

SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM IN AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED STATES, 1890-1914

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(Resumen)

En la década de 1890, EE.UU. acababa de cerrar oficialmente su frontera y estaba a las puertas de ser un Imperio, redefiniendo su mitología e identidad nacional en medio de un acelerado desarrollo industrial. En esa década, las Colonias Australianas estaban en pleno proceso de separación de Gran Bretaña y construcción nacional. En ambos casos las ideas papelistas y el radicalismo agrario representaban un nacionalismo radical. Este triunfó en EE.UU. por la derrota del populismo. Desde entonces socialismo y radicalismo se han considerado antiamericanos; mientras que en Australia el laborismo identificaba socialismo y construcción nacional.

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This article is about the relationship between nationalism and socialism in two "new" and Anglo-saxon countries - Australia and United States- in the crucial period of the 1890s. Those years represented a decisive moment in the formation or non formation of labor parties in both countries (as they were essential in the formation of socialdemocratic parties in the western countries in general) and in the definition or redefinition of the nation.

One of the main differences between Australia and United States at that time was the maturity of their respective processes of national construction. The nation was strongly consolidated in the US since the Revolution and the War of Independence. Since then its identity was related to the Republic and Democracy. In Australia, because of the relationship with Britain, a very weak national consciousness existed until the constitution of the Commonwealth in 1901. Without Revolution or War against the metropolis, Australia became independent, but the Crown remained the Head of State.

However, what united Australia and the US around the 1890's was that American national identity was challenged by the development of corporative capitalism and the end of the agrarian frontier. The national identity had to be redefined at the moment when the United States started to become an Empire. Meanwhile in Australia these were the years of national construction. In both countries the land frontier played a central role in the making or remaking of their mythologies and national identities. The frontier was agrarian and democratic in the US, oligarquic and based on sheep raising in Australia; individualistic and violent in the US, and stimulating the values of egalitarianism, solidarity and mateship in Australia.

The countryside was also where the most important radical movements of both countries took place in the nineties: Populism. American Populism redefined national identity in a radical way, looking for economic democracy. In Australia, the ideas of

American populists were essential in the making of the new mass unions created by sheep-shearers and miners, that eventually led to the foundation of the Australian Labor Party. The fundamental role played by the ALP in the making of the nation has united moderate socialism and nationalism ever since. In the US, the failure of Populism in the 1890s in creating a labor party that united all radicals, separated nationalism and socialism until the New Deal.

I'm going to analyze this subject through three different aspects: land tenure, the construction of national myths and the growth of populism.

LAND TENURE: THE AGRARIAN FRONTIER

Australia and United States were continental countries with land for the settlement of European immigrants. In little less than half a century (1803-1848) the American Republic expanded into a continental nation. This westward growth was achieved by purchase and wars against American Indians, Britain and Mexico. In 1850 the American population was close on 30 millions. At that time Australia had a population of 403,000, and the territories to the north and south of New South Wales had been thinly settled and the West coast was only beginning to be explored. New territorial colonies had been added: South Australia, Western Australia and, in 1851, Victoria.

Almost as large in area as the continental USA, Australia did not have to fight either its aboriginal population or other nations to expand its territory. The main enemy was a hostile environment. Australia contains more desert terrain for its size than any other inhabited continent, most of it in the outback, home to three distinct deserts. Agricultural land benefiting from regular rainfall covers only a narrow band of territory, concentrated principally on the coastal lowlands of Adelaide and Perth. Over 60% of the continent is arid. It is the intermediary semi-arid zone on the fringes of the deserts that sustain the vast sheep-grazing stations, home in the mid-19th century to the Squatters.¹

In comparison, the US enjoys considerable agrarian advantages. Half the continent, from the East Coast to beyond the Missouri, enjoys regular rainfall and is mainly arable.

1. The New South Wales Corps was the first colonial elite in Australia. In 1799 the officers cornered the market in imported rum and soon controlled most of the other imports; this "primitive capital accumulation" secured them ownership of over 75% of the sheep, nearly 60% of the horses and one third of the cattle in Australia. Former New South Wales Corps officers, who had taken up their commander's offer of land grants and "assigned" convict labor, were beginning to consolidate as a pastoralist oligarchy. An oligarchy, moreover, whose power and numbers increased dramatically when, in the 1830s, seal and whale hunting was replaced by the production and export of wool for the British textile industry which rapidly became the major economic activity. See Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, London, 1988 p.105 & 110-111 and Manning Clark, *A Short History of Australia*, New York, 1987, chap.5 "Immigrants and Squatters".

Seventeen major rivers flow through or on the borders of the US and there is only one in Australia. Deserts form only about 5% of the total land surface and are concentrated in the south-west instead of the centre; and the semi-arid grazing lands of the west and south-west occupy another 15-20%. In other words, the American geo-climatic situation is roughly the inverse of that of Australia. But the main difference was political: the distinct forms of Land Tenure.

From The foundational moments of the two nations, there was an inverse relation between the relative distribution of rural and urban populations. This cannot be ascribed solely to the different geophysical and climatological conditions pertaining in the two continents. Different 'political' policies were as important, if not more important, than natural conditions in agrarian development and especially in the distinct forms of land tenure.

From 1800 on in the US the Jeffersonian policy of dividing public land into small and cheap lots gained ground over that supported by Hamilton of selling the land in large extensions. Jefferson's policy obviously favoured a democratic approach to land tenure in support of the small farmer-owner. With the populist presidency of Andrew Jackson this democratization was carried further in a series of "pre-emption" acts (The right to purchase land already settled) which culminated in the 1841 law allowing any white American male who did not own above a certain quantity of land elsewhere, to purchase 160 acres (a square mile) of public land at a minimum price of \$1.20 an acre. Above all, however, it was the Homestead Act of 1862 which set the seal on cheap and easy access to landownership. Here again a maximum 160 acres of land could be bought for only \$10 to cover the administrative costs, the land title being granted after five years of living on and working the land and a further payment of \$26.²

In Australia, the Crown retained the ownership of all public land until self-government was introduced in 1856. Upto 1831, the Crown pursued a policy of free land grants, but in that year it introduced a new policy of auctioning land at a minimum price of 5 shillings an acre. This minimum was raised in subsequent years with the aim of keeping land prices high in order to subsidize emigration, provide work for the colonies, prevent the land being sub-divided, and to make it impossible for workers to buy the land easily. This last aim was justified on the grounds of the shortage and high cost of labor in the colonies. At the same time the Squatters were permitted by the Crown to occupy grazing lands on very favourable terms although their rights of tenure became increasingly uncertain. This led them in 1842 to seek and obtain control of the New South Wales Legislative Council, a first tentative step to self-government, mainly in order to dictate the terms of tenure on the Crown lands they occupied.³

2. Subsequent legislation allowed the purchase of much larger extents of Western lands suited mainly for grazing. This in turn favoured a process of land speculation by the large cattle-ranchers. See H.C.Allen, *Bush and Backwoods, A Comparison of the Frontier in Australia and the United States*, Michigan State University Press, 1959, pp.48-55.

3. H.C.Allen, *ib.*, pp.55-57.

The movement to enforce cheap land in small lots began only after 1858 with self-government and democratization of the political system. The movement took its inspiration largely from the American example, and the laws approved by the colonial legislatures from 1861 to 1869 were to a great extent based on American legislation, especially the Homestead Act.⁴ Despite this, a class of small family farmer-owners could be created only in South Australia and to a lesser extent in Victoria. The majority of Australian historians attribute this failure to lack of capital and adequate equipment, dear and insufficient transport conditions and above all to the climate and geophysical conditions. Shortage of irrigation water, the periodical severe droughts, climatic inclemency, poor soils were only overcome in the 20th century with the large-scale introduction of adequate farming equipment, irrigation and government aid.⁵

The same was true in the last American frontier- the arid and desert lands of California, Arizona, Nevada, Wyoming, New Mexico and Oklahoma, where the periodical droughts and dust storms made impossible the survival of small farmers, favouring the concentration of land ownership and the substitution of cattle for sheep grazing.

The land tenure systems of both countries reflected very different political systems and had consequences on the immigration. At the time of Jackson's presidency in the 1830s the American Republic was a democracy, based on almost universal white male suffrage. Native Americans, blacks and women were excluded from the political system, but for European countries the US was considered a democratic country.

Political and religious dissidents continued to seek refuge there and in 1830 immigration began on a mass scale; in the next half century 12 million workers emigrated from Europe to America. This so-called "old immigration" was composed originally of English, followed later by Scots and Irish and subsequently by Germans and Scandinavians. Many of the British and German immigrants were skilled workers and all of them were attracted by the high salaries and the cheap land. The last European immigration started in 1880s/1890s and ended in 1924.⁶ Twenty five million Jews, southern and eastern Europeans from the countryside, emigrated to the American cities, when the agrarian frontier was already closed. It was in this period that the US began to adopt restrictive immigration laws though until 1924 these would never be as draconian as Australia's.⁷

4. In New South Wales, the Alienation Act and Occupation Act (1861); Victoria, the Duffy Act (1862); Queensland, The Selection Act (1868); South Australia, the Stangways Act (1869).

5. The historians' opinion is shared by M. Clark, op.cit. pp.142-146.

6. The wages were 92% more for skilled workers, unskilled 77% more between 1790-1799, a wage gap which was reduced to 29% and 14% respectively by 1820-1820, according to J.H. Laslett, *Reluctant Proletarians*, unpublished work, Los Angeles, 1984. pp.20-31.

7. With the exception, it should be added, of legislation in 1882 which practically banned Chinese immigration. This was in response to white urban working class and small farmers' protests, especially in California, about competition from Chinese labor which led to anti-

Australia was founded as a penal colony by the British Crown. Convicts, ex-convicts and government officials were the only population until 1840s-50, when the gold rush attracted the first important immigration. Before, and again after, British immigration to Australia had to be subsidized by the British Government in the form of assisted passages. Australia was too far away and the economical opportunities bore no comparison with the American ones. On the other hand the Australian Labor movement, fearful that its high wages would be undermined by immigration that allowed in cheap labor, did all it could to restrict immigration to white, mainly British, immigrants. Their reaction received the support of the urban bourgeoisie and middle-classes who probably feared that their exiguous domestic markets would be diluted, even dissolved, if per capita purchasing power were lowered dramatically by cheap immigrant labor.⁸

THE AGRARIAN FRONTIER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL MYTHS

Despite the apparent similarities in the vast extensions of the cattle ranches of the American West and the sheep stations of the Australian "outback", they were less alike than they appeared at first sight. Mark Twain was surprised at the amount of land needed to pasture sheep in Australia; Anthony Trollope, the British novelist, was impressed by the rough and lonely life led by shepherds and Squatters alike on the stations which were often as much as 25 miles apart and the Australian writer Marcus Clarke, described the loneliness, melancholy and strangeness of the outback in his writing.⁹

Whatever else the Agrarian Frontiers of the two countries were responsible for shaping, they certainly helped to mould the national myths of both. the individualism of the American cowboy was matched by the egalitarianism and "mateship" of the Australian

Chinese violence by the late 1870s. See Paul Kleppner, "Defining Citizenship: Immigration and the Struggle for Voting Rights in Antebellum America", in Donald W. Rogers(ed), *Voting and the Spirit of American Democracy*, University of Illinois Press, 1992, chap.3

8. Barrie Dyster suggests that there was an another equally important economic interest at stake: the entrepreneurs' and middle-class' need to ensure themselves of a strong domestic market for their services and the goods they imported from Britain. High wage labor could meet this demand; convict labor (or later, cheap immigrant labor) could not. See B. Dyster, "Capital and Labor in America and Australia" pp. 195-196 in *American Studies: New Essays from Australia and New Zealand*, eds. Berger J. Bell & Ian J. Bickerton, University of New South Wales, 1981.

9. See Mark Twain, *Following the Equator*, New York, 1897, vol 1, pp.120-130, cited by Norman Harper, *Australia and The United States*, Sydney, 1971, pp.34-35; Hume Dow(ed) *Trollope's Australia*, Melbourne & Sydney, 1966, pp. 96-105; and Marcus Clarke, *The Beauty of Loneliness*, 1877, cited by Ian Turner, *The Australian Dream*, Melbourne, 1968, pp.101-102.

bushman, although the role of bushranger and outlaw were not directly symmetrical in their mythological dimensions.

Despite - or perhaps because of- the fact that The Australian population was largely urban, it looked to the outback when, in the 1850s, the country began its search to construct a national identity and character. It found it in the shepherd bushman living in a solitary and hostile environment whose livelihood, indeed often his life, depended on the skill and solidarity of his fellow bushman; whose only partner, for weeks on end, in this woman-less world, was the mate who shared his hut. Working in a rural or semi-rural setting, the miner also depended in his work on his fellow miner in the same way. "Mateship", equality were seen as the bushman's principal characteristics and assimilated into part of the "national identity".

With this went a defiance of, a hatred for authority, which some attributed to transportation and the hatred for the warders, many of them ex-convicts. Whether this was so or not, it was transposed onto and became personified in the character of the bushranger, a name given from 1806 on¹⁰ to escaped convicts who managed to survive in the wild countryside of Van Diemen Land, one of the worst "convict hells" of Australia. At first they lived by hunting kangaroos and later by stealing sheep from the Squatters and exchanging them with the small free farmers for tea, sugar, flour and gunpowder. The bushrangers became a symbol of freedom; they alone defied authority and a hostile countryside and won their liberty in a convict continent. Their "Robin Hood" fame was due to a generalized hostility to the system of transportation, particularly among the assigned convicts who often helped them directly.¹¹

The bushranger progressed from escaped convict to outlaw but with his characteristic defiance of authority and his ability to live in a hostile environment intact. In a nation that had known neither war nor revolution, he became the major anti-authoritarian hero. Personified finally in Ned Kelly¹², who was said never to have hurt a woman or robbed the poor and who rapidly became a legend among poor farmers, gold-hunters, convicts' descendants and immigrant Irish, Kelly became the only national hero until World War 1. Nor was it surprising that in these conditions *Waltzing Matilde*, which

10. First called "banditti", they then became "bolters" until finally the name "bushranger" was adopted. It is curious to observe how the name was increasingly deprived of its initial "outlaw" connotations. In American English a bushranger is defined as a "backwoodsman", a person living in heavily wooded, uncultivated, thinly settled areas. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Boston, 1985.

11. For the Bushranger's origins, see Hughes, op.cit.pp.231-263.

12. Kelly first became famous in 1878 when he escaped victorious from a battle with the police in north-east Victoria. His fame grew after he and his gang robbed the National Bank and the Bank of New South Wales, both in Victoria. Captured in 1880, he was hanged, converting him definitively into a national hero for the popular classes. See Clarck, op.cit.p.161.

celebrates the theft of a Squatter's sheep, became to all intents and purposes the National Anthem.

Violence has always been considered consubstantial with the American "frontier" where, in some cases, outlaws became popular but not "national" heroes at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. (The nation's founding fathers, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, supplied the need for national heroic figures). Many of the outlaws, like Billy the Kid, were no more than plain criminals; others, like Jessie James and Gregorio Cortez, from Texas, the latter becoming a hero to the Mexicans of the south-west fall clearly into the category of social bandit.¹³

It was the expansion of the mass media which brought fame to these outlaws beyond their original areas of operation, mythologizing them as it mythologized everything to do with the "frontier", especially the West. This mixture of myth and reality continues to this day, finding its major expression - within perfectly codified and cinematic genres - in the "cowboy". Simultaneously the political myth started with Theodore Roosevelt, whose regiment (Rough Riders) in the Spanish American War, was popularly called the "Cowboys Regiment" and saw in the cowboy the expression of american ideals (individualism, political and racial superiority, the use of violence to construct and expand the nation).¹⁴ In historical fact, cowboys were almost always poor whites, Mexicans who had lost their lands and former black slaves, the latter finding better wages and treatment in the West than in the South.¹⁵ Single men, living on the isolated ranches from spring to autumn, they were paid low wages to herd, brand and castrate cattle. Their demise began in the 1880s after the invention of barbed wire in the previous decade and the subsequent enclosure of pasture land. During the agricultural crisis of the 1890s, when many of the best Texas ranches were

13. Representatives of an intermediary type of social bandit were Jesse James and his gang operating on the Kansas-Missouri frontier who were the pride of Confederate small farmers since they robbed only Northern banks and railways; and the Doolin-Dalton gang in Oklahoma who attacked marshals who were using the force of their authority to secure the best land for themselves. See Richard White, *A New History of The American West*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991, pp.328-337.

14. Theodore Roosevelt was the first to use the myth as a political model, and the regiment of "Rough Riders" he raised to fight in the Spanish-American War of 1898 was also known as the "Cowboy Regiment". In the 1960s president Johnson resurrected "The Texas Frontier" as a political symbol; and more recently, Malcolm Baldrige, President Reagan's Secretary of Commerce, was killed in a fall from his horse while practising for a rodeo. At his funeral the then vice-president, George Bush, recited a cowboy poem promising eternal salvation to the frontier elect. President Reagan himself was injured in a fall from a horse during a rodeo in 1989. See Blake Allmendinger, *The Cowboy*, Oxford University Press, 1993, p.4.

15. Racial discrimination on the ranches appears to have been rare and black cowboys could drink with whites in local town bars, though they were not allowed into white brothels. William Loren Katz, *The Black West*, Seattle, 1987, pp.146-166.

bought out by large international companies, the cowboy's previously direct and relatively equal relationship with the rancher changed dramatically. Cattle rustling by out-of-work cowboys, which on a small scale had always been accepted by ranchers, now became a way of life for some while others turned Pinkerton agents who hunted them down.

Other ex-cowboys, however, began to write down the poems and stories they had heard on the ranches, describing their work life herding, branding and castrating cattle. It was the beginning of the literary genre which subsequently turned the cowboy into a symbol of individualism and freedom in the vast landscapes of the West, as well as a model of self-assured and naturally aristocratic Anglo-Saxon masculinity, which was taken up by Hollywood from its earliest days in the 1920s. It entered white American culture as an important component of the national identity, used by presidents and leading politicians ever since.¹⁶

THE GROWTH OF POPULISM

The rapid industrialization of the U.S. in the last two decades of the 19th century, and the simultaneous beginning of large-scale industrialization in Australia, led to protest in both countries being channelled into mass socialist and trade union organizations. And in both, although with differing fates, agrarian movements and populist ideas were an essential component of this protest. In the U.S. The Populist party proved unable to hold together the different radical tendencies in order to become a stable third, socialist party; while in Australia, populist ideas decisively influenced two trade unions formed in the 1880s- the Amalgamated Shearer's Union(ASU) and the Amalgamated Miners Association(AMA)- which became the essential factors in the formation of Labor Parties in the colonies and subsequently in that of the Australian Labor Party itself.

The census of 1890 showed that the American frontier was definitively closed. It was in that decade that the greatest radical agrarian movement in the country's history took place. The closing of the frontier was only one of the factors which had threatened poor farmers since the 1870s. The coming of the railroad, which heralded regional specialization of agrarian production and work; the ever-increasing dependency of small farmers on bank loans to finance their crops, machinery and rail costs; and the fact that agrarian prices had

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begun to drop in the 1870s, dropped even further in the 1880s and finally crashed in the economic crisis of 1893 were among the most important of these. Many small farmers lost their land and became renters or farm hands as a result.¹⁷

These changes took place initially amidst a spectacular economic boom, financial speculation and the creation of enormous fortunes from the new industries. The cities of the East and Mid-West grew rapidly as 600,000 Catholic and Jewish immigrants from southern and eastern Europe poured in each year to the East coast while in the West Chinese and Mexican workers continued to arrive to work in the mines and fields. This rapid industrialization and the influx of a new type of immigrant produced a reaction of terror and hostility in a society which feared losing its traditional agrarian-frontier identity and its Anglo-Saxon/Nordic/Teutonic ethnic "superiority".¹⁸

The rapid economic growth was accompanied by violent social struggle in which for the first time unskilled workers in key industries took part, and led to the formation of trade union and socialist organizations which appeared on the point of "take-off" to European levels.¹⁹ In 1877, the year of the great railroad strikes, the Socialist Labor Party was founded; in 1883, the New International Workers Association had 5,000 members in Chicago, published newspapers in five languages, organized parades and demonstrations, led strikes and was a powerful influence in the 22 trade unions which made up the Central Labor Union of Chicago. It was in Chicago also, in the middle of a strike movement for the eight-hour working day in 1886, that the Haymarket incident took place.²⁰ Amidst national and international protest at the subsequent executions of anarchist leaders, a violent wave of repression was launched against trade unions and working-class parties, in which the national militia, the Pinkerton Agency and employers' private armies took part.

In spite of the repression, agitation continued into the 1890s, climaxing in the massive Pullman strike of 1894.²¹ The previous year saw the beginning of the most serious

17. By 1880 25% of all family farms were rented and by 1900 farm laborers numbered 4.5 million.

18. Sandra Rennie, "The Factor of National Identity: An Explanation of the Differing Reactions of Australia and the United States to Mass Immigration," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 68, September, 1982.

19. This was the view Engels expressed in a letter to Sorge (Jan 29, 1886), although he added that, given their "disdain" for reason and science, one could not expect Anglo North Americans to do anything except in their own way. *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Letters to America 1848-1895*, New York, 1969, p. 148.

20. A bomb was thrown at the police in Haymarket Square, resulting in the death of seven policemen. Anarchists were blamed, and eight of their leaders were tried, four of them being sentenced to death and hanged. It is widely believed that the authorities provoked the incident in order to justify their repression of the anarchist movement.

21. A year earlier Eugene Debs, a populist, had organized the American Railway Union; the strike and its consequences led him to become one of the initiators of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) in 1901. Unlike the Socialist Labor party, the SPA did not support

economic crisis of the country's history, which put out of work between 13 and 15 million workers who received no type of Federal aid since the U.S. was the most absolute laissez-faire economy in the developed western world.²²

As we have seen, the impoverished farmers of the South and West felt the full effects of these economic changes. The small farmers' situation was particularly dramatic in Texas where a "crop-lien" system cost the farmer 25% interest on the money advanced against his crop; if he failed to pay he lost his land and became a tenant. In revolt against this system, the first Farmers Alliance was founded in 1877 which by 1882 had grown to include 120 affiliates in 12 counties of Texas; the Alliance's major strategy for reducing costs and raising farm prices were purchase and sales cooperatives. By 1889, The Farmers Alliance had 400,000 members and had extended its activities to other southern states.²³

In 1886, The first populist program-The Cleburn Demands- called a national Congress of all workers organizations. The rapid growth of the Farmers Alliance and the two major party's indifference to its demands, led it to consider the necessity of creating its own political party. From These different strands the People's Party was founded in 1890. Two years later in Omaha the new party nominated James B. Weaver of Iowa its presidential candidate on a platform which, apart from the typical populist demands of ending land speculation, controlling the power of the banks and the free coinage of silver, contained another series of far-reaching democratic demands in solidarity with the working class: the nationalization of the railroads, a Federal law to bring in the eight-hour day, outlawing the use of Pinkerton detectives as strike breakers, pensions for war veterans, restriction of immigration, the introduction of referenda and other popular initiatives and a single term for Presidents and Vice-Presidents coupled with the direct election of senators.²⁴

Running on this platform, Weaver won a million votes, but he was unable to overcome white southern racism or to make connection on an on-going basis with the working-class movement throughout the US. In the following presidential elections of 1896, the People's Party chose therefore to unite with the Democrats in return for the inclusion in the latter's program of some of its demands. The Democratic nomination that year of William J. Bryan, supported by the majority of the country's radical leaders, was a victory for the most progressive wing of the Democratic party and it frightened the business world

separate trade unions for skilled and unskilled workers, nor was it sectarian in matters of race and immigration.

22. The lack of industrial legislation resulted in a very high level of industrial injury. Moreover, when the first Federal reports on income and wealth were published in 1915 they showed that between one-third and one-quarter of workers were living below the poverty line, while 2% of the population owned 60% of the wealth. Laslett, op.cit.pp.51-53.

23. Gene Clanton, *Populism. The Human Preference in America, 1890-1900*, Boston, 1984,pp.1-23.

24. G.Clanton, op.cit.pp.81-83.

which saw Bryan's program as out-and-out socialism. The Republican candidate, William McKinley, won a landslide victory. In no small part this was due to a reaction against the incumbent Democratic administration which had done too little in the electorates' eyes to mitigate the effects of the Great Depression; but populism's cause crashed with it.

From a social historian's perspective, populism's historic defeat has been viewed as the result of its impossibility to create national alliances with the labor movement even in those regions where its influence was greatest, as in the recently industrialized Mid-West where many of the workers were of the agrarian origin. The major reason was that the interests of small farmers and industrial workers, whatever their origin, did not coincide; the latter wanted to keep food prices low and had no interest therefore in the coinage of silver. In the South, led by the Democratic party which used the Ku Klux Klan's violence and intimidation for its ends, white racism prevented an alliance between whites and blacks; while in the West's mining regions of Colorado Idaho and Montana the AFL's competition and above all the fierce repression against all socialist forces, especially the Knights of Labor, led to populism's failure among a fairly homogenous proletariat.²⁵

From a political scientist's point of view, the explanation is different. Walter Dean Burnham, for example, places the defeat of 1896 in the wider context of popular protest at the effects of the second industrialization and the determination of the masses to make effective use of their potential political weight. In Europe, he argues, the industrial elite was relatively protected from such an onslaught by social deference, the persistence of feudalism and, above all, by the restriction of the vote to the upper and middle classes. In the U.S., on the other hand, universal male white suffrage and democratic policies, introduced before mass industrialization, left the elite feeling particularly vulnerable. It did not remain content with seeing off the immediate threat of Bryan and Populism, but took further steps to protect its privileges and interests.²⁶

The outcome of the 1896 presidential elections marked, in this view, a watershed: on the one hand the moment of a new political realignment (Republican domination of the industrial zones, with the Democratic Party relegated to the rural Mid-West and South, and the radicals to the West), and on the other the elite's counter-offensive to insulate it from any such further threat. This was effectively pursued, mainly through judicial process (Supreme Court and other legal decisions which limited democratic political action in certain key areas of economic policy-making), and through the business world's control of the Republican party and its policies.

The so-called "system of 1896" inaugurated one of those changes which every 30 years or so affected the oldest and most stable of political systems in the West. The outcome was to make the system less democratic, a fact which soon became evident as the Republican party ran unopposed in half the states, black southerners and new immigrants

25. See, for example, J.H. Laslett, *op.cit.*, pp.64-69.

26. Walter Dean Burnham, *The Current Crisis of American Politics*, OUP, 1982, pp.47-50 and 108-110.

were excluded altogether, and the percentage of popular votes in elections, which until then had been high, dropped drastically.²⁷

Bryan's defeat put an end to the possibilities of the People's Party and of an alliance between farmers and the labor movement at the national level. Nonetheless, influential "Labor-Farmer" parties continued to exist at state level until the 1920s in some Mid-Western states and the influence of populism remained important within the political parties thanks to the tremendous national and international success of American populist authors in the last decade of the 19th century. Nowhere outside of the U.S. was this influence greater than in Australia-far more so than in any other British or continental European society-because of the very rapid economic growth after the Gold Rush which saw the development of new industrial and service sectors and the growth of immigration.

In this new Australian atmosphere a new industrial trade-unionism, ideologically influenced by the American populists²⁸, arose in the outback and mining regions at the end of the 1880s. The Amalgamated Sherer's Union (ASU), which had 28,000 members in 1890, and the Amalgamated Miners Association (AMA), with 20,000 in 1893, represented an entirely new type of trade-unionism in Australia. Both stood for the creation of an Australian Labor Federation which would represent workers politically and as trade unionists. This was in stark opposition to the refusal of the earlier craft unions to involve themselves politically, which was not to deny that they had achieved considerable success since the Gold Rush in maintaining high wages and winning of the eight-hour day in 1890.

It was, in fact, the ease with which these labor successes had been won and the absence of serious economic depression which gave the craft unions the security and will to conquers new areas; and in the 1890s they converged with the new trade unionism in a wave of strikes. The first and largest of these was the maritime strike, which for a month paralyzed Eastern Australia's economy on the issue of the unions' negotiating rights in firms. The strike developed into a battle between capital and labor in which for the first time the unions demonstrated that their objective went beyond the original issue to one of becoming the active political vertebrae of society. The strike's defeat and the social polarization which followed it - the government's actions were interpreted by the labor

27. It should be added that, from 1894, the Supreme Court had intervened in labor legislation, redirecting the Sherman Act from its original goal of preventing corporate monopolies to preventing union monopolies. By 1900, moreover, state and federal courts had invalidated about sixty labor laws. M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Vol II*, Cambridge University Press, 1993. pp 645. On the other hand the Republican party, through which the business world entered the political world, became in fact the only party in half of the country's states and the popular vote in elections dropped from 78.5% in 1896 to 64.8% in 1900 and 51.7% in 1904. See Burnham, *ib.p.29 y pp.108-110*.

28. For a general vision of the impact of American populism, see Robin Gollan, "American Populism and Australian Utopianism", in *Labour History*, No.9, Nov.1965. See also Robin Gollan, "The Australian Impact" in *Edward Bellamy Abroad*, New York, 1962, pp.120-122.

movement as supporting capital- ended all opposition to political participation and led to the formation of Labor parties which won notable electoral victories in the colonial parliament of the 1890s.

It was in this particularly formative period of the Australian Labor movement in the 1880s and 1890s that two books by American populist authors were especially influential: *Progress and Poverty*, by Henry George, and *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy.²⁹ George argued that the poverty which characterized industrial society had a single root cause and thus a single remedy: the unequal and unjust distribution of wealth was the cause; the remedy a single tax on land, which would be applied to all owners and would provide sufficient revenue for the government to abolish all other taxes, whether direct or indirect.³⁰

Bellamy's book, published in 1888, was very different. A utopian novel written in a clear and concise style, it described a Bostonian plutocrat, falling asleep in 1887 and awaking in the year 2000 to find that society had resolved all its problems. Men of every condition were now politically and economically equal, consideration and friendliness had replaced inhuman relationships and fraternal cooperation that of brutal competition.³¹ Significantly, Bellamy called the democratic, Christian state socialism he was decribing "Nationalism" since in fact it represented what a large part of American radicalism, from Tom Paine on, had tried to achieve: economic democracy through the effective application of the Bill of Rights.

Both books were "best-sellers" in the U.S. and Australia, Bellamy's alone selling 400,000 copies in a year in the U.S. "Bellamy clubs" were created, attracting socialists for their educational aims, religious groups, humanitarian idealists, trade union leaders and small farmers. George's *Progress and Poverty* was the first treatise on political economy to know such success in the U.S. because it spoke directly to the problems which affected the majority of the population and proposed simple and practical solutions. "Single-tax clubs" also sprang up spontaneously in the U.S. and Australia, and George himself took part in the political struggle, running for New York city mayor on the Independent Labor Party ticket in 1886.

Four years later George visited all the Australian colonies on a three-month trip, finding many "Single-tax" leagues already set up; and many more were created as a result of his visit, especially among workers in the outback who succeeded in having the first Labor Party program include a single land tax proposal. For his part, George admired the

29. Two other populist works which had a notable success in Australia were *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, by L.Gronland and *Caesar's Column* by Ignatius Donnelly. See L.G. Churchward, "The American Influence on the Australian Labour Movement" in *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, vol 5, No.19, Nov. 1953, pp.258-260.

30. Steven B.Cord, *Henry George: Dreamer or Realist?* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1965, pp.33-36.

31. Sylvia E. Bowman, "Edward Bellamy, The American Prophet(1850-1898)" in Sylvia E.Bowman (ed.), *Edward Bellamy Abroad*, New York, 1962, pp.29-66.

social and political progressivism of Australia, particularly as the first country to adopt the secret ballot, and because the railway, telegraph and postal systems were public property and the postal saving banks formed part of the latter.³²

The year of his visit, 1890, was as we have seen, a crucial year for Australia's social history since it coincided with the attempt to create a mass trade-union movement and to involve it in political action through the Australian Labor Federation. Bellamy's ideas were serialized in the Federation's weekly journal, *The Worker*, edited by William Lane, which became the bushmen's bible. In those years no other socialist thinker had as much influence as Bellamy, whose work Lane adapted to the particular Australian conditions. The latter laid emphasis on the role of the trade unions as the "microcosm" of the state which, by propagating their ideas and practises to society as a whole, would make of Australia a cooperative and socialist society. After his failure in Australia, Lane emigrated to Paraguay in 1893 where he founded a small cooperative colony, but Bellamy's ideas continued to influence two generations of Australian socialists.³³

From the decade of the 1890s, European reformists, socialists and trade unionists directed their attention to the "Australian social laboratory", where Labor, alone or in alliance with the Liberals, won almost immediate electoral victories. In part this success is explained by the weakness and lack of development, prior to 1890, of the Australian political party system in which Liberals and Conservatives were in reality no more than political fractions, responding to concrete and changing interests; only with the advent of the Labor party did they begin to organize as disciplined parties. But Labor's success was also due to the fact that the party's creation and development coincided with the growth of a national consciousness which would in turn lead to the independence and creation of the Australian Commonwealth in 1901. Improved communications, population growth - native born Australians outnumbered immigrants from 1871- and the on-going organization of a national market all contributed to the desire for federation and independence. The economic depression of the 1890s and the accompanying banking crisis added to the federative ground swell. Recognizing that they had common interests in achieving better working conditions, the workers' organizations also supported federation, though they signally failed to form a Trade Union Federation. It was in these conditions then that the new labor party became the party of national construction.

This process was without doubt much helped by the fact that national mythology which accompanied unification and independence was based on the bushman's life and work, the social struggle that accompanied it, and the "mateship" attributed to it. National mythology did not take the industrial working class as its model, but the nomadic rural workers of the 1830s and 1840s who stood out in their opposition to the imposition of

32. Australia held a particular interest for him since at the age of 15 and at the height of the Gold Rush he had sailed for Melbourne. Later he married a Sydney woman. See Henry George Jr., *The Life of Henry George*, New York, 1900, pp. 522-539.

33. Robin Gollan, "The Australian Impact", op. cit., p.131.

English ideas of rank and privilege; and to this basic myth were added, at the end of the century, the contemporary populist ideals.³⁴

Without either war or revolution, The Australian Commonwealth achieved its independence with the advent of the new century, January 1, 1901; and from that moment on the Labor party's electoral successes at the federal level grew impressively, allowing it to form minority governments, short-lived though they were, in 1904 and in 1908-1909. The following year, 1910, Labor won an outright majority; and from then until World War II the party was in power for a total of 16 years.

From the time of its initial accession to power, the Labor party proved itself a moderate political force, interested above all in the building of the nation and in keeping Australia "white"; among its major social gains were the consolidation of the obligatory state arbitration system for labor disputes, initiated by the Liberals after the 1890 maritime strike.

The labor party's nation-building efforts were evidenced in its political protagonism in writing the Constitution; in its support of national industry against British, German, Japanese and American competition; in the decision to make Canberra the federal capital—following the example of Washington—and in the creation of a national army. And above all in the policy, shared with all other parties, of maintaining a "White nation".

The policy of a white, essentially British Australia was not new, as we have seen. But it was now that it became a legislative reality. In 1901 The Immigration Restriction Act was laid before the Federal Parliament. The Liberals defended it on the grounds of "national character" and political freedom, and the Labor Party on the necessity of a "White Australia" to maintain the working class 'high standards of living. (The Brisbane Worker called for Australia to be saved from persons of colour so that there should be no poor and the country continue to be "the only white nation outside of Europe"). The Act was passed; under its terms exclusion of non-white immigrants was made easy: any such person who could not take down a dictation of 50 words in a European language was automatically barred. Moreover, any non-white already resident in Australia who failed the exam was deported— as were the Kanakas who had again been brought in to work on the Queensland plantations. Racial discrimination at the Federal and state levels was aimed also at the aboriginal population, Asians and Pacific Islanders, all of whom were disbarred from state employment, pensions and the vote. Trade unions refused them membership and in 1905 the Federal Labor Conference adopted as one of its primordial objectives "the cultivation of an Australian sentiment, based on the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community". Three years later

34. This is the thesis of L.G.Churchward, "The American Influence in the Australian Labor Movement", op.cit.,p.124. It was these ideals—rather than the national mythology—which contributed to the vote being extended to women in 1895, making Australia one of the first countries in the world to have universal(white) suffrage.

it added as the first point of its platform the maintenance of a White Australia, and the Labor government under Premier Fisher adhered faithfully to this policy.³⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Australia and the US were both at the beginning of the 19th century continental countries, with enormous territories to conquer and a population based on European immigration. Both countries built their national myths around their respective frontiers but at a different moment of their national construction and political development.

The Frontier existed in the US from the colonial period as a possibility of cheap land for white settlers (Who fought with the Indians for these lands); however, the frontier became a theory and a national and political myth when it was closed officially in the 1890s census. The Thesis or theory formulated by the famous historian F.J. Turner reinforced the idea of a democratic and egalitarian frontier and national identity. This mythic construction helped to support the new American Empire. At the same time, it tried to redefine the American identity in a radical way, in an atmosphere of big changes and disruptions in the country.

Australia never considered its empty territory as a egalitarian possibility, a real frontier. The ex-convicts and First immigrants looked for equal oportunities in the cities or in the gold mines, bu when Australians started to think about building a national identity and being independent from Great Britain, they looked to the outback for the distinctive values of the Australian identity. They found them in the values of the bushmen and bushrangers: solidarity, mateship, equality, dislike of authority and privilege.

In the 1890s both countries shared the growth of populist ideas. In both countries this agrarian radicalism was related to national values. It was succesful in Australia, where the Labor party was the party of national construction; but failed in the US, since when socialism and radical values have been considered non American.

35. Verity Burgman, "Racism, Socialism and the Labour Movement, 1887-1917", in *Labour History*, No.47, Nov.1984.