

NEVILLE'S ORGANISATION OF CLARK'S SHORT HISTORY

For an Australian focus on 'Our Present and Philosophies in the [European and 'New World'] Age of Revolution and Nationalism (1774-1865): Neo-Classicism, Ideas of what is – America, Europe, Australasia, Asia-Pacific, and 'Middle-East', Sunday 14 April.

From Manning Clark. *A Short History of Australia*. New York : New American Library, 1963. Using the 2006 Penguin Books edition.

AFTER THE AGE OF REVOLUTION FOR AUSTRALIA: AN EDUCATIVE COMMENT, REFLECTING ON CLARK'S SHORT HISTORY FROM CHAPTER EIGHT TO ADDENDUM BY SEBASTIAN CLARK (1861-2006)

Page numbers are placed as references in square brackets.

In the first document the point had been made that the popular understanding of Australian's nationalism and its myth came as folklore, which is anti-intellectual (failing to honestly recognise its own formal ideas when pressed by power); reactionary to any rigour of thought or empathy in the bonds of community; extremely libertarian, to the point that the talk of 'mateship' tends to be egotistic (e.g. 'mate' as being mine, 'me-mate', and central concept of 'character' in the folklore); and a tough, rough, narrowly-focused view of the masculine, with a defensive and aggressive self against the world. It is not the only nationalist narrative for Australia, but it was very influential through the popular literature of the first half of the twentieth century. Clark points out [168] that this is the time that the old selectors, now the country's small farmers, were finally able to prosper. It was major contrast to the descriptions of the sufferings of the old selectors in Henry Lawson's *Water Them Geraniums*, Barbara Baynton's *Bush Studies*, and Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection*; the literature celebrated at the time of prosperity. Clark's assessment was, "So time converted human agony into a huge joke". What did Clark mean by such a bizarre-appearing comment? Contrary to some presumptions in the contemporary 'historical memory' movement, popular literary works which look back on the past produce a myth that comforts and entertains. In social psychology, it has been observed that aging creates a demand for assurance and security. The history is distorted to the point it becomes myth; no longer the honest history. The past is seen in what we once referred to as the comforting perspective of 'rose-tinted glasses'. In commemoration, we forget the critical gaze of the history. In Rudd's Queensland version of folklore, the significance of Lawson's alcoholism is lost. The reader of old is glued to the entertainment as another generation was glued to their televisions, and the current generation to their 'mobiles'.

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In that entertainment gaze, and contrary to the myth, human agony and a just response to it are lost. The commemorations around Ned Kelly and the Kelly gang is a prime example. A reasonable assessment, indeed of history, is that the Glenrowan saga of June 1880 was an act of terrorism from the actions of the Kelly gang [189]. The history is, however, not the message we get from the drama of entertainment and popular literature. History may fit many perspectives but it is not 'spin' (as in 'spinning a yarn') to appease itself to the conditions of our social psychology.

A vindication of violence is one of the major outcomes which arise from Australian folklore and its transmutation into a version of nationalism. Another outcome is provincialism, with its dictionary reference to 'the way of life characteristic of the regions outside the capital city of a country, especially when regarded as unsophisticated or narrow-minded'. Clark, across the book, has little to say about Queensland compared to 'the southern states', but his explanation of 'Queensland Provincialism' came at the point of discussing race relations for Australia. Clark argued:

Queensland Provincialism burgeoned into Australian patriotism. As the colonists saw it they were making sure that the deadly coloured alien biped never again lurked in the scrub with a cane knife waiting to butcher the first white man who came along. For such cruel fancies about the behaviour of other human beings poisoned their minds as they fumbled and groped towards ways and means of defending their way of life and their civilization. In this way the experiences on the sugar fields tainted their nationalism with racial prejudice. [198]

The explanation of 'Queensland Provincialism' is much more complex, and the race relations factor is only one dimension. Furthermore, Clark did explain the wider resolution for Queensland in the federation, during the debates over Queensland's South Sea Islander labour market. When the other Australian colonies agreed that the sugar industry would have market protection, Queensland happily agreed to forgo race-based indentured labour for the sake of the White Australia Policy.

Another outcome in folklore and its cultural nationalism is one of Clark's favourite terms, Philistinism, with its dictionary reference, "the manners, habits, and character, or mode of thinking of a philistine, manifested as an anti-intellectual social attitude that undervalues and despises art and beauty, intellect and spirituality." As an interesting aside, Australian architect Robin Boyd, who actually designed a 1952 Canberra house for Clark, is quoted as saying, "Australia's is a special kind of philistinism, an immovable materialism which puts art and ideas of any kind deliberately and firmly to one side to let the serious business of living

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proceed without distraction.” [from Oz Quotes] Boyd was a modernist architect who vehemently attacked the decorative tendency that he dubbed ‘Featurism’. The point here is that Philistinism is distinct from simple-minded Provincialism, as it also includes clever reductive materialists who lack ‘a soul’.

Perhaps Clark was thinking of the Melbourne-based Boyd, when he first introduced the term in the book. Clark accused the City of Melbourne when Australia became the federation, and Melbourne was its first capital, of imposing “its rectitude, its uprightness, and its philistinism on the new Commonwealth.” This would signal a reference to urban folklore rather than the rural version. What we have as urban folklore are the working class yarns from the suburbs of Fitzroy, Collingwood, and Carlton (see comments further on), and mixed with the morality tales from the middle class puritanism in the new suburbs, typified by Barry Humphrey as ‘Moonee Ponds’ in the 1950s. Indeed, Clark describes [275-277] Australia art, culture, and higher learning as squeezed by a nationalism forged by Puritan and Philistine values, as well as other, economic, values. Clark states:

In the nineteenth century, Protestant Christianity and Irish Catholicism had strengthened the grip of the puritan and the philistine on local culture. Industrialization added a habit of conformity and uniformity. The intellectuals were provoked by this strength of the puritan and the philistine. [275]

Clark concluded that the nationalist outlook, represented by different groups, “mainly centred in Melbourne, were less concerned with killing the twin giants of Australian puritanism and Australian philistinism than with providing happiness, culture, and material well-being for all.” [276]

It was the industrialisation during World War I [247] and the renewed urbanisation of the 1920s that began to close-off the influences of the rural folklore. According to Clark, BHP and ‘the Australian tradition at Gallipoli’ was “...the economic setting for the development of an industry that in time would carry the industrialization of Australia to a point where its uniqueness and its bush lore disappeared. The iron rails tethered the bush to the world.” This economic development would bring a clash between two other nationalist visions.

The other nationalist narratives for Australia were the ‘Bourgeois Civilization’ and ‘the Working Class’. As Clark explained in his chapter, ‘The Age of the Bourgeoisie 1861-1883’, these two groupings replaced the earlier dichromatic phenomena of the societal divide between conservatives and liberals, between squatters and bourgeoisie, and between

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(rural) country and town [174]. In these matters of land policy, the constitution, immigration, and tariffs, it was the bourgeoisie who held sway. Housing as a policy issue and its material outcome became an important factor in the divide between the 'Bourgeois Civilization' and 'the Working Class'. Clark contrasted Melbourne, with its harsher division between South Yarra's bourgeois opulence and the working-class squalor of 'Fitzroy, Collingwood, and even Carlton', and Adelaide, with its 'tradition of working-class ownership of the house' and the City's broader and inclusive religious dissent against materialistic elitism. Within the general bourgeois civilising outlook, the problems were more practical and here the division turned on the old (religious and social) worldview clash between Catholic and Protestant, with secularists playing both off to take the education game:

All, whether Catholic or Protestant, native-born or immigrant, born to great inheritance or local boys who made good, believed in the bourgeois ideal of getting on, in equality of opportunity, and in material progress as the forerunner of spiritual and moral progress. It was when they turned their minds to the problem of how and what to teach their children that their society was almost split asunder. [178]

Clark goes on to describe the extensive colonial education debates. Nevertheless, the question ought to be asked, that apart from the Protestant work ethic ('getting on'), what did the 'Bourgeois Civilization' consist of? Marcus Clarke's novel, *Civilisation Without Delusion* (1880), described that vision. In his earlier novel, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874), Clarke (note with an 'e' at the end) had written on theme of the convictism versus anti-convictism debate of the previous half-century, and he squarely blamed religion for the cruelty in convictism and the idea of a 'convict stain' in anti-convictism. Whatever the validity of the argument, it led to Clarke creating a different vision, as Clark stated of the message of Clarke's work, "since organised religion had demonstrably failed to lead men into the paths of duty and virtue, it was the task of the future to try morality without religion." [181]

From the Age of the Bourgeoisie (1861-1883), where this vision of civilization arrived upon was 'Australia as the World's Social Experiment' during the Edwardian Era (1901-1910). This is a reference to the 'world-first' progressivist reforms, in economic welfare, such as the Invalid and Old Age Pension Act of 1908, but more particularly in labour relations regulations and the development of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration. The great economic achievements, accompanied by a wave of industrial inventiveness in machinery, were due to the political forces of both the Labor Party and the Liberal Party under the high-minded Alfred Deakin. However, Clark points out that things went badly when Deakin forged a union with the Conservative free-traders, with the new

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Liberal Party in 1909. In Clark's assessment: "Liberalism had abandoned its role as a pioneer in social reform and committed itself to the defence of the *status quo*." [239] The Labor Party at this time was only comparatively less conservative. It was Labor Leader Andrew Fisher who promised the United Kingdom, 'the last man and the last shilling' in his Colac speech of 31 July 1914 [242]. The speech was made a few days before war broke out, and a few months before Fisher become Prime Minister. The statement spoke of Labor's commitment to the economic system of imperial federation, which was conservative in that it was protectionist and 'culturally high' in heritage and 'colonial' dependency.

Just as the unity of Conservatives and Liberals in various political party formations, over the history, were plagued by opposing versions of nationalism, Labor and the union movement was also plagued by the exact same types of polemic nationalism – the choice between Empire-worship which was at its core English nationalism, or radical nationalism with its independence-cum-isolationism and policy of racial purity. The short-term Labor Prime Minister Billy Hughes (1915-1916) and then the Nationalist Party Prime Minister Billy Hughes (Nationalist Labor 1916-1917; Nationalist 1917-1923) brought the two versions into the one policy package, what truly is the core of the new version of nationalism for Australia, ANZAC nationalism. While it is true that the events of Gallipoli campaign in 1915 gave birth to the myth, the myth was, in one sense, a curtain that hid the political machinery of Hughes in fostering the nationalism for his own politics which, contrary to the myth, was duty to empire and the social hierarchy it was structured by; and in the other sense, a drape that Hughes, the beloved 'little digger', wrapped himself snugly inside. Certainly, Hughes is a controversial figure in Australian history, but testimonies to his personality, across the political divide, does put him in the class of cunning politicians with little regard to high ideals. Clark's scathing assessment goes further than most, but it is backed-up by other testimonies from conservatives who were unnerved by Hughes' militancy:

In the heat and passions aroused by a country [England] at bay, Hughes put himself at the service of those who shared his own craving for an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He stormed up and down England shouting to audiences caught up in the hysteria of war, 'Wake up England!' [247-248]

Nevertheless, Hughes was popularly received at the conclusion of World War I. His political popularity, which continued beyond his political career, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, became something of national hero-worship. It meant his key political message became 'gospel' to a conventional-thinking middle Australia. Clark records this key message at the very end of Chapter Ten. Said Hughes at the House of Representative on 10 September 1919: "There is no way of salvation save by the gospel of work. Those who endeavour to set class against class, or to destroy wealth are counsellors of destruction." [254] The

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sentiment here oddly combines, in the middle ground, the Catholic working class and the Protestant middle class, and yet the idea of salvation from work, as Clark describes throughout the book, reeks of economic slavery and the slavery to materialism and consumerism.

Both Clark's analysis of the political messages and the political messages themselves were shaped in the understanding of federal politics of the 1920s, with the polarization of the Left into a new Australian movement of Communism [265], and of the Right in secret right-wing militias and from demagogue politicians (mild versions of their European counterparts) [271-272]. Federal government policies were White Australia, material living standards, tariff protection, and strategies against what was proclaimed as the Communist menace [258]. Contrary to the much later attempt, in the 1980s, to tar Clark as a communist-sympathizer by *Quadrant* and *The Courier-Mail*, Clark actually identified the failure of Communism in Australia:

Yet the Communist failed to gain a following amongst the working classes. Their leaders were drawn from the petty bourgeois intelligentsia and renegades from the Catholic Church, while the rank and file of the party were drawn as from the middle-class intellectuals as from the working classes. It was as difficult for the Communists in Australia to convert people to the overthrow of the existing society as it was for missionaries in Tahiti to convince the natives of original sin. Their upright if stiff-necked loyalty to the doctrine of increasing misery did not help them to convince the masses that they knew how to remove the causes of human conflict and create material well-being for all. Their loyalty to all the changes of tactics and policies in Moscow exposed them to the charge they were not masters in their own house. [265-266]

On the other side of politics, and in the next decade (1930s), the United Australia Party proved just as politically inept [270-273]. The party was formed by another Labor renegade, Joseph Lyons, who also created a new party from an alliance with the nationalists, and the Nationalist Party became the United Australia Party (UAP, a rebranding in age of extreme nationalist parties). As Clark explains, the era of the UAP was a time in Australia of massive urbanization and industrialisation, coinciding with the worse of the Great Depression. Most historians agree that Australia did not recover from the impoverishment until the war economy of World War II. The failure of the UAP's free-market economic policies in this era, along with the recovery from high-levels of government control and regulation in the war, is what produced the second welfare state in Australia. In these policies the Labor Party of Curtin-Chifley-Evatt led the way, in what was called, Social Reconstruction. However, the same policies and outlook was also extended by Robert Menzies' new Liberal Party, although without the socialist level of planning.

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In the new post-war era there were two major differences between the Left and Right in their vision of the nation. And these two policy areas had their ascendance in the UAP era, and were marked, again, by over-reactions within the Labor Party, ending again in the splits in the Australian Labor Party and the formations of new right-wing labour parties. The first policy area was 'anti-communism', not so much as a policy platform as a political weapon. The hall-marks were Menzies' fight with the High Court and his failed attempt to ban the Communist Party in a referendum, along with the Petrov affair, and Evatt's over-reaction [308-310]. The second policy area was cultural censorship. It began with the UAP Government use of the customs department to enforce bans on all books, pamphlets, and newspapers deemed to be corrupt or deprave [273]. This meant that literary works, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were banned in Australia. Even in the new post-war era, the Labor Party did not help removed this Puritan or Philistine cultural nationalism. As the party was divided by the political question of communism, it was also divided on the cultural question of higher education and literary intellect. The intelligentsia in the party did what it could, but the higher education sectional interest was epitomized by H.V. Evatt, the Labor Opposition Leader. While Evatt had a brilliant intellect in law and many policies areas [294], he was inept politician often allowing his temper to lead him into the political traps of his foes [291-292].

In fairness, he was also leading a party undermining itself in factional brawls, and that extreme polemic environment made it difficult to have clear insight. Indeed, the polemics reinforced the old provincialism, but on the national scale: "...the leaders of opinion in Australia kept off the wider horizons." [295]. However, the post-war era was changing that provincial perception. In 1947 the Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell declared that, "The days of isolation are over", and Clark saw this as a change in 'the mental horizons':

By the 1960s the migrant from Europe, and the revolution in communications, had broken down the cultural isolation, left the bush culture as a historic survival, liberated some from the dead hand of their puritan past, and prepared Australians to confront the universal problem of man in the age of plastics, chromium, and the [nuclear] bomb. [299]

Here we had the emergence of a new nationalism, cosmopolitan nationalism, which led to breakdown of the White Australia Policy.

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The politics of the Cold War weaved its way throughout the politics and the culture, as outlined above. In terms of policy, caught in the ethos of the Cold War, Clark explains an innovative national policy as Evatt's original vision for the ANZAC Pact, an independent, third-way, foreign policy for Australia and New Zealand [294]. However, Clark notes that, by the late 1960s, this vision became a great failure of opportunity for Labor. It had failed to "...sketch a society pitched midway between the ideologies of Moscow and Washington." [311]

The key problem in failing to negotiate a way forward is what Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith identified as *The Affluent Society*, which are the problems of materialism and consumerism that Clark described in the Australian history of the last quarter of the twentieth century. Australians were beguiled by their own material wealth. Even the great philosopher, Bernard Russell, was beguiled when he toured Australia in 1950. According to Clark, Russell saw Australians as pioneers "not only in the development of Australia, but in pointing the way to a happier destiny for man throughout the centuries to come." [314] As Clark described, this could not be the 'happiness' that Russell himself held to:

Material well-being for all was stripping away the need for the great comforters of the past – the promise of happiness in the life of the world to come, or the promise on earth, or the poetry and music which had ministered in the past not just to delight but also to give the strength and the courage to endure. [318]

We were caught, like a kangaroo before the headlight, as Clark says in "never-ending titillation on the television screen". [318]

Clark also saw hope from Gough Whitlam's vision of finding a way forward in a national vision, which was steered "between the moral infamies of a capitalist society and the conformism of the communist societies" [331]. But to make a long story short that opportunity was also lost. Clark's conclusion of the short history, ended apparently pessimistically: "Mammon has won", he said, "Mammon had infected the ancient continent of Australia. The dreams of humanity had ended in age of ruin". And yet Clark's historiography is never completely hopeless. His last paragraph:

...Australians have begun to contribute to the never-ending conversations of humanity on the meaning of life, and the means of wisdom and understanding. So far no one has described the phoenix bird which will arise from the ashes of an age of ruins. No one has risked prophesying

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whether an age of ruins will be the prelude to the coming of the barbarians or to taking a seat at the great banquet of life. The life-deniers and the straiteners have been swept into the dustbin of human history. Now is the time for the life-affirmers and the enlargers to show whether they have anything to say, whether they have any food for the great hungers of humanity [351]

This is where Clark concluded his revised short history, in 1986 (the original had closed off in 1963). Considering the book as a whole, it can be said that Clark delivered another nationalism, the nationalism of tragedy. In 2006 his son, Sebastian Clark, gave an addendum to the book. Sebastian's assessment of the last few decades was more pessimistic than his father's, "a level of deprivation contrary to the overall happiness rating". [353] As the son described, John Howard's response to the Clark-ian tragic nationalism was to declare a politics for a 'relaxed and comfortable' Australia [357]. The paradox of the politics was the fear and anxiety that it created, Clark's old story of the fears of foreigners and foreign ideas, and the anxious rush back to find comfort in the cultural isolation of the past. As Sebastian Clark showed, all of this further ruin became possible in the recent decades because Australian Governments had run down the higher education and research sector; where in the funding schemes, the outcome was "Professional courses benefited, while arts [meaning humanities] and basic sciences declined." [367]. The social sciences had also suffered. It was contrary to the nationalist visions of both Evatt and Menzies, but fitting the narrower and berefted visions of Hughes and Howard.

In summary, Clark provided an understanding of different versions of Australian nationalism and myth:

1. Rural and Urban Folklore (with crossovers, as many rural folklorists were urbanists);
2. Provincialism (with the possibility of scaling 'the local' up to the region or the nation);
3. Philistinism (with one of its old versions as 'Puritanism');
4. 'Bourgeois Civilization' (which aligned to the old British-Australian nationalism);
5. 'Working Class' (which is more commonly referred to as 'Radical Nationalism');
6. ANZAC Nationalism (and there are different versions, see Carolyn Holbrook's *ANZAC: The Unauthorised Biography*);
7. Cosmopolitan Nationalism (from the 1980s a variant arose as multiculturalism); and Clark's own
8. Tragic Nationalism.

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The last word should be given to Clark who summed up in the last chapter, discussing the major cultural shift of Australian society, a divided society, the conflict between the two major political nationalisms:

Committed since 1905 to the aim of cultivating an Australian national sentiment, they [‘the nationalists’] were stronger advocates than the members of the conservatives groups of such policies as an Australian national anthem and an Australian national flag. Unlike the conservatives, they did not stress their loyalty to the British monarchy or to any imperial ties or sentiment. In general they were committed to such slogans as ‘Australia for the Australians’ and to the defence of Australia on Australian soil. By contrast, their opponents saw themselves as both Australians and British, as Australian Britons; as such they believed the first line of defence for Australia was the battlefields of Europe or in the jungles of South-east Asia. [327]