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# RIOT ACTS

The history of Australian rioting

A documentary series for television

Ten historical outlines

by

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## 1. *THE STAR AND THE SLAUGHTER*

### Newcastle 1979

The Star Hotel riot is legendary among people of a certain age group in Australia. Until the earthquake occurred, many knew little about Newcastle except for the Star.

Conflict began when the owner, Tooth's Brewery, decided to close down the hotel for economic reasons. Some people rejoiced at the news, regarding the Star as an unsavoury venue which attracted an undesirable clientele. For the patrons who fought to keep it open, the hotel was more like a sacred site. What started as a simple financial decision became a battle between a subculture and the middle class; between youth and authority. The riot was as inevitable as the closure itself.

Even by Newcastle's standards, the Star was an unusual hotel. It was painted white, with black and grey tiles and big orange doors. Over the name and the date, 1925, was a large white ten-pointed star. The building stretched back for a block. It had three bars, each serving a sub-subculture of its own. The back bar catered to pimps, sailors and crew cut types who didn't fit in anywhere else. Presiding over the middle, gay bar, was drag queen extraordinaire Stella the Fella. The front bar was usually full of teenagers who came for the rock 'n' roll. Every Saturday afternoon 600 crowded in, free of charge, to hear local band, the Heroes.

The band played on a raised stage behind the bar while people danced on tables and anywhere else they could find a space. The only beer sold came from a rival brewery, Tooheys. As it was usually impossible to reach the bar, people would pass money and drinks back and forth good-naturedly through the crush. And all this just across the road from the Workers' Club!

Over time, the Star earned a certain reputation, particularly after a sailor was knifed to death there one night: it was full of unemployed layabouts and half-naked youths; nice girls didn't go there. But for plenty of young Novocastrians, the Star was *THE* place to go. One commentator described the Star as the only spot 'where a lot of young people felt happy, met friends, and experienced a sense of belonging.' In a time and place of chronic unemployment, such things were more important than ever.

Although the hotel was making money, Tooth's took a fixed rent. It made no difference to them whether the hotel was doing well or not. When the Licensing Court requested renovation work to be carried out, Tooth's decided to have the Star demolished instead. This announcement was greeted with shock and anger. The publican, Don Graham, tried unsuccessfully to buy the pub. A demolition protest petition attracted 10,000 signatures. Young tradesmen volunteered to carry out the renovation work free of charge. 'Save the Star' T-shirts appeared. Tooth's remained unrelenting. The hotel would be demolished.

Wednesday, 19 September arrived. The Star's last night of trading. At 7pm it was still sweltering hot. Inside the hotel it was even worse. One thousand people pressed around the bar as the Heroes took to the stage. Three hours later, the band was approaching the end of the gig. Lead singer Peter de Jong later recalled, 'the crowd was at fever pitch, high-spirited and emotional rather than aggressive.'

Before the band could finish its encore, four police pushed through the crowd and climbed over the bar. One policeman shook de Jong's microphone; another tugged the guitarist's leg. Suddenly the atmosphere changed. People started yelling, 'Fuck off pigs!' The Heroes left the stage and unplugged their instruments.

As the police left to clear the other bars, the crowd screamed for an encore. The Heroes returned to the stage. Their final song was called 'The Star and the Slaughter'. Although the lyrics weren't directly related to the hotel's closure, de Jong considered it to be 'an appropriate swansong, a lament for the Star.'

The lyrics of the chorus went: 'And I want action/I want fighting in the streets/we're going to take this town by storm/we're going to burn this village down/we'll take no hostage/give no quarter/they will remember the night of the star and the slaughter...'

When the band finished, the crowd jabbed their fists in the air and howled for more. Meanwhile 3000 more people had gathered outside the hotel. Marius Webb from Sydney radio station 2JJ was in the crowd taping the riot when a police car knocked down a crowd-member nearby, infuriating onlookers. When police put people in paddy wagons, their friends released them. As far as the authorities were concerned, rules were rules: pubs must close at 10pm and streets had to be cleared for traffic.

Hundreds began hurling beer cans and abuse at the police. Punches were thrown. Flagons and rocks from a nearby rockery garden became weapons. 18 police were injured. Police vehicles were over-turned, doused in petrol and set alight. One man was recorded yelling, 'Police hate the youth of Newcastle.' Inviting plate glass shopfronts on nearby buildings were not touched. All of the crowd's fury was vented on the police.

Eventually the police retreated and the riot fizzled out. 43 had been arrested and 12 hospitalised. Nursing cuts and bruises, participants from both sides staggered home.

The Star Hotel riot was big news throughout Australia and even made the papers overseas. From *Le Monde*, in France: 'Australians riot when pub closes.'

One month after the riot, the Star Hotel was sold, and then demolished.

#### **POSTSCRIPT INFORMATION:**

- There were two similar riots in 1979 when the Frankston Hotel (Victoria), and the Stage Door Tavern (Sydney) were closed. Large scale brawls at a New Year's Eve concert at the Sydney Opera House, at the end of the year, led to a ban on rock concerts at that venue which lasted over a decade.
- The Heroes moved to Sydney, but could not find a following there to match what they had known at the Star. Soon after, the band folded.
- Since the Star Hotel riot, the levels of alcohol abuse and unemployment, major contributors to crowd violence, have risen in New South Wales.

#### **POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW:**

- Former Star Hotel patrons and those involved in the riot
- Relatives & friends
- Peter de Jong (former lead singer, the Heroes)

### 3.

- Police involved with the riot at administration and street level
- Newcastle hospital staff who were working on the night of the riot
- Newcastle council aldermen & business people c.1979
- Current owners of Star Hotel site
- Don Graham (former licensee, Star Hotel)
- Marius Webb (former 2JJ employee)
- Stella the Fella
  
- **POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTARY AUDIO & VISUAL MATERIAL:**
- Contemporary news footage
- photographs
- articles
- relics from Star Hotel
- 2JJ sound recording of riot, Heroes' song: *The Star and the Slaughter*
- Cold Chisel song about the hotel

## 2. RED FLAG RIOTS

### Brisbane 1919

Brisbane has a long and ugly tradition of rioting, from the anti-Chinese brawls of 1888 to the 'Battle of Brisbane' in 1944. One of the nastiest civil disturbances in Brisbane's history took place after World War One, when returned soldiers attacked the local Russian community.

Before the war, Australia operated an Immigration Bureau in Brisbane for people arriving from the east. Most of these immigrants were Russians; Jews, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and a few Monarchists. Many were political prisoners who had escaped from Siberia. Few could speak English. All were searching for freedom of one kind or another. After a week at the Bureau, immigrants were free to choose whether they wanted to work and live in the country or the city. There were few obstacles. In one case an Australian official stamped a Russian theatre programme when it was offered as a passport.

Since Brisbane was the port of entry into Australia, a Russian community of three or four thousand formed there. Although Brisbane was then not much more than a big country town, many immigrants didn't even realise Sydney or Melbourne existed.

The language barrier created many problems for the Russians; physics lecturers became railway carriage cleaners, doctors worked on cane farms, poets became abattoir workers. Many immigrants died within a year from the heavy work and unaccustomed heat. In 1913 a Russian Club was established in Stanley Street, South Brisbane. However for those outside the city there remained no outlet for intellectual debate or discussion.

Simple conversation with fellow workers was difficult, at best, and the Australian newspapers were indecipherable. The films of Charlie Chaplin spoke a universal language, and were popular among the Russians.

Slowly, things began to improve. A Russian language play was produced and staged in Brisbane. A Russian newspaper, the *Rabotchaya 'Zhizn' Workers' Life* began regular publication. Links were established with the local branch of the International Workers of the World (IWW) organisation.

When World War One broke out, a number of Brisbane Russians enlisted. Then came the extraordinary news of the 1917 Revolution. Opinion in the local community was divided, but overall there was cautious jubilation. The next edition of the *Workers' Life* was printed entirely in red ink. When the Revolution survived its first days and weeks, some members of the community began to think about going home.

A ship was chartered. 500 Russian political refugees from all over Australia returned to the country of their birth. Meanwhile all further immigration into Australia from Russia was stopped. When Leon Trotsky signed a truce with Germany, the Brisbane Russians became enemy aliens. Anti-foreigners attacked the Russian community in newspapers using pseudonyms like 'Patriot'. Some suggested that all expatriate Russians be interned.

The *Daily Mail* called for the deportation of certain 'Bolshevik leaders' in the 'public interest'. Soon after, eight of these men were deported by the Federal government. The Russian newspaper was closed and its type confiscated by the police.

Meanwhile the working people of Brisbane became divided over the symbolism of the red flag. While some union organisations proudly flew it and opened and closed their meetings with the red flag anthem, others bitterly opposed what the flag represented. Cartoons in both the *Worker* and the conservative press grew more strident. At one meeting in the Brisbane Domain there was a noise war between loyalist returned soldiers chanting 'Rule Britannia' and radicals singing 'The Red Flag'.

Next came reports of riots between IWW sympathisers and returned soldiers in Hughenden and Toowoomba. The Queensland Commissioner of Police, Frederick Urquhart, who had become famous as a young man for suppressing the 1884 Kalkadoon Aboriginal uprising (and saw the Russians as an 'undesirable class'), began organising an anti-communist, paramilitary vigilante force to defend the loyalist cause. Commonwealth surveillance pinpointed two 'troublemakers' in the Russian community: Alexander Zuzenko, a charismatic, confirmed Bolshevik, and Peter Simonoff, an ex-Broken Hill miner and now the new Soviet Consul in Queensland.

Meanwhile red leftist posters were being slapped over War Loan advertisements as fast as they could be removed. Boarding houses in South Brisbane were raided. 'Red' propaganda and printing blocks were seized. Consul Simonoff was interned.

In protest, a large, peaceful march wound its way through Brisbane's streets, led by members of the Russian community. After the march, lists of 'dangerous Russians' who had taken part were compiled and sent to London.

Military raids seized protest banners and other revolutionary material. In one raid the Russian Club on Stanley Street was wrecked. New premises were established in Merivale Street.

It was now illegal to march under the red flag. At 2.30pm on Sunday, 23 March 1919, a subdued assembly of 400 met outside Brisbane Trades Hall. Police looked on. Surveillance agents mingled with the crowd. Suddenly Alexander Zuzenko and his followers emerged and unwrapped three large red banners, hoisting them high. A cheer went up as a hundred small red pennants were also distributed.

The march began. It grew and gathered momentum as the marchers approached the Domain. When they got inside, speaker after speaker took the podium. Police on horses and on foot attempted to intervene, but they were hopelessly outnumbered. For the moment the radicals had won.

That night, several thousand returned soldiers violently attacked a union meeting at North Quay. Russians and radicals were 'seized, mauled and stabbed'. Then two thousand men crossed Victoria Bridge to attack the 'Bolshevik headquarters'. Police stood by and watched. It took warning shots from inside, and a heavy fall of rain, to disperse the mob.

Early next day military police ransacked the treasured workers' library stored at Merivale Street. Russian homes received similar treatment while their occupants were interrogated. That night, fuelled by alcohol, inaccurate anti-Russian editorials, and an inflammatory meeting at North Quay, seven thousand returned soldiers and loyalists marched on the Russian Club chanting 'Burn their meeting place down!' and 'Hang them!'

Lines of unwilling police armed with bayonets met the mob. (The Merivale Street buildings were owned by a government minister). Palings, bricks, home-made bombs and bottles rained down. Sporadic gunfire became more frequent. Commissioner Urquhart was seriously wounded. After two hours, the now empty hall was virtually demolished. Incredibly, no one had been killed, despite scores of injuries. After the *Brisbane Courier* defended the actions of the loyalist mob, further violent riots and demonstrations went for three days. On the fifth night a mighty storm put a stop to further large scale violence.

The riots were followed by months of intimidation and individual assaults upon people who spoke or even looked Russian. For the repressed and terrified Russian community, these times would be remembered as the 'days of the pogrom'.

**POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW & SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:**

- Raymond Evans (senior lecturer in History at University of Queensland & author of *The Red Flag Riots*)
- relatives of those involved
- members of remaining Brisbane Russian community
- contemporary newsreel footage
- cartoons, articles and photographs
- songs
- riot relics

### 3. *POLICE STRIKE RIOTS*

#### Melbourne 1923

Melbourne isn't the sort of city one normally associates with mob violence. Before 1923, the last riot in Melbourne had occurred on an election day eighty years earlier, when a man called Henry Condell became mayor. The city's docile reputation changed on the weekend before the 1923 Melbourne Cup, when a special late-night edition of the *Evening Sun* reported that 'anarchy, naked, unashamed - and drunken...' ruled the streets. It all started when the police went on strike.

For some time the police force had claimed that they were undermanned and underpaid. There was no pension scheme for men who had joined after 1902, and police felt humiliated by a recently established system of internal 'espionage', which involved senior constables, in plainclothes, spying on junior police as they patrolled their beats.

In a statement redolent of the Kennett industrial relations era, the Trades Hall Council Disputes Committee laid the blame for the police strike (and what followed) squarely at the door of Victorian Premier Lawson, and his government's 'policy of so-called economy' which 'refused to provide decent conditions for its employees.'

On the night of Wednesday 31 October, thirty police based at Russell Street Station mutinied and refused to work. They were told they would be dismissed if they did not return to work, unconditionally, the next night. On Thursday the night patrol again refused to perform normal duties.

By Friday 475 police were on strike. That night 630 had left their posts. Many of the replacement police, who were specially brought in from the country, sympathised with their colleagues and also refused to work. By the time thousands of visitors began arriving in town for the Melbourne Cup, no less than 800 police were on strike.

It was not long before the violence began. The few police who were still on the streets were abused by hooligans and then pelted with stones, eggs and bottles. A small fight at the corner of Swanston and Bourke streets became a brawl; drunken men broke bottles of beer over the heads of whoever was within reach. Blood and beer spattered the road. One party of youths broke the windows of a clothing store and swapped their own hats for more fashionable ones before running away. When a drunken man smashed the window of a jeweller's shop the entire stock disappeared 'within seconds'.

Soon the mob was in complete control of the entire central city block bounded by Bourke, Swanston, Elizabeth and Collins streets. And it wasn't just young men who were involved. One spectator reported seeing women stealing furs, shoes, rings, gowns and suits from window displays. Secondary brawls broke out between looters as they fought over particularly desirable objects. Meanwhile pickpockets had a field day. Passersby were bashed. One young man was robbed and kicked to death near Princes Bridge. A number of reporters covering the riot were themselves wounded, mostly by flying glass. Allen Dawes of the *Evening Sun* was pushed over the second-storey verandah rail of the Royal Mail Hotel.



At one stage forty police confronted the mob on Bourke Street, batons drawn. Hooligans jeered and continued looting. When the police weighed into the crowd a pitched battle 'swayed back and forth' all the way to Elizabeth Street. Fighting was intense, and it was almost impossible to make arrests. Ambulances wailed in a constant shuttling stream in and out of the city centre.

After the first night of violence, headlines screamed 'UNLEASHED SCUM'! Premier Lawson appealed to loyal citizens to form a volunteer police force. 2000 men enrolled, including a number of former lighthorsemen who became mounted constables.

On Saturday night the rioting continued. Jewellery stores were again a popular target. When the mob moved off, things quietened down for a while. One man, about to kick in the window of a Myer store, was knocked down by a security guard and carted off to hospital. Then the mob reappeared and turned its attention to the London Stores. Menswear was stolen by the armful. Hats were worn 'or just kicked down the street'. Women stuffed skirts, cardigans and hosiery into bags. Small boys looted tinned fruit and lollies. Later, a sports shop's depot was invaded and large numbers of rifles, revolvers and hunting knives were stolen. One commentator described the scene as an 'incredible orgy'.

When a corporal of the Citizens' Forces appeared with his rifle the crowd yelled in rage and rushed him. The corporal was disarmed, crushed and kicked viciously. A tram was pulled off its line and the occupants trampled. Members of the fire brigade attempted to assist, but were beaten off. One man was pushed through a plate glass window in Swanston Street and terribly gashed about the throat.

After receiving reinforcements, the special constables slowly regained control of the city by walking in line formation and swinging their batons ahead of them. Clerks worked continuously enrolling more volunteers at the Town Hall. Eventually so many men enrolled as special constables that Russell Street ran completely out of batons.

By the early hours of Sunday morning 237 people were in hospital and 85 looters were in police wagons. Later that day, 100,000 people travelled in from the suburbs to see what had happened to their city, filling trains and jamming roads. They found 'menacing roughs' scouring the streets, hundreds of windows shattered, and 'two-up schools in action on every corner'.

By Monday morning order was completely restored. Although the streets were back to normal, the city still reeled in shock at what had happened. Striking police published a statement 'repudiating any connection' between 'the rioting that [had] taken place in the city' and their own action.

**POSTSCRIPT INFORMATION:**

- The 1923 Melbourne Cup was won by the favourite, Bitalli, in fine weather
- None of the striking police were ever reinstated by Premier Lawson
- The volunteer force continued to police the city until new recruits were trained
- It is now illegal for police to strike in Australia

**POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW:**

- any veterans of the riot who are still alive
- friends and relatives of veterans
- friends and relatives of journalists who covered the riot
- Victorian historians
- police representatives
- government representatives
- union representatives
- sociologists who have studied the riot

**POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTARY AUDIO & VISUAL MATERIAL:**

- Contemporary newsreel footage (National Film and Sound Archive)
- news photographs and articles
- relics from the riot
- police records relating to the strike and riot.

## 4. *WHITE PERIL*

### Buckland River, Lambing Flat & Clunes 1857-73

Chinese immigrants have borne the brunt of Anglo-Australian mob fury many times in this country's history. The goldfield riots at Buckland, Lambing Flat and Clunes are but three of the most violent (recorded) attacks upon these peaceable, industrious people. Whenever things were tough on the goldfields, and they often were, the culturally distinct Chinese became ideal scapegoats. The violence that followed was usually accepted, and sometimes applauded, by both the press and the wider population.

**1. The Buckland River** goldfields were near modern-day Bright, in the Victorian Alps. The deep, narrow valley was an unhealthy place to live. It was damp and freezing in winter, windless and sultry in summer. When gold was discovered there by an American in 1853, diggers came at the rate of 500 a day, until 8000 were at work. In spring, melted snow flooded the diggings and men had to work in waist-deep water. 3000 miners died in the first fifteen months of the field, mainly from typhoid. There was only one police trooper to keep order over the entire valley. Lawlessness was rife.

The Chinese name for Australia was *Hsin-Chin-Shan* - the Golden Mountain. By 1856 thousands were at work on the Buckland and neighbouring diggings along the Ovens River. Open hostility from European diggers led to the Chinese generally working over tailings and old areas of the river. By sheer labour, the newcomers prospered. In 1857 there were only 500 Europeans left on the Buckland, while the 'celestial' population had grown to 2000.

Perhaps most infuriating to the Europeans was the way the Chinese refused to become Australians: they wore traditional clothes, ate traditional foods and maintained non-Christian religious practices. In the absence of hard factual charges, vague allegations of Chinese ethical improprieties such as bestiality and opium addiction began to circulate. This evil spread, until by mid 1857 the *Age* was referring to the Chinese as 'ill-omened snake-like spawn', 'barbarians' and 'miserable Mongolians'. The conditions for violence were perfect.

On 4 July 1857 a group of European diggers decided that the Chinese should be expelled from the field. The sole policeman, Trooper Duffy, urged them to disband, but he was pushed aside. One hundred European miners armed with pick handles formed a line at the head of the diggings and began driving out the Chinese.

Despite their superior numbers, the terrified Chinese miners ran ahead of their aggressors. Tents, stores and joss-houses were burned and looted. Anything that could not be stolen was destroyed. Several people drowned in the freezing Buckland river. Many were savagely beaten.

Over the following days there were numerous cases of death by exposure as the mid-winter conditions took their toll. Some Chinese miners were so terrified that they crossed rugged mountain ranges to flee their pursuers; a number of Buckland refugees were later rounded up in faraway Adelong, in NSW.

Two days after the riot, a party of police led by Superintendent Robert O'Hara Burke (later of Burke and Wills fame) arrived from Beechworth and restored peace to the goldfield. Eight men were arrested, and the Chinese gradually began to return.

Shortly after the Buckland riot, plague swept through the valley and killed most of the population. One visitor wrote that 'the valley was so thickly studded with graves that the river seemed to run through a churchyard.'

**2. Lambing Flat**, or Burrangong, in New South Wales, is sometimes referred to as the birthplace of the 'White Australia' policy. Rioting began there in 1860, the same year that two bills designed to restrict Chinese immigration were introduced in Parliament.

Most of the miners at Lambing Flat were from the Kiandra goldfield in the Snowy Mountains. Initially the gold was shallow and easily won. By October 1860 the Chinese population was prominent on the field. The first anti-Chinese violence occurred before the goldfield was even officially declared, when a party of European miners, led by a German band, drove them from the diggings in November 1860. Unwittingly, they had forced the Chinese into an area called Ironbark which turned out to be rich in gold deposits.

When a gold commissioner was appointed at the end of the month to police the field, the Chinese were grudgingly allowed to stay... temporarily. On 12 December the diggers 'rolled up' once more. After attacking the haunts of 'undesirable characters of their own race', a number of men went on to the Chinese camp and continued their 'orgy of destruction'. Pigtailed were hacked or torn from their owners as souvenirs.

By the end of January 1861, Chinese numbers had grown to 1500. The Europeans delivered an ultimatum for the Chinese to leave the field. This was obeyed. Before the situation could get any worse, police were dispatched to maintain the peace. In February European miners overpowered the troopers and again attacked the Chinese. This time the military were called in, and Premier Charles Cowper personally visited the scene. For a while order prevailed.

When the military and most of the troopers were withdrawn in May, Lambing Flat was again desperately under-policed; many Chinese fled to the nearby town of Yass. Major attacks in June led to the destruction of their abandoned buildings and possessions. Men on horseback rounded up remaining Chinese miners like cattle and whipped them.

When some participants were arrested, an angry crowd gathered. As one policeman read the Riot Act, his comrades were fired upon by the mob of 3000. The battle raged for two hours before the rioters withdrew. One rioter was killed. A reporter who was marked for death (after criticising the miners' behaviour) fled the diggings. As the rioters mobilised for another attack the police pulled out, hopelessly outnumbered. Martial Law was proclaimed. Troops supported by artillery eventually restored control, and the Chinese returned. William Spicer, the ringleader, was identified and jailed.

**3.** Gold was discovered at **Clunes**, near Ballarat in Victoria, in 1851. The area was quickly settled by tin miners from Cornwall. Years of harmony followed. Then, as shafts went deeper, economy measures were introduced. In 1873 workers at the main mine went on strike over Saturday shift hours.

After weeks of stalemate, the owners decided to break the strike by importing Chinese workers. The news was leaked. Angry Cornishmen destroyed new dwellings being built for the Chinese.

On the night before the Chinese were due to arrive, 1000 incensed people gathered in the main street as the Clunes Brass Band played martial airs. Early the next morning, 8 December, men, women and children armed with every kind of weapon met the arriving coaches. Impassive faces stared out as the coaches stopped.

‘The Chinese will only get to Clunes over the bodies of dead Cornishmen,’ shouted the miners.

The police accompanying the Chinese ordered the mob to disperse or face ‘grave consequences’. They were answered with a shower of stones and Cornish curses. Then the miners and their families surged to the attack. Outnumbered, the police stood by as the Chinese were hauled from their coaches, one by one, and viciously beaten. Eventually the coaches were packed back to Ballarat. The miners’ demands were met, and the strike ended.

**POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW & SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:**

- Goldfields historians
- Australian Chinese community
- relatives of riot participants
- fossickers working on these goldfields
- contemporary press reports
- paintings and sketches
- goldfield relics (including Young Museum material)
- song: ‘Dick the Digger, a Tale of the Buckland’.

## 5. *THE BATTLE OF BRISBANE*

### Brisbane 1944

During World War Two, Brisbane became the headquarters for the United States and Australian armies fighting in the Pacific. It was also the main recreational centre for American troops on leave. With such an influx of fighting men into what was then a small provincial backwater, it is not surprising that some contemporary commentators saw the situation as a 'Yankee invasion'. Sexual, social, racial and cultural identities were all turned upside down with the arrival of the Americans. For the people of Brisbane it was a time of excitement, change... and violence.

Until General MacArthur and his gleaming warships sailed up the Brisbane River in 1942, most Australians knew little of America apart from the products of Hollywood. General MacArthur fitted well into the mould of a celluloid hero. He was certainly more exciting than ex-trade unionist Prime Minister John Curtin.

Everywhere MacArthur went in Australia, he was greeted by cheering, madly enthusiastic crowds. 13 June 1942 became Douglas MacArthur Day, a national public holiday. In one hospital eleven mothers named their newborn sons 'Douglas MacArthur'. A chef even invented a MacArthur sandwich. After MacArthur became commander-in-chief of the South West Pacific Area he moved his headquarters to Lennons Hotel, in Brisbane. A red and white striped canvas awning was erected over the entrance in his honour.

The American troops, both white (and to a lesser degree) black, were praised in Australian newspapers for their silent strength, politeness, and impeccable presentation. Women loved their friendliness, good teeth, and the way they said 'Ma'am'. American soldiers were paid considerably more than Australians, and were generous with their money and cigarette rations. Australians returning from the front quickly found that they were fighting a new battle at home - to hold on to their women.

When scores of Americans married Australian girls the tone of the newspapers began to sour: 'These men did not come to Australia to marry - they came here to fight.' American money changed many things in Brisbane; taxis would only stop for a US uniform, waiters were far more attentive to Americans, and dance halls and movie theatres were all but taken over by the 'friendly' troops.

Resentment increased. Australian wives of American servicemen were now openly harassed in the streets. Many of these women emigrated to the United States.

Not everyone thought Brisbane's character had changed for the better. One female commentator described it as a 'wild brawling town'. Conservative Queensland was shocked at reports of 'cuddle bunnies', 'lounge lizzies' (amateur prostitutes) and 'wild drunken women' fighting over American soldiers. In one year the incidence of venereal disease in Brisbane tripled. Twenty brothels operated round the clock servicing long queues of black and white US troops. Brisbane became known as 'The American Village', and late in 1942 a Methodist minister described the city as being worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. Some wondered whether it was worth being saved from the Japanese for this.

Fuelled by the constant threat of combat and the lack of women, brawls became more common. It wasn't just Australians versus Americans, but black versus white and citizen versus soldier. In October 1943 a knife fight between Americans and Australians in Fortitude Valley left one dead and three wounded. Other scuffles, assaults and murders followed. Sometimes three or four brawls a night were broken up by police.

Heavily armed US military police (the internal disciplinary force) were involved in many incidents, including the shooting of an Australian soldier in a Townsville cafe. Stories about a battle between two troop trains, one Australian and one American, began to circulate. Although there was no basis of truth in the story, the supposed cause - Americans 'using' Australian women - was a very real reason for tension at this time.

The incident which has become known as the 'Battle of Brisbane' began at the start of the American Thanksgiving celebration, on the night of 26 November 1944, when two US military police stopped an American private called Stein to check his leave pass. Stein's companions, two slightly drunk Australians, resented the officers' action. Their argument became a large scale confrontation when a crowd of Australian soldiers left their nearby canteen and joined in, chasing the two MPs down the street and whipping them with their webbed belts.

After the MPs took shelter in the luxurious US Post Exchange, or PX (the American canteen) at the corner of Adelaide and Creek streets, the mob, now numbering about 200, attempted to break into the PX, which was guarded by more MPs armed with pistols and batons. Plate glass windows were smashed with pieces of wood. Truck tyres were slashed. Parking signs were ripped out and used as battering rams. One military policeman suffered a fractured skull when he was struck in the face with half a brick. Altogether nine MPs were injured. One member of the mob later described being 'spun away by the crowd, like a whirlpool.'

The Australian authorities' response to the riot was slow and strangely restrained. The fire brigade came and left again without using their hoses on the crowd. Civilian police were hopelessly outnumbered, even with reinforcements. By 8pm the mob outside the canteen had swelled to 4000, including over 1000 Americans and civilians. When Australian armed troops arrived to quell the disturbance, the civilian police thought they were rioters and demanded they hand over their weapons. The Australians responded by removing their identification armbands and handing their rifles over to the mob. Meanwhile the American MPs remained huddled in the canteen as it was destroyed around them. One soldier in the crowd shouted: 'Come out and fight, you bastards... you're not game, you're yellow... why don't you go and fight the Japs instead of fighting our men?'

Two more American military police arrived at the scene of the riot at 8.15pm. One was armed with a pistol and the other with a riot gun. As they attempted to force their way through the crowd and into the canteen there was a scuffle, in which shots were fired by the Americans. One Australian private was killed, and seven others wounded. Shortly after, the crowd was dispersed by a combination of military and civilian forces.

The next night saw further violent confrontations between Australian soldiers and American MPs, who were patrolling the city in groups of six. The MPs wore steel helmets with gas masks and carried pistols and tear gas. There were large fights on Albert Street between US troops,

armed with machine pistols and riot guns, and Australian soldiers. One tense stand-off on Queen Street ended without bloodshed when officers from both sides intervened. Twenty-one Americans were injured on the second night of fighting.

Again the Australian authorities were strangely reticent in their duties, perhaps out of sympathy with their compatriots, but eventually order was restored. News of the riots was censored at the time, leading to exaggerated stories about casualties and deaths. Most witnesses at a later court of inquiry blamed the military police for what had happened.

**POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW & SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:**

- John Hammond Moore (author *Over-sexed, Over-paid and Over Here*)
- Rosemary Campbell (author *Heroes & Lovers*)
- Annette & E.D. Potts (authors *Yanks Down Under 1941-45*)
- riot veterans and their relatives
- ASIO files re riot held by Australian Archives
- novels re riots
- contemporary articles
- photographs
- cartoons
- newsreels
- War Memorial material



## 6. *GREAT DEPRESSION RIOTS*

### Adelaide, Newtown, Cairns & Glebe 1931-32

Rioting seems to be something that usually occurs at times of great social upheaval. The Great Depression in Australia was just such a time, and spawned a myriad of violent confrontations between the defenders of state and wealth - the police - and the poor and unemployed.

**1. The Adelaide Beef Riot** occurred on Friday, 9 January 1931. It began as a march, from Port Adelaide into the city, to protest against the Labor Government's decision to replace beef with mutton on ration tickets for the unemployed. Led by leaders of the Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM), one thousand men, women and children marched carrying placards, banners and red flags. At the edge of the city they were joined by a thousand unemployed Adelaide men. The crowd sang revolutionary songs and chanted 'We want beef' as they marched past Parliament House and stopped outside the Treasury Building in Victoria Square.

It was intended that a deputation would then enter and speak to the Premier, Lionel Hill. Before the deputation reached the door, large numbers of police streamed out of the building and began laying into the crowd. When demonstrators attempted to retreat, they found mounted troopers and motorcycle police converging from behind. Twenty minutes of fierce fighting followed. Some police drove their motorcycles into the crowd. Others freely used their long batons. The unemployed fought back as best they could, with bannerpoles, wooden spikes and 'missiles'. The *Advertiser* described the struggle as 'furious', with blood 'flowing freely on both sides'. After twenty minutes the demonstrators were beaten back, and then half of them reassembled around Colonel Light's statue (then located in Victoria Square). The police charged and dispersed the group. Sporadic street fighting raged for another half hour. Twelve men were arrested, and seventeen admitted to hospital (including ten police).

Premier Hill, who had watched the battle from his office high above the Square, later blamed communist agitators for the riot, and dismissed charges of police brutality. Beef was restored to the ration.

**2.** In 1931 there were a number of violent evictions in Sydney of people who could or would not pay their rent. On 20 June, one eviction, in **Newtown**, became a riot.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported: 'The most sensational eviction battle Sydney has ever known was fought between 40 policemen and 18 Communists at 143 Union Street, Newtown, yesterday morning. All the defenders were injured, some seriously, and at least 15 of the police were treated by ambulance officials.' This incident became known as Bloody Friday.

It began when a busload of police arrived at the house to enforce an eviction order. The occupants were prepared. Having locked the house and barricaded the doors, they took up defensive positions on the balcony. When the police were showered with bricks and stones, some constables drew their guns and fired at the balcony. Others attempted to break through the sandbagged barricades with axes and hammers.

The first constable inside the house was immediately felled with a 'terrific blow'. Other police surged in over him and began battling tenants armed with iron bludgeons, chairs and sticks. The fight raged for nearly an hour before the police could begin dragging the 'insensible' occupants of the house out to their paddy wagons.

Meanwhile an antagonistic crowd of thousands had gathered outside the house. As bloodstained police emerged, one by one, the crowd hooted and shouted insults. When the mob threatened to become violent they were forcibly pushed back by squads of police and fenced off with human cordons. Some members of the crowd hurled stones at the drivers of the police wagons as they drove their prisoners away.

There were also violent demonstrations at Railway Square and Bankstown (The Battle of Bankstown). Most of the men at Bankstown were World War One vets, in their 30s, not young hotheads as was claimed. Several who were there said it was 'worse than Gallipoli'.

**3. Today Cairns** is better known as a holiday destination than a riot town. During the Depression, things were a little different. From the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 July 1932: 'SERIOUS RIOTING AT CAIRNS...100 MEN INJURED...PITCHED BATTLE ON SHOWGROUND.' Later reports said police were being used as 'private basher gangs' to evict the unemployed.

Cairns was a popular destination for unemployed men during the '30s. It was warm, and there was a perception down south that there was plenty of work cutting sugarcane. However there was no proper shelter for the unemployed in Cairns, unlike Rockhampton or Mackay. Instead, the 'bagmen' camped in empty horsestalls at the showground.

As the date of the 1932 Cairns Show grew closer, pressure was applied to remove the unemployed. Workers with some of the big firms in Cairns, such as the brewery and sawmill, were told that if they didn't help 'bash up' and evict the bagmen, they would lose their jobs. Although there was only one avowed communist at the showground, the bagmen were characterised as 'unruly Reds.'

The attack came on a Sunday morning. Fifty police from outlying areas, supported by hundreds of men from the town, descended on the bagmen with batons and sticks. The unemployed defended themselves with brooms and shovels from the horse stalls. Bricks, bottles and stones flew as the battle raged. In less than twenty minutes, the bagmen had been defeated. Seven were arrested, and the rest scattered to the bush. A brilliant barrister, Fred Paterson, defended those who were arrested, and later became the only member of state Parliament ever elected as a Communist.

**4. The Glebe Dole Riots** took place in October 1932. They were sparked by the issuing of the '32 Questionnaire', to the unemployed, by the Lang Government. If people wished to continue receiving coupons for necessary everyday items, they were obliged to answer 32 personal questions, such as: Do you live with your wife? Do you grow any vegetables? If not, why not? Do you keep any livestock? ('Fleas' was a popular answer).

The Unemployed Workers Movement, led by Stan Moran, held a public burning of the hated questionnaires in Glebe. Thousands turned up for a meeting outside the Glebe Town Hall soon after, but as soon as Moran began speaking he was pulled down and 'thumped' by baton-wielding police. Further meetings followed, building to a 'monster meeting' outside the Glebe Town Hall which attracted 800 people protesting against the questionnaires and police intimidation. Police intervened and shifted the speakers down the street. As the meeting opened once more, they ordered speakers to shift a further fifteen metres.

This happened several more times, until the meeting refused to be moved again. This was the signal for the police to attack the speakers and their defenders with batons and gun-butts. One Aboriginal communist, Lucy Eatock, was whipped as she tried to escape. The unemployed fought back, disarming the police and wounding several. The riot ended when a lorry-load of police 'special bashers' arrived and cleared the streets. The UWM leaders were rounded up and arrested. Further meetings and riot violence followed.

**POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW & SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:**

- Stan Moran
- Ray Broomhill (author *Unemployed Workers*)
- Audrey Johnson (author *Bread and Roses*)
- Wendy Lowenstein (author *Weevils in the Flour*), also Richard Lowenstein's film *Evictions*.
- Nadia Wheatley's new (c.March 1999) MA thesis: *The Unemployed Kicked*. (Check title).
- also another piece written by Nadia Wheatley: *Meeting them at the Door*.
- ABC Hindsight piece (repeated 11 March 1999) re unemployed riots
- veterans of riots
- oral histories, newsreels, contemporary photos, articles and cartoons
- leaflets and riot relics, songs

## 7. *THE LOCK-OUT RIOT*

### Rothbury 1929

Rothbury is a coalmining town in the Hunter Valley, inland from Newcastle in New South Wales. It is the only place in Australia where miners striking for better working conditions were actually fired upon by police.

The countdown to violence began when 10,000 miners throughout northern NSW received dismissal notices for refusing to accept a reduction in pay. This came after a nine month stalemate in which the mines were not worked and men remained unpaid.

In the eyes of mine-owners, the men had been on strike. As far as the miners of northern NSW were concerned, they had been locked out.

Early in December 1929 the Bavin Liberal Government decided to re-open one colliery, at Rothbury, with non-union 'scab' labour. Miners from throughout the area organised a protest at this decision. On the night of Sunday 15 December men from Cessnock marched to Rothbury and joined their comrades with the intention of demonstrating on-site the next day. Veterans later remembered a festival atmosphere that night, with no forebodings.

Meanwhile the Minister of Mines, R.W.D. Weaver - soon to be known as the 'Rajah of Rothbury' - had arrived at the mine to direct operations personally. When miners' leader Thomas 'Bondy' Hoare threatened that mineworkers 'would lift the lid off Hell' if any attempt was made to work the mine with non-union labour, Weaver replied that Rothbury would open 'though the heavens fall'.

Next morning the demonstrators marched towards the mine, headed by the Kurri Kurri pipe band. Frank Mattocks, coalfields correspondent for the Newcastle Morning Herald, described the 5am gathering of thousands of mineworkers as being 'like nothing so much as a picnic crowd.'

It was almost dawn when the 10,000 demonstrating miners reached a hill overlooking the Rothbury mine. Moments later, 240 volunteer labourers arrived, under police guard, to re-open the pit. It had been decided the night before to engage the scab labourers non-violently and urge them not to work, but when miners' leaders reached the perimeter fence they were stopped by police. Others scrambled under the fence and got inside.

Suddenly, in the words of one miner: 'police seemed to come from every bush and began to fell men left and right with their batons... the mounted police came through and were merciless in their attacks... then the guns came out and there were about a dozen men lying prostrate in no time.'

This was an utterly unexpected development. The police were using live bullets against miners armed with sticks and stones. Reporters described police drawing their revolvers and firing 'fusillades into the ranks of wildly charging miners'.

Another eyewitness declared: 'It was an experience not to be forgotten... to see a smoking gun in the hands of a policeman after he had shot your mate, to hear challenges to the police to do their damndest, to see men shot through both legs, another shot through the throat, falling to the middle of the road... others concealing their wounds, not wishing to be placed on the casualty list in case their wives were informed.' During the course of the riot one union leader, J.M. Baddeley, was batoned to the ground by police even as he advised the miners to leave the property.

Most newspapers backed the authorities' line on what had happened, with headlines like 'MINERS ATTACK POLICE', 'ONE KILLED AND MANY WOUNDED IN DESPERATE RIOT AT DAWN' and 'FIERCE RIOTS AT ROTHBURY'. As far as the labour movement was concerned, it was a vicious, unprovoked and tragic attack.

One young Greta miner, Norman Brown, was fatally shot in the stomach during the riot. He was on the fringe of the crowd and taking no active part in the fighting when he was hit. More than forty men were wounded. Some were never able to work again. The riot ended when the advice of senior union officials to leave the mine was heard and eventually accepted. Angry, wounded miners straggled back to their homes.

More than 7,000 people attended the funeral of Norman Brown at Greta cemetery. His death was commemorated by numerous songs and poems, including this one by contemporary miner R. Grant, 'A Sad Day on the Coalfields':

*There are sounds of sobs and crying as the daylight floods the sky  
The hour of life has vanished and the long night passes by  
I lift my eyes to heaven and in tears I'll call her son  
Who was taken from his mother by the crack of someone's gun  
Yes, in the hour of sorrow there's one thing I can't conceal  
For my heart is always longing and my thoughts will often steal  
Across the bush to Rothbury whose surface leaves a track  
To the boys who went on picket and the boy who'll never come back*

**POSTSCRIPT INFORMATION:**

- There was another big demonstration outside the NSW Parliament in Sydney while the events of Rothbury were being debated. It was dispersed by a police baton charge. Further protest meetings took place throughout the country.
- Government use of police muscle against miners continued after the riot. Miners saw them as a 'virtual army of occupation', who 'conducted themselves with an arrogance and brutality that went far beyond the requirements of maintaining order'.
- Some historians regard Rothbury as being largely responsible for the overthrow of the Bavin Government in New South Wales.
- The Miners' Federation of Australia remained under communist control for eighteen years following the 'Battle of Rothbury'.
- The Rothbury coal mine remained closed until 1960, when it was re-opened as Ayrfield No.3.
- In 1979 a miners' memorial dedicated to Norman Brown was unveiled at Freeman's Waterhole, not far from Rothbury.

**POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW:**

- Miners' Federation representatives
- Dr Robin Gollan (author *The Coalminers of NSW*)
- Edgar Ross (author *A History of the Miners' Federation of Australia*)
- any veterans of the lock-out and riot who are still alive
- friends and relatives of veterans

**POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTARY AUDIO & VISUAL MATERIAL:**

- ABC *Broadband* radio documentary re Rothbury broadcast August 1979
- oral histories re Rothbury held by National Library
- grave of Norman Brown
- articles in 1978-79 (50th anniversary) editions of *Common Cause* (Miners' Federation journal)
- contemporary photographs
- articles
- interviews
- newsreel material
- songs and poems
- riot relics

## 8. *RIOT IN THE PORT OF PEARLS*

### Broome 1920

Broome, in Western Australia, is known for its colourful, cosmopolitan character; the town's historical links with Asia are more intimate than those of any other place in Australia. Originally, these links were forged with pearls.

Until World War Two Broome's pearling industry was dominated by the Japanese. Unlike the Chinese, Filipinos, Indonesians and Australians, who tended to stay on dry land, the Japanese excelled in the lucrative, dangerous business of diving for pearls. Another ethnic group, known as the Koepangers, worked with the Japanese on the Broome-based luggers (pearling boats). These people were part-Malay, part-Portuguese and part-Timorese. They shared the risks, (if not so many of the rewards) of the pearling life, by providing boat crews and menial labourers for the luggers.

The practice of using ethnically mixed crews at sea had originally been brought in after a series of pearl lugger mutinies. In theory, mixed nationalities who disliked each other would be less likely to unite in mutiny against their European masters. Over time however, the alliance became strained. Japanese divers regarded the Koepangers as 'black men' and second-class citizens. The Koepangers saw the Japanese as arrogant, intolerant, and selfish. Hatred simmered. In 1920 this hatred erupted into riot.

The Japanese first became prominent in the pearling industry in the early 1900s. They even had their own club, which came to serve as a de-facto union and centre of business operations. At the time it was illegal for Asians to own interests in Australian pearling operations. All work had to be contracted via Australian pearling masters. However as the Japanese grew in stature in the industry, particularly as divers and tenders (skippers), it became increasingly difficult for pearling masters to bypass the members of the Japanese Club. A system of under-the-counter deal-making with members of the club, known as dummyming, soon became entrenched in the industry. The Japanese pearlmen prospered. Soon they had their own tennis courts, hospital, prostitutes, bars and gambling houses. It became increasingly unclear just who was working for whom.

Meanwhile it was becoming very clear to the Koepangers whom they were working for. While the Japanese won prestige positions and high rates of pay, the Koepangers remained indentured labourers and crew hands. Without anything like the collective bargaining power or dummyming system of the Japanese, they were out in the cold.

Japanese discipline on the pearling luggers had always been notoriously hard. The divers were particularly bad-tempered when working in deep water. One day, while at sea, a Koepanger crew-member did something to offend a 'No.1' Japanese diver. As punishment, the man was dragged behind the lugger with a rope around his neck until he drowned. Authorities were told that it had been an accident. Crew-members were threatened with death if they should tell the truth, but the Koepanger community was soon full of news of the murder. Soon after, a Japanese was beaten to death in retaliation. But the Koepangers did not yet feel they had been avenged.

During the 1920 'lay-up', or wet season, just before Christmas, the Koepangers decided to attack the Japanese at Mackay's camp, on the foreshore, with knives, clubs and bottles. There had been a heatwave for some days, and it was an unusually hot and sticky night. Many Broome residents were watching silent movies at the Sun Picture Cinema when the attack started. News of the riot spread rapidly. In the distance there was shouting and the sounds of running men.

En route to Mackay's camp in one of Broome's few motor cars, Police Sergeant Spry and a constable passed the Japanese Club, where they saw hundreds of men arming themselves with clubs and knives. 'The Koepangers are killing the Japanese!' shouted the men. Ignoring the sergeant's pleas to stop, angry Japanese poured past the policemen towards the camp, joining thousands of others as they ran.

Soon the two groups were at each others' throats. Screams and the thud of clubs drowned out Sergeant Spry's calls for order. The 400 Koepangers were outnumbered by the Japanese five to one. Soon there were piles of wounded and unconscious men lying on the road. As the Koepangers fled, the Japanese pursued them. With the assistance of a Pearling Inspector called Stuart, Spry managed to rescue two Koepangers who had been bound by the Japanese and were about to be executed.

Meanwhile returned servicemen were being sworn in as volunteer riot police by Inspector Thomas of the Broome police. Altogether 200 special constables were sworn in, including horseback patrols, but they could do little to control the situation. The riots, and heatwave, continued for the next three days.

These were times of terror for the people of Broome, particularly for anyone who looked at all like a Koepanger. Robin Hunter, a light-skinned Aborigine, wore a white armband as a symbol of neutrality.

Bands of knife-wielding Japanese broke down the doors of anyone they suspected of harbouring their enemies, including hotels and the homes of whites. The Koepangers who had not fled the town roamed about in large armed groups.

Policing the situation required great tact if a massacre was to be averted. One danger was that the Japanese-hating Amboinese and Malays might join the Koepangers and swing the balance of numbers against the Japanese.

At various times Europeans became buffers between the two warring groups. Both Japanese and Koepangers were rescued from life-threatening situations by white police. At one stage a number of Japanese rushed the jail, which was surrounded by armed guards, but they stopped at the last moment. Broome's *Nor'-West Echo* reported that two Koepangers were saved from hanging by the actions of European Broome residents. Thanks largely to Police Inspector Thomas, not a single shot was fired during the riot.

Meanwhile the Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, had agreed to send the warship HMAS *Geranium* to Broome. Unfortunately it would not arrive for another three weeks. At the height of the fighting, Acting Magistrate F. Gray read the Riot Act, twice, to no avail. Reluctantly, the other ethnic minorities remained out of the conflict as both sides gradually exhausted themselves.



Finally the leaders of the warring groups agreed upon a settlement. Eight men - four Japanese and four Koepangers - had been killed. Encouraged by Inspector Thomas, the leaders of the Japanese promised to help restore order.

On 26 December the riot officially ended. Next day there was a feast, for all ethnic groups, outside the Japanese Club.

In April 1921 the charges arising from the riots came to court. No one was charged for the eight deaths, but two Japanese were convicted of causing grievous bodily harm and sentenced to jail before being deported. Eight others were sentenced to nine months' jail.

Inspector Thomas, who had gone without rest for the three long, sweltering days and nights of the riot, died in his sleep on the first night of peace.

**POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW & SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:**

- Hugh Edwards (Broome historian & author *Port of Pearls*)
- Robin Hunter
- Pat Malcolm
- other long-time Broome residents
- riot veterans
- contemporary articles
- photographs
- riot relics

## 9. *BLOOD ON THE GOLDEN MILE*

### Kalgoorlie-Boulder 1934

The reason given for many riots is that they took place at times of great hardship in society. Australia's worst civil disturbance, at Kalgoorlie-Boulder in 1934, defies such an explanation. Although this riot occurred during the Great Depression, Kalgoorlie-Boulder was fairly well insulated from negative economic effects by the wealth of its 'Golden Mile'. The violence, when it came, had more in common with the racial battles of the 19th century goldfields than with other Depression riots of the 1930s. This time it was not the Chinese, but the Italian and Yugoslav communities who felt the wrath of the mob.

These ethnic groups had originally moved on to the WA goldfields when an increasing number of young Anglo-Australians chose not to carry on the dangerous underground mining life of their fathers. Although the newcomers were strong and willing to work, they were inexperienced miners, and often irritated the Australians with their unorthodox mining methods and cultural distinctiveness. Even after living for decades, as Australian citizens, in the twin towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder, the Italians and Yugoslavs were never quite accepted. On the street they stood out with their strange languages, different clothes and 'particular mannerisms'. For some, their presence remained a source of 'rumbling antagonism'. Eventually the opportunity arrived for built-up animosities to break loose.

It was Australia Day 1934 - 41 years since the beginning of the goldfield - when the incident which sparked the rioting took place. A drunken Anglo-Australian miner called Jordan (who had been something of a football hero in his youth) was ejected by a barman from a Kalgoorlie hotel. The barman was Italian. Words turned to blows as Jordan put up a fight. Then a punch from the barman sent the miner's head crashing against a concrete curb, knocking him unconscious.

Jordan had an unusually thin skull. Hours later, he died in hospital.

Vengeful, racial hatred exploded in a series of violent attacks upon the 'Dings' and 'Dagoes' which lasted for two days. In an attack upon one foreign camp, a Montenegrin was fatally shot and two of his attackers wounded. On a lease area known as Dingbat Flat, shotguns, rifles, jam-tin bombs and dynamite were used against the Yugoslavs and Italians. At Boulder, rioters attacked people in their homes. Immigrants defended their families with rifles and knives.

Most of the immigrants' houses were not built in streets or even connected to council services; the people were too poor. Instead they lived around the edges of various mining leases, such as the Ivanhoe. One old-timer later remembered that the houses 'ran in all directions, looked into each other's backyards, and front doors looked into the side doors. They were in great clusters... flimsy as they were, they were really a great credit to their owners who had come with nothing.'

On the Ivanhoe lease there was a ditch between the rows of houses and the railway line. At one stage the Yugoslavs defended their homes along the line of this ditch using gelignite bombs. When they ran out of gelignite, they were forced to retreat while rioters set fire to their houses.

The two-storey foreign-owned Home From Home Hotel and the All Nations boarding house were also burned down. Fire spread and destroyed the Kalgoorlie Wine Saloon next door. After a meeting, the Anglo-Australian miners (or 'Britishers' as they liked to be called) declared that they would not return to work until the mining companies agreed to dismiss all the 'foreigners'. As Yugoslavs and Italians accounted for about twenty percent of the 2500 men working underground, the mines soon ground to a standstill.

Alcohol contributed to the second night of violence.

By 1am 'hordes of men and women' were streaming through Kalgoorlie laden with looted goods, including one man who carried a tablecloth full of chocolates and fruit. Meanwhile bands of drunken rioters wandered the streets smashing plate glass. At 4am a foreign-owned tobacconist shop went up in flames. The fire brigade managed to save the recently renovated York Hotel, next door, but the tobacconist and a neighbouring bicycle shop were completely destroyed.

Next day the *West Australian's* correspondent reported that: 'the main street of Kalgoorlie resembled a shambles... The concrete pavements were deeply stained with looted wine, while plate glass, smashed into hundreds of fragments, was scattered over the roadway. Fruit, chocolates, crockery, linen, legs from chairs and tables, ornaments, fish, paper bags, cruets and trays, strewn the footpath or were piled in front of the wrecked shops.' During the day, immigrants attempted to salvage what they could of their possessions from the smoking ruins of buildings, while in other parts of town people dismembered cash registers and safes. Furniture had been smashed to splinters inside the looted shops. Trashed cars and broken fences 'added to the desolation'. In one cafe, owned by a man called Kalafatas, two new refrigerators had been wrecked and the motors torn out. The remains of an upright piano lay outside the ruined Kalgoorlie Wine Saloon.

Some of the plunder from the riot was carried for quite a distance: one stove was found abandoned nearly a mile from where it had been stolen.

The riots ended after mining companies agreed to meet with miners and discuss their claims. By the time a train-load of specially mobilised constables arrived from Perth it was all over. Three were dead, and many people had been wounded or made homeless.

#### **POSTSCRIPT INFORMATION:**

- The Home From Home was rebuilt as Hannan's Hotel, which still stands today.
- The Golden Mile has now become the Super Pit, an open-cut mine which will eventually be 7km long, 3km wide and 300m deep.
- In June 1993 Kalgoorlie-Boulder celebrated the 100th anniversary of the discovery of gold in the area.
- The only substantial records of the Kalgoorlie-Boulder riot come from the time; newspaper accounts and oral histories. The riot is not mentioned in official histories of Western Australia or the WA goldfields.

#### **POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW:**

- Riot veterans and their families
- Wendy Lowenstein (author *Weevils in the Flour: an oral record of the 1930s Depression in Australia*)
- WA historians
- Kalgoorlie-Boulder residents
- Australian Workers' Union representatives

**POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTARY AUDIO & VISUAL MATERIAL:**

- Contemporary articles
- photographs
- cine footage
- riot relics
- oral histories recorded by John Clements and Wendy Lowenstein
- ABC Radio National *That's History* program (focusing upon the Kalgoorlie-Boulder riots) broadcast 1992

## 10. *BIKE RACE RIOTS*

### Bathurst 1980-85

The Bathurst motorcycle race riots stand alone in the history of Australian rioting. They had nothing to do with gold, economics, industrial relations, greed or ethnic rivalry. Perhaps the best way to understand what happened at Bathurst is to look at the riots as a team sport; a highly ritualised, violent and illegal game.

Easter motorcycle races were first held at Bathurst in 1931. Crowds quickly grew, until by 1936 there were 10,000 people attending events there. Races were initially held on the Vale Road circuit, just outside Bathurst, but when the council realised how much money could be made from the event a new circuit was built at Mount Panorama. Soon Bathurst was regarded as a mecca for bike enthusiasts. Easter 1949 saw 50,000 visitors pouring into town for motorcycle Grand Prix and car-racing events.

'Hooliganism' began to be associated with the races after 1955, when 'throttle-happy lads', 'promenade percys' and 'milk bar cowboys' became a focus of police attention. By the late fifties the outlaw face of motorcycling was represented by bodgies and widgies. In 1959 one Sydney newspaper reported that packs of these motorcycle hooligans were engaged in an orgy of destruction. This was later proved to be false. Meanwhile complaints of police persecution of motorcyclists grew more common.

Gradually, low-key, low-budget 'clubman' racing was replaced by corporate sponsorship. As club membership declined, vandalism and violence became more common. In Easter 1960 a near-riot occurred when firecracker-throwing youths clashed with 20 police in a park in the centre of Bathurst. 10 arrests were made. More high jinks followed. Next year police ordered that a human effigy hanging from a tree and bearing the sign 'This is what we think of cops' be taken down.

In 1964 youths lit a bonfire in the main street, ran a Japanese flag up the flagpole, threw firecrackers at police and held lightpole-climbing competitions. Charges of drunkenness and indecent language resulted.

By now there were certain police who went to Bathurst every Easter. Baiting was carried out by both sides: the rules of the game were becoming more defined. In spite of increasing allegations of police harassment, media coverage was now almost universally anti-biker in its stance. During the late '70s some bikers attempted to set fire to the Bathurst courthouse. A police truck loaded with prisoners had its windscreen smashed. In 1977 alone, 138 were arrested. Those arrested were almost always blue collar workers.

In 1979 it was decided to build a police station in the camping area on Mount Panorama. The brick compound was surrounded with barbed-wire-topped cyclone fencing. In the eyes of the motorcycle fraternity, this was an intolerable provocation. Not only was the police station in the middle of the camping ground, but it was built directly on top of the largest 'bullring' at Mount Panorama, a site of 'historical significance' for the bikies.

(One bullring game, called the doughnut, involved a circle of spectators judging a bike-rider's skill while he put one foot down and spun round and round at high revs).

The first demonstration against the presence of the compound came in Easter 1980, when a large group shouted insults at police and threw beer cans and rocks; challenging police to arrest them. One mechanic drove his motorcycle into the police line. After police retreated inside their compound, more than a thousand people laid siege to the building. A telephone pole carrying the line from the station was set on fire, but those inside managed to call in 60 reinforcements. After four hours 109 people had been arrested.

During Easter 1981 there were major, unrelated riots in Mildura and again in Bathurst, where 62 police were injured when their compound was attacked by a crowd of thousands. The confrontation began when police moved in to break up a fight between members of the crowd. When the mob turned on them instead, the police took shelter in their brick compound. A convoy of police reinforcements and ambulances was called after the crowd began destroying patrol cars parked inside the compound.

Police later blamed a 'hard core' group for inciting the riot, which took twenty minutes to get under control. 130 were arrested. Not for the first time, it was suggested that the Grand Prix at Bathurst be banned, but commercial interests prevailed.

Bathurst was quiet in 1982. This time the Tactical Response Group (TRG) riot police were present to act as a deterrent against violence. However some have argued that the lack of rioting that Easter had more to do with heavy falls of rain.

The weather was fine at Bathurst for the Easter 1983 weekend. Despite the presence of the TRG, on the Saturday night there was a six hour riot. 181 were injured when a crowd of 3,000 attacked the police station at the Mount Panorama camping ground.

The officer in charge of the TRG said his men had been the target of a 'screaming mob' of drunken people, and regretted that he hadn't had tear gas. The police, wielding night sticks and protected with shields, helmets and flak jackets, had to contend with bricks, rocks, beer cans filled with gravel, flaming petrol-soaked toilet rolls, and several sticks of gelignite.

Again the riot took the form of a kind of game; riot police charged, bikies ran away, and then reformed in front of the station as the police retreated to safety from the barrage of missiles. After a handful of arrests were processed, another charge would take place. At one stage a Volkswagen Beetle was set on fire and then rolled end over end towards the police compound, prompting another charge from the TRG.

Motorcycle organisations distanced themselves from the violence, blaming what they called 'two-percenters' (minorities in the crowd) for what had taken place. Easter 1984 was wet and quiet in Bathurst, like two years before.

1985 was a different story. Anticipating a major riot, a team of academics infiltrated the crowd and joined police in the compound with the intention of studying the riot first-hand. They were not disappointed. This time 75 armoured TRG police faced the mob. One journalist described

the 'battlefront' as being like a 'coconut shy', as riot police were pelted with rocks, half bricks and fire bombs. The height of the violence came between 9pm and 1am on the Saturday night.

A Channel 7 news car and equipment valued at \$40,000 was fire-bombed and destroyed. Numerous police vehicles, ambulances and media vehicles were seriously damaged. A kiosk was destroyed and became a source of brick ammunition. Despite their bullet-proof vests, visored crash helmets and shields, many police were seriously hurt.

At one point a crowd-member yelled out, 'half time, change sides'. Someone else said: 'This is great value... You pay 16 bucks to fuckin' knock some copper on the head'. Abusive chants rang out from the mob. The police replied by 'whooping' and beating their shields with nightsticks. While the riot raged around them, some campers remained sitting by their campfires; drinking, cuddling and playing cards.

Altogether 100 people were wounded. 164 were arrested and charged. Offences included riotous assembly, throwing explosive substances and singing 'offensive songs'.

Despite the disastrous violence of 1985, the Mayor of Bathurst refused to consider stopping the Easter race meetings (which were now bringing in \$7 million a year). Instead, alcohol was banned on Mount Panorama. There have been no further large scale riots.

**POSSIBLE PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW & SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL:**

- Veno, C. Cunneen, M. Findlay, R. Lynch, V. Tupper (behavioural scientists who studied the riots)
- riot veterans
- police representatives
- motorcycling community representatives
- Bathurst residents/business people/aldermen
- contemporary TV news footage
- press photographs and articles