 4.

15. Hyslop, “White Labourism”, pp. 409–414.

16. *Idem*, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 165.



on a much more solid base. This syndicated level of protection aided the mobility of ASE members throughout the Empire, and it was the British-trained engineers who assumed the leadership of overseas branches. Before World War I the ASE had 26 branches with 2,600 members in South Africa, and 83 branches with a combined membership of 11,000 across Australia and New Zealand. South African labour leaders, such as J.T. Bain, and W.H. Andrews, emerged from the ranks of the ASE, and while Hyslop argues that these men were not inherently racist “the logic of white unionism tended to trap such men in racist positions”. This was clearly demonstrated through the ASE’s campaign to exclude black workers from skilled positions within the mines, and they used their dominant position within the SALP to ensure that this would not happen. According to Hyslop: “For anyone inclined to seek the roots of labour racism in Afrikaner racial ideologies, it is worth noting that at the first conference of the South African Labour Party in 1909 there was not a single Afrikaans speaking delegate present.”<sup>17</sup> There is no indication of the nature of the debate that took place at this inaugural SALP conference, but it is argued that between then and 1912 the SALP emerged “as a unified political voice for White Labourism”. With the Afrikaner (and the influence of Afrikaner nationalist political ideology) exonerated of all responsibility for the formulation, production, and dissemination of the common ideology of white racism, it was British unionism that was argued to be “directly involved in the creation of South African industrial segregation”.<sup>18</sup>

Wessel P. Visser would tend to support this view, noting that it was British workers, or workers of British origin, who took a leading role in the formation of the SALP and the trade-union movement in South Africa:

The predominantly British character of the miners, the habit of the British workshop, and the tradition of the British trade-union and political wings became established on the Witwatersrand. [...] the trade-union and political wings of the (white) South African labour movement were organized in the same way as were similar bodies and movements in Britain.<sup>19</sup>

The great fear was competition from black workers. White skilled workers – including foreign skilled workers, semiskilled and unskilled whites and indigenous Afrikaners – protected and defended their skill and status by introducing “discriminatory practices on the basis of the

17. *Ibid.*, p. 415.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 404.

19. Visser in fact draws heavily on an earlier historiographical tradition of those writers who Van der Walt considers to have a close association with the South African communist school of historical thought, or those influenced by their writing, method, and approach, and include the work of: Edward Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*; C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic* (London, 1957); M. Horrel, *South African Trade Unionism: A Study of a Divided Working Class* (Johannesburg, 1961), and Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*.

colour-bar in the work place". This ensured that the majority black labour force continued to function as a large pool of cheap and unskilled labour and consequently they remained unorganized.<sup>20</sup>

Visser's main interest is on the emergence of "pro-strike literature" in South Africa but his views in this instance are very close to that of Hyslop, in so far as his general conclusion asserts that pro-strike literature "reflects in essence a 'white labour' discourse". He would include in this the syndicalist Johannesburg *Voice of Labour* which, along with others elements of the socialist press, existed "to fight the battles of the [white] workers". But in his assessment of the South African labour and socialist press he demonstrates that there was an active discourse by white workers on the issue of race and class consciousness in South Africa.<sup>21</sup> He nonetheless supports the view that the leading architects of South Africa's white labour policy were disproportionately British and sees an important role for migrant Scots. The following section considers the role of Scots in South Africa and assesses their role in opposing racism and segregation in South Africa.

#### THE SCOTTISH DIASPORA AND SCOTTISH MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

The historical method and approach adopted in the research and writing for this article is firmly set in a transnational labour-history context, and examines emergent revolutionary syndicalism and labour activism among the immigrant Scottish community in South Africa before 1914. In the book, *The History of the Left in South Africa: Writings of Baruch Hirson*, Hirson considered the evolution of South African syndicalism from 1907, the emergence of the revolutionary syndicalist organ, the *Johannesburg Voice of Labour* (VOL) in 1908, and how Scots such as Archie Crawford and Andrew Dunbar had a considerable influence on these developments.

He noted an ideological link that united the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), which was formed in Scotland 1903. While relatively small (perhaps as few as 600 dedicated members) it had a considerable influence in the Clydeside engineering workshops around Glasgow (and in the large Singer sewing-machine factory in Clydebank) and among railway workers in Edinburgh. The Scottish SLP also had links with South Africa, and Hirson noted how revolutionary syndicalist literature made its way from Scotland (written by "local De Leonists" in Glasgow) to spread the "ideas of industrial unionism" to workers in South Africa. When the anti-war dissenters split from the SALP in 1915 they went on to form the International Socialist League (ISL), and the SLP in South Africa joined with them. It was Andrew Dunbar who was influential in convincing the

20. Visser, "To Fight the Battles of the Workers", pp. 406–407.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 433–434.

ISL to adopt the constitution of the SLP of America and this became ISL policy: “To propagare the principals of International Socialism, Industrial Unionism, and anti-militarism”. It would also be an important step along the way towards the formation of the CPSA in 1921.<sup>22</sup>

The Scottish connection is also recognized by Van der Walt, who has stressed how Dunbar and fellow Scot Jock Campbell from Glasgow “wielded decisive political influence” within the ISL. They were also outspoken in their outright condemnation of racism and the demand for equal rights for black and white workers.<sup>23</sup> Visser too identified links with the South Africa SLP and the Scottish socialist press, subscribing not only to the *Socialist*, official propaganda organ of the SLP in Scotland, but also to the Glasgow *Forward* (Independent Labour Party – ILP) and the Labour Party *Labour Leader* (also printed in Glasgow).<sup>24</sup>

Jonathan Hyslop has also established close ties with Scotland and the influence of an earlier strain of Scottish radicalism characterized in the form of Dundee-born J.T. Bain (“arguably the Transvaal’s first Socialist agitator”). Indeed, Hyslop has noted that the SLP in Scotland was that “rarest of things, a Marxist party almost entirely consisting of industrial workers”, and from its two main bases (in Glasgow and Edinburgh) “De Leon’s teachings filtered out to the Scottish diaspora”. John Campbell, the Irish-born, but Scottish-raised, De Leonist, “was significant in bringing this influence to the Transvaal”, where he led “a small De Leonite circle in Johannesburg. The work of Jack and Ray Simons, Mantzaris, David Tickton and many others, make regularly reference to the influential role played by Scots in the South African labour movement. They note the influence of Robert Stuart from Aberdeen, who arrived in Cape Town in 1901, and helped form the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) in 1902, A.L. Clark (the father of railway trade unionism in South Africa) and Harry Norrie – both socialist and ILP members from Scotland – who formed the ILP Clarion Fellowship in Durban, Natal, in 1903.<sup>25</sup>

22. Baruch Hirson and Yael Hirson, *The History of the Left in South Africa: Writings of Baruch Hirson* (London, 2005), pp. 4–6. Baruch Hirson died in 1999, less than twenty years after his release from Pretoria Local Prison. This is noted by Tom Lodge who contributed to the introduction of Baruch Hirson’s book which Yael Hirson collected and edited. Lodge also noted that Hirson’s work “extended a considerable influence over the development of South African historiography both in Britain and South Africa [...] and inspired a generation of young South African historians”, p. xix.

23. Van der Walt, “The IWW, Revolutionary Syndicalism and Working Class Struggle in South Africa, 1910–1921”, available at <http://www.iww.org/PDF/iwwrevsyndic.pdf>; last accessed 12 January 2010.

24. Visser, “Exporting Trade Unionism and Labour Politics”, p. 155; *idem*, “To Fight the Battles of the Workers”, pp. 407–409.

25. Jonathan Hyslop, “Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish: Military Scottishness and Social Power in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa”, *South African Historical*

It is only in recent years that the socio-historic phenomenon of “diaspora” has been the subject of serious critical study in Scotland. Scotland’s history, argues David Armitage, is unquestionably “a transnational history because the Scots have been such a prominently international people”, and today there are an estimated 25 million people of Scottish descent living outside Scotland. Scottish migration and Scottish migrants are no less a part of Scottish history *and that no history*, or cultural understanding, of Scotland “could be complete without an account of the Scottish diaspora”. Part of that history is to be found in South Africa where, noted John MacKenzie, the mineral revolution and industrial boom of the later nineteenth century “stimulated a remarkable migration from Scotland”.<sup>26</sup>

Scottish migration to South Africa was essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon and many settled after the Boer War. It was a Scottish ticket to South Africa, and Elaine McFarland has estimated that nearly 15 per cent of all Scots elisting in the Imperial Yeomanry remained behind after their service ended “compared with an estimated 5.3 per cent for Imperial Yeomanry recruits from the United Kingdom as a whole”. She based this on an analysis of surviving discharge papers, noting that 25 per cent were missing or incomplete, but concluded that “the total number who remained [was] likely to be rather higher”. Three contingents of the Imperial Yeomanry were sent to South Africa and among the third contingent (1901–1902) the Scots numbered almost 19 per cent of total British recruitment.<sup>27</sup> A random sample based on 285 records of the men who comprised the third contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry, held at the University of Dundee, has confirmed that a figure of 27 per cent were discharged in South Africa. Indeed, one of that number was Archibald Crawford – the future syndicalist who produced the Johannesburg *Voice of Labour* – who was recruited in Glasgow on 6 January 1902. Indeed, other evidence points to sizeable Scottish communities at Bloemfontein, Ladysmith, and Kimberley even before the war had ended.<sup>28</sup>

*Journal*, 52 (2002), pp. 96–114; see also *idem*, “A Ragged Trousered Philanthropist and the Empire: Robert Tressell in South Africa”, *History Workshop Journal*, 51 (2001), pp. 64–86; *idem*, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, pp. 168, 184–185, and *idem*, “A Scottish Socialist Reads Carlyle”; see also Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa*, ch. 4: “White Labour Policies”, and ch 7: “The Thunder of the Left”; Tickin, “Origins of the South African Labour Party”.

26. David Armitage, “The Scottish Diaspora”, in Jenny Wormald (ed.), *Scotland: A History* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 272–273; see also John A. MacKenzie with Nigel R. Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race, 1772–1914*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester, 2007), pp. 161–162.

27. Elaine W. McFarland, “‘Empire-Enlarging Genius’: Scottish Imperial Yeomanry in the Boer War”, *War in History*, 13 (2006), pp. 299–328, 318–319.

28. “Defenders of Empire or Economic Conscripts?: An analysis of Scottish Recruitment to the Third Contingent of the Imperial Yeomanry, 1901 to 1902”; this is a pilot project undertaken by Derek Patrick and William Kenefick, School of Humanities, History, University of Dundee,

The first South African census in 1911 showed that the Scots represented 20 per cent of the 181,891 British-born settlers, and that they “were more likely to migrate to South Africa than the Irish or Welsh” (who numbered 8 per cent and 2 per cent respectively). According to John MacKenzie, the Scots had “a major effect upon the mining boom on the Transvaal”. In total 48 per cent of all Scots migrating to South Africa settled in the Transvaal, 26 per cent in the Cape, 19 per cent in Natal, and 7 per cent in the Orange Free State. Some 37,138 Scots were recorded in the 1911 census, of which 24,387 were male and 12,741 female, and the overall Scottish percentage in South Africa was “double what it should have been proportionate to the population of the British Isles”. There was also a dramatic drop in Irish and Welsh emigration to South Africa after 1902, but this was offset by a dramatic increase in Scottish settlement. By 1911 the ratio of Scots to English in South Africa was 1 to 3.5 persons as opposed to 1 to 8 for Britain and Ireland combined (a figure closer to 1:9 if the total number of those leaving Scotland between spring 1911 and autumn 1912 were to be included).

As will be demonstrated below, it was English and Scottish migrants who, in the main, led the South African labour movement before 1914, and in this leadership role the ratio was more or less 1 to 1. This demonstrates that the Scots had a disproportionate impact on the development of the labour and trade-union movement in South Africa before 1914. MacKenzie also argues that the Scots exported many aspects of their “civil society and cultural forms to South Africa”. Indeed, Jonathan Hyslop has taken up this theme and persuasively argued that the Scots despatched their social tension and divisions as well as their “propensity” for radical “class-identified” politics, which were imported with them into South Africa.<sup>29</sup> From this perspective, the Scots are clearly important to our understanding of the transnational labour history of South Africa: as

and is financed by a small research grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland. Other evidence suggests a growing Scottish presence in the northern territories of South Africa. In a letter sent home to Scotland reporting on the relief of Ladysmith, and published in *The Fifehire Advertiser*, 3 March 1900, it is suggested there were a “large number of Kirkcaldy men inside the town”, and some time later another article appeared in the *The Fifehire Advertiser*, 21 April 1900, which claimed that there was a “large amount of Scots in Bloomfontein”. In the book by “a Scottish Trooper J.P. Sturrock”, *The Fifes in South Africa* (Cupar, 1903), p. 31, the author spoke of his impression of Kimberley and noted that the local hotel the “Queen’s” was owned by a man from Forfarshire who was also a colonel in the local volunteer corps. It was also reported in the *Fife Herald and Journal*, 14 March 1900, that the Mayor of Ladysmith was Joseph Farquhar from Perth in Scotland and that his brother owned a chemist’s shop on St John Street, Ladysmith. For Archie Crawford’s military record, see Records of the Attestation and Discharge Papers of the Imperial Yeomanry, National Archives, Kew, London: record no. 43800, Pte Archibald Crawford, 142nd Company, 31st Battalion, Imperial Yeomanry (Fincastle’s Horse). He enlisted 6 January 1902 and his trade was entered as “engine fitter”. He was discharged at Cape Town.

29. MacKenzie, *The Scots in South Africa*, pp. 161–162, 169.

important as the English, more so than the Irish and Welsh, and as influential as the Australians and the New Zealanders – or indeed the English-Cornish mining community – whose place in the annals of South African labour history is well established and readily acknowledged. This is sufficient reason to incorporate the story of the Scots within the wider narrative of South African labour history.<sup>30</sup>

#### THE SCOTS AND THE ANTI-RACIAL LEFT-WING IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is one of the aims of this article to acknowledge more clearly the role and activity of Scots in the South African labour movement. John MacKenzie asserts that the Scots played a disproportionately influential role in terms of their impact on the environment, evangelicalism, and business, noting too that “Scottish medical schools were an important source for doctors for South Africa”. He also acknowledges the Scottish influence within the labour movement in South Africa and that they were largely drawn “from the depressed working-class spaces and strata within Scotland”. Crucially, the Scots took their class-identified brand of radical politics with them whenever they ventured abroad: “they exported their discontents, their rage at capitalism and big business, and their sense that something needed to be done in South Africa”.<sup>31</sup>

Hyslop’s own research has done much to uncover an important and influential role for Scots in South Africa and in particularly his study of the life and times of Dundee-born James Thompson Bain – culminating in the publication of his biography *The Notorious Syndicalist, J.T. Bain: A Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa*. Hyslop skilfully takes the reader through Bain’s life and the early history of the South African trade-union and labour movement, and notes, for example, that it was a mixture of “Australian, northern English and Scots militancy” that helped strengthen the relatively weak trade-union structure in the early twentieth century, and that “several effective Australians and Scots” trade unionists helped achieve strong trade unionism in South Africa.<sup>32</sup>

In the articles “Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish”, and “A Scottish Socialist Reads Carlyle in Johannesburg Prison, June 1900”, Hyslop considers the activities of Scots in South Africa in much greater detail. The main concern with the latter was how the literary culture of the imperial working class defined their intellectual and political development and demonstrated that “British working class culture [...] was a

30. Hyslop, “Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish”, p. 98.

31. MacKenzie, *The Scots in South Africa*, p. 204; see also ch. 6: “Professionals: The Church and Education”, and ch. 7: “Medicine, Business and Radicals”.

32. Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, pp. 162–163.

globalised one; the world of the empire of white labour".<sup>33</sup> In this article Hyslop was back on familiar ground in his further considerations of white labourism. The other article considered the impact of military Scottishness in South Africa. This demonstrated the manner in which the Scots imported many facets of their culture and traditions to South Africa, and that South African society was keen to embrace and absorb elements of the Scottish martial tradition. With the establishment of the Cape Town Highlanders and the Transvaal Scottish regiments, South Africa became part of the "global politics of military Scottishness".<sup>34</sup>

Despite the clear evidence of a significant Scottish involvement in South Africa, it does seem curious that Hyslop does not make more of the information he unearths. The Scottish influence within the labour press is one area worthy of further investigation, and in recognizing the role of Scot Archie Crawford in connection with the launch and management of the *Voice of Labour* (*VofL*) Hyslop is clearly aware of this. It was through the columns of the *VofL* that Crawford and his band of fellow Scots – including James Davidson from Montrose in north-east Scotland – decried the "white labour protectionism" of SALP and that "segregation went against socialist principles". Indeed, this same group of Scots were also heavily involved in forming the South African Socialist Society.<sup>35</sup> There are also Scottish hands at work with the foundation of the *Eastern Record* by SALP members who were against the "racial protectionism" expounded by the Gibraltar-born SALP leader F.H.P. Creswell. The driving force behind the *Eastern Record* was Glasgow-born Christina Barnet (secretary of the Benoni Women's Labour League) and her husband Robert (also a Scot) – both heavily involved in left-wing journalism.<sup>36</sup> This small but influential group of Scots do not comfortably fit the racialist white-labourist profile presented by Hyslop. Despite the clear evidence of wide-scale Scottish involvement before 1914 the Scots are not accorded any pre-eminent role in the history of the development of the South African labour movement, or the radical groups, associations, and parties representing its left wing: primacy is given once again to the role of the Australians. Put simply, the Australians were ultimately responsible for the promulgating the "common ideology of White Labourism" and as such would need to figure prominently in Hyslop's work.<sup>37</sup>

33. Hyslop, "A Scottish Socialist Reads Carlyle".

34. *Idem*, "Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish", pp. 96–98; see also E.W. McFarland, "A Coronach in Stone", in C.M.M. Macdonald and E.W. McFarland (eds), *Scotland and the Great War* (East Linton, 1997), pp. 1–10.

35. Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 187.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 267–268.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 164–166; see also Hyslop, "White Labourism", pp. 405–409, 419.

According to David Ticktin, by 1905 British workers predominated in South Africa constituting over 85 per cent of all European workers in the Transvaal and almost 70 per cent of the miners at Kimberley. Ticktin produced a list of thirty-seven leading activists in the South African labour movement in the early twentieth century and provided place-of-birth details for twenty-six of these. Ten were born in England, nine in Scotland, three were Irish (one was T. Maginess, an ASE member who learned his trade and his politics in Glasgow), two were Australian, one a German Jew, and one a Gibraltarian, F.H.P. Creswell, who became leader of the SALP. The English and Scottish clearly dominate and this would suggest their influence was not inconsiderable. Alexander Seaton Raitt, for example, organized the engineers and later became a Labour Member of the Transvaal Legislative Assembly; John Reid, a leading South African ASE member (who in Scotland had been secretary of the ASE in Glasgow – one of the most militant ASE branches in Britain), became a member of the Transvaal Legislative Assembly; and William Wallace Lorimer, founder of the Scottish National Council of Shop Assistants and a well-known ILP member, was a delegate to the Witwatersrand Trades Council.

Ticktin's evidence does not suggest as significant a role for Australian labour activists and there is little evidence of any widespread Cornish miners' influence. Miners from Scotland, northern England, and Wales had political representation, he argued, but generally they were more closely associated with liberalism than with the policies of the SALP. In relation to the labour movement in South Africa, therefore, the miners played only "a minor political role in proportion to their numbers", and it would seem unlikely that Cornishmen greatly influenced the movement – beyond the fact that they formed a sizable constituency and a large voting block.<sup>38</sup> Hyslop himself notes their close association with the "crew culture" and their "racially and ethnically exclusionary labour practices". Indeed, they not only attempted to shut out black and Asian workers but also Afrikaners and other white workers.<sup>39</sup> Such evidence suggests that the Cornish were attempting (unsuccessfully) to keep the mining industry Cornish rather than white.

#### BRITISH WORKERS AND WHITE LABOURISM

Skilled migrants began to enter South Africa after vast deposits of diamonds and gold were discovered there towards the end of the nineteenth century. There was a large contingent of British miners and skilled tradesmen and, as demonstrated above, a substantial number were Scots. In January 1914

38. Ticktin, "Origins of the South African Labour Party", pp. 4 and 5; see also *Dictionary of South African Biography*, I (Pretoria, 1968), entry for R.S. Raitt.

39. Hyslop, "White Labourism", p. 413.



the South African authorities deported nine leading labour activists to Britain because of their involvement in the widespread syndicalist-style strikes on the Rand during 1913 and early 1914. Eight of the deportees were British-born and five of them were Scots. One of the Scottish deportees was Archie Crawford, founder of the revolutionary syndicalist Johannesburg *Voice of Labour*, and James Thompson Bain – described by one Cape Town newspaper as “the notorious syndicalist”.<sup>40</sup> Both men formed part of an influential group of Scots who became important figures in South African labour history.

Jonathan Hyslop rightly argues that British working-class culture was being exported through mass colonial migration and was expressed through the labour and trade-union press. Crucially, one of the most important aspect of this exchange of ideas was that it encouraged support for “white labourism” in South Africa as promulgated in the White Australia Policy after its adoption by the Australian government in 1901.<sup>41</sup> In the years before the Great War, he argued, the imperial working class was therefore “making itself white”, and this was reflected also in the growth of working-class racism in Britain. This was clearly evident in the enthusiastic reception accorded the nine deportees by British workers in 1914, because it exposed the inherent racism of the British labour movement at that time.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, in reporting the plight of the deportees the British labour press was “responsible for some of the worst racial incitement of the time” – a point that we will return to shortly.<sup>43</sup>

There is no doubt that there was a significant and increasing movement of workers between Britain and South Africa, as well as Australia, Canada, and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. John MacKenzie noted the example of the Scottish stonemason, Robert Cruickshank Graham, who immigrated first to America, to return to Scotland before travelling on to Canada and finally settling in South Africa by the early twentieth century. He also noted that Graham – like Crawford, Dunbar, and both Campbells (Scots-born Jock and Irish-born John – raised from childhood in Glasgow), “strongly opposed the colour bar”. British and Scottish labour leaders also visited these locations, and labour leaders and activists in the dominions – such as Archie Crawford – visited industrial centres overseas where they were exposed to radical and extremist views, and these connections were further strengthened by the broad dissemination of British and Scottish socialist publications in South Africa. After the Boer War other mainly white and English-speaking workers settled in South Africa, including demobilized British, Australasian,

40. *Idem*, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 3.

41. *Idem*, “White Labourism”, p. 419.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 398–421.

43. *Idem*, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, pp. 254–255.

and Canadian soldiers and migrants from America, Europe, and an increasing number of Russian Jews. There was thus a wide variety of political views to be heard, and as Wessell Visser suggests, “most strands of socialist thought and labour politics in the English-speaking world were represented in the white South African labour movement”.<sup>44</sup>

South Africa routinely welcomed well-known labour activist and political thinkers, and they too made an impact on the South African labour movement. According to David Ticktin, the visit of Scottish labour leader, James Keir Hardie, inspired fellow Scot Archie Crawford to establish the *Voice of Labour* in support of Keir Hardie’s “colour-blind” political ideology, his opposition to the colour bar, and his defence of the Cape’s non-racial franchise.<sup>45</sup> But Keir Hardie’s visit in 1908 was also the cause of a major row among South African miners, because he advocated that they should open up their trade union to black workers, and more generally because of his support for Indian nationalism. He spoke about labour and social equality for native and coloured people, but the level of hostility he faced in some quarters, particularly from the miners, fits all too well the racist “white-labourist” profile outlined by Hyslop.<sup>46</sup> Wilfred Harrison wrote about Keir Hardie’s visit in his memoirs and, despite his hostile reception, and under the auspices of SDF, he did get his chance to speak and when he did he asserted that “Socialism has no national or geographical boundaries. We are a world brotherhood and Comrades in the great fight for the unity of the world’s workers.”<sup>47</sup>

Despite Keir Hardie’s less than welcoming reception at both Durban and Johannesburg (he was rather better received in Bloemfontein) it would seem clear that among the SDF in Cape Town and other sections of the socialist left there were anti-racists who were willing to question the ideology of “racial segregation and white protectionism”. This does not mean that there was unanimity of purpose, but there was clearly much confusion on how best to address this question of race and class in South Africa. But Hyslop would argue that this was not simply a South African problem; it was one which reverberated across the British Empire and affected workers in Britain. But this is far from clear.

When reporting on the British Socialist Party (BSP) conference in April 1914, for example, *The Times* noted that a motion was passed decrying the

44. Visser, “To Fight the Battles of the Workers”, p. 406: note on Crawford overseas journey, p. 409.

45. Ticktin, “Origins of the South African Labour Party”, p. 4.

46. W.H. Fraser, “Keir Hardie: Radical, Socialist, Feminist”, *Études Écossaises*, 10 (2005): “La Réputation – de figures écossaises historique célèbre”, pp. 103–115; see also K.O. Morgan, “Britain’s Vietnam? Lloyd George, Keir Hardie and the Importance of the ‘Pro-Boers’”, in W.R. Lewis (ed.), *Still More Adventures with Britannia* (London, 2003), pp. 51–74.

47. Harrison, “Keir Hardie’s Visit”, in *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa*.

South African government and its attempt to destroy trade unionism and its effort to get fresh supplies of cheap labour whether “black, white or yellow”. This was followed by another resolution that was agreed “without discussion”, expressing “sympathy with the Indians in South Africa in their endeavour to receive the elementary rights of British citizenship”.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps this suggests a degree of ambivalence on the part of the BSP: a show of solidarity with the imperial working class on the one hand, while on the other offering a critique of British imperialism in defence of the rights of Indian workers in South Africa. It should be noted that no mention was made of the rights of black and coloured workers, and the expression of anti-imperialist views may not necessarily point to anti-racism. But a discourse on racism was nevertheless evidently taking place.

On other occasions the case is more clear-cut and transparent. In December 1913 a mass meeting of between 6,000 and 7,000 people was held in Waverley Market, Edinburgh to honour Jim Larkin, recently released from prison for his part in organizing the Dublin transport workers. The darling of the Scottish radical left, R.B. Cunninghame Graham M.P., opened the meeting and explained “the meaning of Larkinism”, and asserted that there was widespread rank-and-file support for the principals of syndicalism and direct industrial action, but importantly: “[Larkinism] stood for revolt. It stood for their Indian fellow-subjects in the Transvaal. It stood against the intolerable tyranny dictated by the oil capitalists in America in regard to Mexico. It stood for freedom of the weak and oppressed.”<sup>49</sup>

Just days before, a similar meeting was held in Glasgow in honour of Larkin which was attended by 3,000 people. Tom Johnston presided and John Wheatley (of the Catholic Workingmen’s Association) made the opening address, noting Larkin’s fight against the “dictators” and English trade-union leaders (a reference to James Sexton of the National Union of Dock Labourers, whose Scottish organizer was James O’Connor Kesseck, and the seamen’s leader Havelock Wilson) and their disregard of the wishes of the rank and file. When Larkin spoke he stressed that he stood on a platform broad enough to accommodate “the Scottish and Irish workers [...] the Saxon and any other race. It was the platform of human liberty”.<sup>50</sup> These were clear expressions of international solidarity and support for syndicalism and industrial unionism in Britain before 1914.

48. “Reporting on the Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference of the BSP”, *The Times*, 14 April 1914.

49. *The Times*, 13 December 1913.

50. William Kenefick, *Red Scotland: The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left, c.1872 to 1932* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 118–121 for discussion on “Larkinism” and use of direct action: for discussion on rank-and-file industrial unionism and reaction against the cautious industrial conservatism of English trade union leaders, see pp. 123–129.

As Neville Kirk suggests, this socialist critique of British imperialism stressed the need for international solidarity with “coloured” indigenous and migrant peoples, and as such “was far more searching and anti-racist” than some elements of the literature suggest.<sup>51</sup>

#### WHITE LABOURISM AND THE BRITISH IMPERIAL WORKING CLASS

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the Hyslop thesis is his “cultural-mutation” theory in which he emphasizes the conversion of the British working class to white labourism. Indeed, confirmation of this conversion was evident with the overwhelming support shown for the nine South African deportees when they arrived in Britain in late February 1914, and the manner in which they were actively “feted” by a wide section of the British working class over the following months. “The discourse of the reception is revealing” because it demonstrated that white labourism was “part of the fabric of the British Labour movement”. Indeed, one example employed by Hyslop refers to a meeting in Glasgow which welcomed three of the Scottish deportees at a gathering addressed by Bob Smillie, the Scottish miners’ leader, and “the legendary revolutionary Marxist” John MacLean. The salient features and finer points of this meeting will be discussed more fully below, but for Hyslop, who provides little detail of what actually transpired at the meeting, it was clear evidence of a wider support for “white labourism” within the British labour movement.<sup>52</sup>

There are four main points to consider which, it is argued, demonstrate support for white labourism in the British context. The first takes the form of an example drawn from a report printed in the Glasgow-based Independent Labour Party (ILP) weekly socialist publication, *Forward*. This reported on James O’Connor Kessack – Scottish secretary of the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL), and representative of the National Transport Workers’ Federation (NTWF) – who assumed a leading role in the campaign to exclude “Lascars” (Asian and African seamen) from employment on British ships. Kessack clearly employed overtly racist language, and when speaking of the labour conflict in the Rand he ominously proclaimed that it was “the preliminary skirmishes of a great battle which will determine whether African and Asiatic shall displace the White”.<sup>53</sup> The second point draws on a statement reported widely in the socialist press (on this occasion the *Clarion*) that the Botha government was acting “unconstitutionally” in forcing the deportations in

51. N. Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins: Globalisation, Workers and Labour Movements in Britain, the USA and Australia from the 1880s to 1914* (London, 2003), p. 154, and pp. 204–205.

52. Hyslop, “White Labourism”, p. 416; see also *Forward*, 4 April 1914.

53. *Forward*, 11 April 1914.

**THE MAN WHO SAVED SOCIETY.**



Figure 1. Cartoon by J. R. Millar reprinted in the Independent Labour Party publication, *Forward*, 21 February 1914. In the foreground is a Rand mine-owner warmly embracing an armed Boer militiaman, and in the background a manacled white worker. To what extent do the facial features of the cartoon character, however, “represent the worst kind of hostile stereotyping of Jews”?

the first instance, and that British workers were now the “true defenders of the Imperial enterprise against self-interested capitalists who were betraying it”.<sup>54</sup> Thirdly, the imperial working class was forced to close ranks because it saw that a greater threat came from “all the social forces that could be represented as non-British”; not simply Africans and Asians “but also white ‘others’”. Finally, and perhaps most importantly:

The extent to which white workers had been subject to repression in South Africa was seen as a breaching of the thresholds of violence which could be acceptably used against white British citizens. It was taken as presaging a threat to the British labour movement in a way in which repression of African or Asian colonial subject was not.<sup>55</sup>

Hyslop made much of the fact that, in its coverage of the deportations, the left-wing press supplemented reports with racist cartoons. One illustration in *Forward* is suggested to have promoted anti-Semitism, insofar as the Rand mine-owner in the foreground was depicted as “a stereotypical, fat Jewish capitalist” warmly embracing an armed Boer militiaman, while standing forlornly in the background is a “clean-cut manacled [white] worker”.<sup>56</sup> By contrast, another illustration depicted a fat British capitalist with large mutton-chop whiskers, irately swatting nine very large angry mosquitoes emerging from a box signed “with General Smuts’ Compliments”. Each insect had the name of one of the nine deportees etched on its wings and underneath the illustration was the caption, “A Hot Time in Store for The Bosses”. Put simply, in these as in other illustrations the “bosses” and the “capitalist class” are typically depicted as “fat and bloated” whatever their race or ethnicity.<sup>57</sup>

Is Hyslop justified in asking whether this cartoon promoted an anti-Semitic view, and if so, does it add a further dimension to the racial discourse taking place in Scotland? It is the case that Jews were migrating to Scotland in ever-increasing numbers in the decade before the Great War. The overwhelming majority settled in the Gorbals slum area of Glasgow’s south side where they lived in considerable poverty, and cheek by jowl with the Catholic and Protestant Irish. It is well documented in Scottish social and labour historiography, however, that the Jews suffered little discrimination or overt anti-Semitism in Scotland. Indeed, the Jewish community itself held the view that Scotland was the only country in Europe not to have shed Jewish blood or persecuted the Jews. This is not to say that anti-Semitism was absent from the racial discourse taking place in Britain at this time, but in Scotland “the most traditional and damaging

54. *The Clarion*, 13 February 1914.

55. Hyslop, “White Labourism”, pp. 417–418.

56. *Forward*, 21 February 1914.

57. *Forward*, 7 March 1914.

## A Hot Time in Store for The Bosses.



Figure 2. Cartoon by J. R. Millar reprinted in the Independent Labour Party publication, *Forward*, 7 March 1914. Etched on the wings of the insects are the names of the nine deportees, five of whom were Scottish. They are David McKerrell, Andrew Watson, Archie Crawford, W. Livingstone, and emerging last from the box (signed with General Smuts' compliments), J.T. Bain.

form of racism had long been anti-Irish and anti-Catholic in nature". The Jews were also fully integrated within the labour and trade-union movement in Glasgow and at specially organized events and gatherings (in support of political prisoners in imperial Russia for example) and at May Day Rallies "the international sympathies" of the Scottish people were revealed in "Russian, Yiddish, Lithuanian and Polish alongside English" as well as Gaelic (the language of the Scottish Highlanders).<sup>58</sup> Indeed, viewed from this perspective the level of inter-ethnic mingling and integration in Glasgow suggests a commonality with the cosmopolitan nature of the labour movement at Cape Town, rather than a show of support and solidarity for the ideology of white labourism more commonly associated with the workers of the Witwatersrand.

#### THE SOUTH AFRICAN VOICE OF ANTI-RACISM

It is evident from the work of Lucien van der Walt and Wessel Visser that while some "white Socialists" believed that "black workers should have political rights", as long as they functioned as "semi-slaves" they had to be treated as "unfair competition". This resulted in their exclusion from the trade-union and labour movement and the political process.<sup>59</sup> Van der Walt readily acknowledges the existence of white labourism, but he also stresses the strength of opposition to it.

It is clear that during this period of intense industrialization native rights were savagely suppressed and that "liberal Imperial rules of equality before the law were supplanted by exploitative colonial capitalism". As Neville Kirk put it, labour was facing a global onslaught at this time "launched [...] by corporate capital, the courts and the state".<sup>60</sup> In South Africa as in Canada, and British Columbia in particular, the law seemed at all times to be influenced and shaped by the interests of monopoly capitalism, and a central plank of this approach was the search for alternative supplies of cheap labour. For most white socialists in South Africa, therefore, non-white labour was not only cheap and racially inferior, but it was easily exploited by capitalism. By contrast, in Britain,

58. William Kenefick, "Jewish and Catholic Irish Relations: The Glasgow Waterfront c.1880 to 1914", in David Cesarani and Gemma Romain (eds), *Jews and Port Cities 1590-1990: Commerce, Community and Cosmopolitanism*, special issue, *Journal of Jewish Culture and History*, 7 (2004), pp. 215-234; *idem*, "Comparing the Jewish and Irish Communities in Twentieth Century Scotland", in David Cesarani, Tony Kushner, and Milton Shain (eds) *Place and Displacement in Jewish History and Memory: Zakor v'Makor*, special issue, *Journal of Jewish Culture and History*, 9 (2007), pp. 60-78; *idem*, *Red Scotland*, pp. 96-97.

59. Visser, "To Fight the Battles of the Workers", pp. 400-434; Van der Walt, "Bakunin's Heirs in South Africa", pp. 67-89; *idem*, "Reflections on Race and Anarchism in South Africa", "The Influence of the IWW in Southern Africa", and "The First Globalisation".

60. Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins*, p. 37.



the relationship between labour and the legislative system was less confrontational and more transparent in its operation. Thus, Kirk argues, while the central thrust of the socialist message in Britain asserted “class over race and racism”, in South Africa, and particularly in Australia, there was a “loud and even proud assertion of race over class”.<sup>61</sup>

Did this mean that the white working class and their institutions avoided any consideration of the position of black and coloured people living in the Transvaal?<sup>62</sup> It is clear that there was a growing popularity for “white labourism”, and Hyslop is undoubtedly correct in stressing a tangible and global interconnectedness between sections of the white imperial working class. But is this the final proof that “the white labourism of the Empire and the British labour movement were inseparably intermeshed”?<sup>63</sup> Kirk would agree that there was “an active and lively flow and interchange of personnel, ideas and debate among socialists in Britain, South Africa and Australia”.<sup>64</sup> But Hyslop takes this argument on to another level by arguing that, like J.T. Bain, “most” white workers simply excluded black workers from their fulminations on the inequalities of the capitalist system.

It is at this point he presents two fundamental assertions. First, that British historians, while recognizing that British working-class culture was exported through mass colonial migration, tend to overlook how “this mutated abroad” and was then in turn re-exported to exert an influence on the Labour movement in Britain. Secondly, that in charting the development of the British labour movement into the colonial realm, British historians find themselves facing an immediate ideological dilemma – for they are brought up against the reality of how, in places like Australia, South Africa, or Canada, the culture of British labour fitted neatly into the politics of white dominion. Thus, British historians find it easier to avoid the subject of white racialism.

But is this rather too simplistic? Perhaps not entirely, but Neville Kirk is clearly a prime example of a British historian who, far from avoiding the issue of race, makes it a central component of his research. Indeed, his findings reveal that there was considerable debate on this issue both in Britain and throughout the dominions before 1914. Hyslop’s analysis does not make that entirely clear, and his line of argument does not adequately account for a “duality” of opinion on issues such as the “native question”. For example, Alexander Seaton Raitt vehemently disapproved of the extension of municipal franchise to non-whites – he even opposed the formation of an Independent Labour Party – but he was nonetheless

61. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

62. Hyslop, “A Scottish Socialist Reads Carlyle”, p. 646.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 653–655.

64. Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins*, p. 150.

“outspoken” in his concern over the welfare of black miners (although this could be construed as a form of sympathetic white working-class paternalism).<sup>65</sup> This example demonstrates, however, that there was debate about race and class within the labour movement in South Africa and it was not simply a marginalized issue. The editorials, articles, and contributors to the columns of the *VofL* illustrate only too well that class- and race-consciousness was discussed and debated, as were racist and anti-racist issues. Kirk would agree that the native question was problematic, but it nevertheless formed part of a more complex socialist debate “in which class consciousness both mingled and vied for supremacy with racism”. It was not clear evidence of a uniform racism “affecting the imperial working class”.<sup>66</sup>

The *Cape Times* reported extensively on the Labour Party Conference in April 1914 and a motion on whether “coloured persons” (of mixed race) should be admitted to the SALP – although they were clearly not discussing the admission of African, Indian, or Chinese labour. Miners’ delegates had spoken in favour of the motion “providing they [the coloureds] gave guarantees that they agree to the party’s policy of upholding and advancing white standards”. While this does not say much about the expansiveness of their political vision, notwithstanding the fact that coloured males already had voting rights in the Cape, it showed a willingness to widen the parameters of the debate and at least begin the process of challenging restrictive and discriminatory practices.

It was all too much for the Afrikaner delegates, who voted against and declared “that they would not sit in any conference with coloured people”. They boycotted the next day’s proceedings. Afrikaner racial ideology now mingled with British white labourism for the same sentiments were clearly expressed in the *Evening Chronicle*, which condemned outright any decision to admit coloureds, reporting that when the motion was raised on the fourth day of conference “the hall was only half full when compared with the previous day”.<sup>67</sup> Considered from another perspective, at least half the delegates to the conference remained to debate the issue.

There was a lively, if at times quarrelsome, debate over the issue of class and race conducted through the columns of the socialist and labour press in Britain, South Africa, and elsewhere. This is borne out in an article that appeared in *Forward* in April 1914, reporting on the meeting addressed by

65. Ticktin, “Origins of the South African Labour Party”, pp. 4 and 5; see also *Dictionary of South African Biography*, I, entry for R.S. Raitt.

66. Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins*, p. 154; see also n. 26, and reference to “Jonathan Hyslop’s article on ‘White Labourism’”.

67. “Report on the SALP Conference”, *The Cape Times* and *The Evening Chronicle*, 3 April 1914.

three of the Scots deportees, Andrew Watson, Archie Crawford, and David McKerrell. The meeting was described as a “Red Affair” and it was stated that the “rebel” element dominated the gathering of some 3,000 eager listeners.

The Scottish miners’ leader Bob Smillie and spoke of a declaration of “class war”: “If the workers were afraid to speak of class war [...] it was plain from what had taken place in America, British Columbia, South Africa, that employers were not afraid to put the class war theory into operation.” John Maclean followed Smillie and, in supporting the motion, “hissed” his disgust of a capitalist class “bereft of religion and humanity, and whose only morality was to rob the people”.<sup>68</sup> Watson – originally a native of Greenock – told his story of the Transvaal Strike and “in an unassuming fashion” went over the events surrounding the Trades Hall siege in Johannesburg in January 1914. He spoke of receiving a half-hour warning to surrender or face the consequences and, with a field gun aimed at the door of the Trades Hall, they had little choice but to comply. But he felt that it was the proudest moment of his life when he later walked through the streets of Johannesburg accompanied by a lusty and rousing rendition of the “Red Flag” and he promised the gathering that he would be returning to South Africa.<sup>69</sup>

Next up was Crawford, a native of Springburn in Glasgow. He first stressed his syndicalist credentials, and then provoked great mirth by recounting his arrival in South Africa clothed, as he then was, “in military garb and armed with a gun to fight for my King and Country”. That was twelve years ago “when he was eighteen [...] so perhaps the assembled could forgive him”. He then spoke of the dividends reaped by the “Capitalists of the Transvaal” – 400 per cent in 1913, and 500 per cent the year before that – and the plight of black Africans, noting that when such great profits were being paid out “native workers were housed in huts” that made the slums of Glasgow (without doubt some of the worst in Europe) seem like paradise. They were paid sixpence a day and owing to bad conditions “died like rotten sheep”. To cut down on burial expenses the companies would not provide single coffins but instead put up to six workers at a time in big holes.

68. John MacLean was at this time a leading propagandist for the BSP, and also organized Marxist education classes all over the central industrial belt of Scotland. He was a regular contributor to all the socialist newspapers such as the Labour Party’s *Labour Leader*, the SDF organ, *Justice*, and the BSP *Clarion*. MacLean was viewed by Lenin as one of three leading revolutionaries in Europe by 1917, along with Adler in Austria, and Liebknecht in Germany. In 1918 Maclean was appointed Soviet Consul in Great Britain. The Paris-based *Nache Slovo* also ran an article on MacLean and the trade-union and labour movement in Scotland; see Kenefick, *Red Scotland*, ch. 7.

69. *Forward*, 4 April 1914.

Hyslop might well argue that his words did no more than express a humanitarian sentiment, and did not necessarily challenge the racial paternalism of the audience – although this would assume that the audience held such racial pretensions in the first place. Hyslop acknowledges that some supporters of “the nine” – including British and Scottish labour leader James Keir Hardie – were “sympathetic to the condition of black workers in South Africa” but for the “duration of the deportees campaign” such considerations were put aside “in order to concentrate on what they appear to have seen as the more basic socialist issue – the need to defend trade unionism”.<sup>70</sup> Crawford evidently did not ignore the issue of native rights when he addressed his audience at Glasgow. He could have spoken on other subjects, but he chose instead to highlight the injustice faced by black workers. Does this suggest that the audience was largely sympathetic to the subject of his address? At least he was allowed to make his case before an audience of 3,000, unlike Keir Hardie, whose meetings were disrupted because he argued for the inclusion of black and coloured workers into white trade unions in South Africa some six years earlier.

Hyslop argued that Bain and other leaders avoided speaking on black working-class issues – something that the great and much-loved Tom Mann was also accused of, despite being urged to do so by the Johannesburg *VofL*.<sup>71</sup> But Archie Crawford, as he had done at Glasgow, did speak on black working-class issues and through the *VofL* he and fellow-Scots James Davidson and Frank Murray fulminated against the policy of white labourism:

A “white labour ideal” for South Africa is perhaps the wildest dream of the most disordered imagination. It is incapable of realisation simply because it is physically impossible.

Self-styled “labour leaders” who have no intention of abolishing the capitalist system of ownership, actually argue as if the representatives of capital will legislate against what is a fundamental condition of capitalist exploitation, namely, the maintenance of a steady supply of cheap skilled labour [...].

And the whole of Government, which is merely their executive committee, will be at their disposal to render the exploitation of the natives an easy task.<sup>72</sup>

Later in October 1909, Crawford outlined his impressions of the South African Labour Party Conference of that year, where he moved an amendment to a motion on “Native Policy”; which clearly hit at the heart of his underlying political philosophy: “That this Conference recognises only one division in Society [...] that between the Capitalist class and the

70. Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 254.

71. J. White, *Tom Mann: Lives of the Left* (Manchester 1991), pp. 153–154.

72. “The Economics of the Native Problems”, *Voice of Labour*, 14 January 1909.

Working class, and can imagine no principle or policy that is not applicable irrespective of colour.”<sup>73</sup> His amendment was “refused” and his analysis of what occurred during the debate undoubtedly illustrated the extent of the race problem, but it also demonstrated that this was very much a live issue.

Some regular contributors to the *VofL* were clearly sympathetic to the “colour-blind” ideology of the editors. Other correspondents held more extreme racist views which prompted the editors to state that “We hear all sides, but are not responsible for any of the views expressed by our correspondents.”<sup>74</sup> Perhaps this was just as well for, while some socialists closely associated with the paper’s viewpoint, others made no attempt to disguise their overtly racist views. In reply to an article on extending the franchise to natives and Indians in South Africa (written by British liberal journalist W.T. Stead), and reproduced in the *VofL*, one correspondent argued that “No self respecting white man could sit beside a coloured man in parliament”.<sup>75</sup> The editors could only conclude “that the average Trade Unionist was opposed to the native franchise”, but still enthusiastically proclaimed “Socialism knows no race, colour or creed”. Indeed, when discussing the constitution of the Union of South Africa prior to its foundation in 1910 the *VofL* declared “Yes, the coloured man should have the vote”.<sup>76</sup> To exclude the natives, argued Frank Murray, meant that “divide and rule” would be the order of the day.<sup>77</sup>

It was only in the Cape Province where coloured workers had any real political freedom before 1910. The Transvaal, the Orange Free State, and Natal were more or less uniformly against any native franchise, no matter how limited. A number of Labour MPs in Britain opposed the “Union of South Africa” bill over the franchise issue before it became law, and it was widely reported in the British press on Keir Hardie’s proclamation that it was only a matter of time before the colour-blind Cape franchise would be sacrificed on the alter of white supremacy.

Hyslop clearly identifies a significant vocal and vociferous strain of white labourism within the ranks of the imperial working class, but it is equally clear that there was considerable debate on the issue of class and race in Britain and South Africa. The Johannesburg *VofL* was a prime example of anti-racism, and in the columns of the *Eastern Record* there was some lively discussion against “the segregationist policies” of the SALP – which clearly demonstrates that not all members of the SALP spoke in the “unified political voice of White Labourism”. Moreover, in surveying the British

73. *Voice of Labour*, 16 October 1909.

74. *Voice of Labour*, 7 January 1910.

75. *Voice of Labour*, 4 September 1909.

76. *Voice of Labour*, 31 July 1909.

77. *Voice of Labour*, 21 and 28 August 1909.

labour press during discussions on the constitution of the Union of South Africa it is clear that many contributors spoke with a distinctly socialist and internationalist voice in support of maintaining the existing Cape native franchise, and some even ventured to suggest extending the franchise to all adult males in irrespective of race. The *VofL* was not a mass-circulation paper, but it nonetheless became “the central point from which the doctrines of revolutionary syndicalism in South Africa emerged”.<sup>78</sup>

It is correct to argue that Crawford waged a strong campaign against white labourism, convinced some workers and labour leaders to adopt militant industrial strategies, and even bred hostility to racism. But the extent to which the Crawford’s critique of racism had any real currency among the broad swathe of white trade unionists is another matter. It should also be recognised that Crawford’s commitment to the syndicalist cause changed considerably after his return from exile: he left a committed syndicalist and propagandist, and returned “an Empire patriot”, having jettisoned the critique of racism he helped develop and champion before 1914. It would be another Scot, Andrew Dunbar, who would become one of the dominant figures in the syndicalist movement thereafter.<sup>79</sup>

#### ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND WHITE LABOURISM

Hyslop contends that the fact that the deportees were “feted” by the trade-union and labour movement – noting too the many events organized in their honour and how these proceedings were widely and enthusiastically reported in the socialist press – was a clear and unequivocal demonstration of the support of the British labour movement for the policies of white labourism. But the speeches made at these meetings – such as the one held at Glasgow in February 1914, attended by three of the deportees – suggest no such connection and bear all the hallmarks of the socialist critique of British imperialism. It is clear that anti-imperialism and racism are not mutually exclusive and to hold anti-imperialist views did not necessarily equate with socialism. But equally, to attack international capitalism and place it within an anti-imperialist critique does not necessarily equate to the wholesale acceptance of white labourism.

An editorial appeared in *Forward* in February 1914 and issued the warning that “we must be aware of the opinions of our enemies” and of events taking place in South Africa:

The news reports from South Africa are opportune: written on the day that the nine deportees are expected to land, they sound a note of warning to workers in

78. Visser, “To Fight the Battles of the Workers”; for discussion of *Voice of Labour*, see pp. 411–412.

79. Hirson, *The History of the Left in South Africa*, pp. 5–6.

this country, that the capitalist class here are prepared to adopt South African methods. [...]

As a matter of fact the deportations, censorship of the press, even the forcible destruction of the workers press, have for many long years been the tactics employed by the American capitalist in his fight [...] New Zealand has also employed it.

[Now] It is coming to the homeland. South Africa has shown its success, and our British Press have rent the air with the pœans [*sic*] of praise.

A British government has endorsed the tactics. Everything points to a coming struggle in this country. *And we Socialists – and the workers – are we prepared?* [my emphasis]

In that same edition there were two columns of correspondence, which included a critique of the “The Class War in South Africa”, and “The imposition of Martial Law”, and a report on “Workers hunted back to work at the points of bayonets”.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, some weeks before, *Forward* published a series of cartoons representing the violent repression of workers in South Africa. Under the heading “The Beast At Large” one illustration depicted “Capitalism” as a tiger mauling the prostrate and bloodied body of a worker. The caption below simply read: “Capital has tasted blood in South Africa. Its brutal and ruthless treatment of Labour is always more typical of ‘Nature red in tooth and claw’ than of Christian civilisation. For our own safety, we must destroy the Beast.”<sup>81</sup> Was this merely another example of the defence of the diasporic British working class and further evidence, as Hyslop would argue, that “the socialist response to the deportations [had] merged with the discourse of biological racism”? This was evidence that “the cause of the working class and that of whiteness were conflated” and for Hyslop this was perhaps best exemplified in the reports in the socialist press on James O’Connor Kessack’s racist remarks regarding Lascar labour.

Kirk stresses that the socialist press was generally happy to hear all shades of opinion and, from this viewpoint, simply reporting Kessack did not mean that the editors of *Forward* necessarily agreed with those views. Opposition to Lascar labour on British merchant ships did intensify before World War I, but there were still no great divergent opinions on this issue in Scotland. A mass meeting to discuss the Lascar problem was held in Glasgow in April 1914, where the chairman was careful to reject “any possibility that racism might have been the motivating factor” behind the campaign, and added “that their objections to Chinese and Indian labour was not because these men were of a different race and a different colour, but because they lowered the standard of life for white men”.<sup>82</sup>

80. *Forward*, 28 February 1914.

81. *Forward*, 7 February 1914.

82. A. Dunlop, “Lascars and Labourers: Reactions to the Indian Presence in the West of Scotland during the 1920s and 1930s”, *Scottish Labour History Society Journal*, 25 (1990), pp. 40–57, 43; “Lascars and the NTWF”, *Glasgow Herald*, 2 April 1914.

Kessack was no stranger to controversy and he alienated Catholic Irish workers in Scotland when he was reported as saying that “Catholics should not be allowed to hold office in trade union organisations”. This was a direct reference to the influence of Jim Larkin, and the fact that the largely Catholic Irish dock-labour force of the west of Scotland had left Kessack’s Liverpool-based dock union (NUDL) because of his opposition to Larkin and his association with syndicalism. Kessack had his problems with Irish immigrants who did not share his religion, and he was also an avowed critic of socialism and revolutionary syndicalism. In industrial west Scotland, where the Irish played a critical role in emergent dock unionism and the socialist movement, Kessack’s remarks caused real consternation among the wider trade-union and labour movement simply because they had worked hard to overcome sectarianism and discrimination within their own ranks. The editors of *Forward* felt the need to ask “where he stood in relation to the Socialist movement in Scotland” for Kessack’s opinion was at variance with the views of the great majority of workers in Scotland.<sup>83</sup>

As for the racist ideology of Kessack, it would be dangerous to conflate the views of one man, as reported in one socialist weekly, with the general political view of that paper and subsequently assert on that basis that “the assumptions of white labourism were part of the British labour movement before 1914”. Like the proviso issued by Archie Crawford in the *VofL* “Postbag” section, the editors of *Forward* could likewise claim, “We hear all sides, but are not responsible for any of the views expressed by our correspondents.”<sup>84</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The Scots were much involved in the labour movement in South Africa and actively involved in the syndicalist movement and the socialist and labour press before 1914. It is also clear that they were not immune from assertions of white supremacy, but equally others vociferously argued the cause of internationalism and “colour-blind” socialism, and an end to race discrimination in South Africa. Archie Crawford asserted that the real danger to the working class was not simply the threat of cheap labour – indigenous, Chinese, or white – but global monopoly capitalism supported by the political and legal powers of the state.

There is no denying that many of the imperial working class in Australia and South Africa began to organize to fight to preserve their skills and defend their standard of living against the threat of cheap labour, and in some

83. *Forward*, 10 January 1914; see also W. Kenefick, “Irish Dockers and Trade Unionism on Clydeside”, *Irish Studies Review*, 19 (1997), pp. 22–29; *idem*, *Rebellious and Contrary: The Glasgow Dockers, 1853–1932* (East Linton, 2000).

84. *Voice of Labour*, 7 January 1910.



instances safeguard their cultural and racial superiority within colonial society against indigenous peoples. Viewed from this standpoint there seems much justification in Hyslop's argument: that the imperial working class was formulating racist policies as part of its developing radical and socialist critique of capitalism. But it is also clear that that creed of "white labourism" was not accepted by all imperial workers. The matter is not that simple. For while the voice of labour in Australia and South Africa was largely "a socialist racist one" the same could not be said of the voice of socialism in Britain where the socialist movement, as Kirk argues, demonstrated the "supremacy of class over race" in both their attitudes and actions.<sup>85</sup>

Bernard Porter has argued that colonial industrial issues, whether these referred to disputes in the Transvaal or British Columbia, "were always treated as labour issues" by the labour movement in Britain, "never as racial ones". Indeed, he noted the thoughts of one Labour Member of Parliament who "expressed his 'perfect abhorrence' of the idea that Africans and the like might be 'of a different type of human clay, as it were, from the Europeans'". For labour leaders "it was the colonial workers'" relationship with the means of production that was the crucial consideration "not their ethnicity".<sup>86</sup> While Porter acknowledges that the views of labour leaders might not be those of ordinary workers, it nevertheless confirms Kirk's contention that the question of white labourism forms part of a more "complex debate" in which "class consciousness both mingled and vied for supremacy with racism".<sup>87</sup>

As for the South African deportees, on their arrival in Britain during February 1914 they were indeed "feted" by the trade-union and labour movement and the story of their determined and heroic stand against the monolithic forces of South African capital was reported throughout the labour and socialist press and addressed at labour and socialist meetings across Britain. Their story was inspiring for it fed into a deep groundswell of defiance that was felt on the part of a labour movement engaged in its own escalating industrial war in Britain. But was this evidence that the British trade-union and labour movement sanctioned a carte-blanche commitment to the type of white labourism more commonly espoused in Australia and South Africa? As Hyslop himself recognises "like all political movements, the agitation around the deportees had a finite lifespan" and by April 1914 "demand for public meetings fell off".<sup>88</sup>

The British labour movement and the socialist press would turn their attentions to the next cause célèbre and next in succession for *Forward*

85. Kirk, *Comrades and Consins*, p. 205.

86. B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 218–219.

87. Kirk, *Comrades and Consins*, p. 154.

88. Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 260.

was the case of the Lanarkshire miners involved in the Vancouver miners' strike in British Columbia – fought strictly along class lines. Interest in this strike was to last until the outbreak of World War I, when the dispute finally came to an end after two and a half years. As to the charge of the existence of a uniform and global attachment to racist ideologies of “white labourism”, based on a careful examination of the evidence, and in keeping with the spirit and tradition of Scots law, that case remains “not proven”.