RED CRIMINALS

Censorship, surveillance and suppression of the radical Russian community in Brisbane during World War I

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ABSTRACT

Keeping Australia safe and protecting the interests of the Commonwealth is the mission of Australia's intelligence agencies. The collection, analysis and provision of intelligence on domestic and foreign threats to Australia’s security assists the government’s decision-making and underpins policy. During World War I, the potential for monitoring political trends in the domestic population was enhanced through mass postal and cable censorship and surveillance in Australia, the wider British Commonwealth and several other countries.

This thesis explores the collection and analysis of intelligence by defence and security agencies during World War I through the case of a group of immigrant activists in Brisbane, the Russian Workers Association (RWA). Taking an historical approach, the aim of the thesis is to explore how the emergence of a coordinated intelligence network is reflected in the data collected on the events and personalities of the Russian group, and in turn how the radicalism of the Russians and the rise of communism shaped the focus of intelligence collection. This work contributes to the substantial body of existing literature on political surveillance and radical organisations in Australia by providing a fuller understanding of the censorship and surveillance processes that led to the suppression of the Russians and how this intelligence focus had longer term impacts on post-war policy.

The historical context for this study is the legislative framework established by the Fisher government and expanded under the Hughes government. The War Precautions Act 1914 and War Precautions Regulations were administered by the Department of Defence and greatly empowered its intelligence arm, the Intelligence Section General Staff. Military intelligence was assisted by state police and two new federal agencies, the Special Intelligence Bureau and the Commonwealth Police. In addition to managing Australia’s contribution to the war in Europe, these Regulations set up the parameters for dealing with wartime disloyalty and sedition on the home front. At this time the radicalism of organisations like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was sweeping through the domestic labour movement. The successes of the Bolsheviks in Russia and the promises of their Soviet revolution also bolstered the ideas promoted by socialist and later communist groups. In response, the Hughes government’s focus on disloyalty and sedition, through the Unlawful Associations Act 1916, set in place restrictions to suppress groups like the RWA.

This study draws on documents created by state and federal agencies and the radical Russian community in Brisbane. The most significant and voluminous intelligence collection tool of the
Great War was postal and cable censorship. From these sources alone, 846 censors’ reports relevant to the RWA were identified for this study through a comprehensive survey of all reports from Queensland between 1915 and 1919, and selected reports from New South Wales and Victoria in 1918 and 1919. These reports are complemented by analysis of selected correspondence and subject files produced by state and federal agencies responsible for monitoring subversive groups. This primary material is also contextualised by secondary literature which deals with political surveillance and radical organisations in Australia and the United Kingdom.

The thesis begins by describing the historical context which surrounded the intelligence agencies that safeguarded the World War I home front, and introducing the story of the Russians in Brisbane. Chapter 1 focuses on the RWA and reconstructs the origins and development of the radical identity that made it an object of government interest. Chapter 2 examines the historical context for the development of the intelligence agencies. The final chapters form the narrative core of the thesis. Chapter 3 traces early Queensland state government correspondence and police reports on the Russian community centred in South Brisbane, and explores discussions at state and federal levels on how best to manage the group. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the intelligence collected through censorship and surveillance, and how the intelligence agencies analysed and distributed this information. Through this process the agencies determined which members of the RWA were subversive, disloyal or seditious. The voices of the Russians and the censors in these records reveal wartime intelligence at the grassroots level.
Statement of originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Louise Curtis
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List of abbreviations

ALP Australian Labor Party
AWA Australian Workers Association
AWU Australian Workers Union
CPA Communist Party of Australia
ILP Independent Labour Party
ISGS Intelligence Section General Staff (military intelligence)
IWW Industrial Workers of the World
MD Military District
MF Third Military District censors’ reports, Victoria
NAA National Archives of Australia
RE Second Military District censors’ reports, New South Wales
RSL Returned and Services League
RSSILA Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia
RWA Russian Workers Association
OBU One Big Union (also OBUPLO One Big Union Propaganda League)
Q/QF/QS First Military District censors’ reports, Queensland
QRU Queensland Railway Union
QSA Queensland State Archives
SIB Special Intelligence Bureau
UFL United Federation of Labour
WWI World War I (also known as the Great War)
Statement acknowledging assistance received

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Great appreciation goes to the dedicated staff in a number of institutions including the Griffith University libraries, University of Queensland libraries, National Library of Australia, Queensland State Archives and National Archives of Australia. I would also like to acknowledge the official support that I received from my employer, the National Archives of Australia. Dr Joe Straezek from the Department of Defence kindly facilitated official access to records.

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Work published in the course of research and preparation of the thesis


‘First World War Intelligence and the Russian Workers Association in Australia’. In Rhizomes: Re-Visioning Boundaries. Edited by Kate Bennett, Maryam Jamarani, and Laura Tolton. St Lucia: School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Queensland, 2006: 9pp.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores a pivotal slice of Australia’s intelligence history: the censorship and surveillance of the home front during World War I. It takes as its focus the wartime suppression of a radical group of Russian immigrant-activists in Brisbane, the Russian Workers Association (RWA). The thesis examines several questions.

- What is the history of the RWA in Australia?
- How was intelligence collected on the RWA, its members and their activities?
- What was the assessment of the nature of the RWA by the Australian authorities?

At a grassroots level the thesis reconstructs the history of the censorship and surveillance of the RWA and reflects on factors that contributed to increased suppression of the group. At a broader level it connects people and events, looking at how the emergence of the modern Australian state during World War I influenced the actions of subversive groups within it.

The retrieval and interpretation of the events and intricacies of immigrant-activist experiences on the home front draws on a wide body of literature and can potentially feed into several areas of scholarship. While this work touches on themes of political emigration, conservatism, racism, government intelligence agencies and war, its primary focus is the body of archival evidence which documents the way in which the RWA was subjected to interdiction by the federal government on the World War I home front. The thesis is a detailed study of that suppression, and it is as much a study of censorship and surveillance as it is an analysis of the Russian community that was being monitored. Analysis is informed by three important bodies of literature: disloyalty on the Australian home front during World War I, radical politics in Australia, and intelligence history.

Disloyalty on the Australian home front during World War I

There are numerous published studies that examine the labour movement around the time of World War I and post-war Australia. Each adds its own insight into the struggle to internationalise the labour movement in light of the Russian triumph, whilst at the same time contending with the complex home front experience. Raymond Evans investigates the social conflict in Queensland during the war period in *Loyalty and Disloyalty*. He further examines tensions between loyal and

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1 The Russian group in Brisbane was known by several names. The title Russian Workers Association can be found across sources from the time period under study. It will be used as a blanket term to refer to the radical Russian group or union in Brisbane.

Introduction
disloyal factions in *The Red Flag Riots*, and shows how Brisbane’s Russian community was purged by the returned soldiers’ movement. Robert Murray also examines this theme in Australian history along with Gerhard Fischer. Another important text is *Industrial Labour and Politics*, in which Ian Turner thoroughly looks at the development of the labour movement in the eastern states over a twenty-year period until 1921. The industrial unrest and strikes on the World War I home front and their impact on Queensland society have been covered in several works including collections edited by John Iremonger, John Merritt and Graeme Osborne as well as Denis Murphy.

**Radical politics in Australia**
The history of radicalism in Australia is explored in a number of publications. Verity Burgmann, Frank Cain and P.J. Rushton deal specifically with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and its direct action program within the labour movement. Also related to the RWA are several detailed studies that cover state surveillance and the impact of the *War Precautions Act 1914* and *Unlawful Association Act 1916* on radical groups. This literature includes the work of Miriam Dixson, Bob Gollan and Frank Farrell. Stuart Macintyre’s *The Reds* examines the founding of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and role played by Russians in its establishment. David Lovell and Kevin Windle published an edited selection of documents pertinent to the relationship between the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of Australia. Several of the early documents are assessments of the Australian situation by RWA members Alexander Zuzenko and Peter

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8 The *War Precautions Act* was passed by the Fisher Labor government, albeit with some opposition from within the Party, in late 1914. The Hughes Nationalist government introduced the *Unlawful Associations Act* in mid December 1916 as a barrier to IWW activity.
Introduction

Studies of the Russian community in Australia include Elena Govor’s work, Eric Fried’s honours thesis on Russians in Queensland, and a collection of pertinent chapters in *Russia and the Fifth Continent*, edited by John McNair and Thomas Poole. Kevin Windle has published on the political activities of members of the RWA, particularly Zuzenko and his work for the Communist International in the 1920s.

As Burgmann observes, early Australian socialists exhibited a kind of hero worship of foreign activists and adopted ideas which were not always suited to Australian conditions. At the same time, as Macintyre points out, Russian agitators, even Lenin, reviewed political developments in the Commonwealth. European socialists were also interested in social and economic developments in Australia and the successes of reformist socialism over its revolutionary counterpart. The new nation was seen as a ‘social laboratory’ that was closely watched. For these reasons studies of radical Russian groups in the United States are useful as a comparison to the story of the RWA in Brisbane, in particular studies by Sally Miller, Robert Murray and Rita Simon. Similarly, Frank Clarke’s work on Leesma in the United Kingdom provides useful context of how England responded to threats from Russian radicals.

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17 Frank Gordon Clarke, *Will-o’-the-Wisp: Peter the Painter and the anti-tsarist terrorists in Britain and Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983).
Intelligence history

The literature on political surveillance and intelligence agencies in Australia is well established. One of the earliest works that examines censorship in Australia during the World War I is Ernest Scott’s *Australia During the War*.18 The *History of the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department 1938–1946*, the official history commissioned by the British Home Office after World War II, also covers the establishment of mass censorship during the Great War and explores the relationship between Britain and her Dominions.19

Critical analysis of political surveillance and censorship and its impact on Australian society can be found in the work of Kevin Fewster, John Hilvert and Frank Cain.20 These works necessarily also cover the history of the Australian intelligence and security agencies themselves. Additionally Christopher Coulthard-Clark examines the first intelligence organisation in Australia, the Australian Intelligence Corp.21 This early period of the history and the transition into World War I is reviewed in Jacqueline Templeton’s history of Australia’s intelligence agencies.22 Frank Cain’s unofficial history of the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) explores security and intelligence developments during World War I.23 Wider secondary literature on British intelligence, immigration and right-wing movements in Australia includes analysis of Australian intelligence and security agencies. Christopher Andrew has published widely on the history of British intelligence, and work by Andrew Moore and Sean Brawley touches on the role of Australian intelligence agencies during World War I.24

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18 Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1939).
22 Jacqueline Templeton, Royal Commission into Intelligence and Security Seventh Report: Australian Intelligence Security Services 1900–1950, Vols 1–2, 7A and 7B, series A8908, NAA.
Censorship and surveillance of the Russian Workers Association

As Christopher Andrew and David Dilks explain in their introduction to the Missing Dimension, secret intelligence is absent from much academic history. The effect of this absence, they go on to say, 'is that its absence may distort our understanding of other, accessible dimensions'.25 The Russian-Australian connection has been an undervalued area in the study of Australian intelligence history.26 The importance of this nexus is reinforced by factors including the substantial Russian population in Australia; Bolshevik interest in the social developments in Australia; and the long-term intelligence interest of federal government agencies such as ASIO in the Communist Party of Australia. The wartime censorship and surveillance of the RWA illustrates one of the strongest and clearest early connections between these themes.

The telling of the history of censorship and surveillance on the home front from a macro perspective is important for understanding the importance of larger trends in society and the impact of policy developments. However, to tease out the impact of these trends and policies on the population they aimed to control, a grassroots approach to analysis is required. Focusing on the case of the RWA as a microhistory provides a snapshot into deeper histories of surveillance in Australian society.

In ‘Four Arguments for Microhistory’, István Szijártó states that ‘microhistory is the flagship of contemporary social historians’. He goes on to argue that microhistory is also ‘appealing to the general public, it is realistic, it conveys personal experience and whatever it has in its focus, the lines branching out from this reach very far’.27 Based on the ‘little facts’ of history drawn directly from the sources, microhistory can be more concrete and, in some sense, ‘entails a stronger reality’ than traditional social history.28 This detailed case study of the RWA and the interaction of the group’s members straddles local history and social history. The micro focus on the RWA ‘conveys the lived experience’ of the Russians as immigrant-activist workers,29 but also links the narrative of the Russians to the wider, general context of wartime intelligence and security. It links the dreams of revolutionary Russia with the realities of home front censorship and surveillance in Australia during World War I by examining seditious groups targeted by federal wartime legislation.

Georg Iggers observes that microhistory developed not because microhistorians considered social science methodology ‘not possible or desirable but [because] … social scientists have made generalizations that do not hold up when tested against the concrete reality of the small-scale life

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26 The work of Elena Govor over the last decade clearly challenges this silence.
they claim to explain’. By ‘reducing the scale of observation’ to small units and how people lived their lives in them, as Carlo Ginzburg suggests, it can be demonstrated ‘that any social structure is the result of interaction and of numerous individual strategies, a fabric that can only be reconstituted from close observation’ The snapshot which emerges also reflects the conservative moral panic to the threat of sedition and how mainstream Australian silenced opposition by beating up seemingly innocent events into explicit expressions of group sedition. Wartime legislation buttressed the state by increasing scrutiny of the population. Ultimately censorship asserted bureaucratic control over the history being made.

As Sigurdur Magnússon states, ‘microhistorians tend to focus on outliers rather than looking for the average individual’. This approach, he continues, helps to reveal ‘what is usually kept hidden from the outside world’, the ‘normal exceptions’. These normal exceptions tended to catch the attention of authorities and their stories are recorded in government documents. Significantly, focused studies such as this one about the RWA ‘illustrate the function of the formal institutions in power and how they handle people’s affairs’ In this way, microhistories have the potential to go beyond the particular cases they examine.

The RWA can be viewed as a detached bubble of Russianness pursuing a transplanted ideological program. The RWA existed in a vacuum. Its members were isolated in Brisbane culturally and ideologically through a combination of government surveillance; apathy from the labour movement; and the suspicions of the wider community as mainstream Australia consolidated its British identity and purged itself of non-British elements. RWA members were physically separated from Russia and the revolutionary happenings that many had hoped would be achieved in their lifetime. This isolation was compounded by problems following and interpreting important foreign events due to censorship and lack of communication during wartime. The RWA became more radicalised as a result of this process. As their revolutionary fervour increased, there was increasingly nowhere to go. The group was blocked in Australia and became increasingly irrelevant in Russia as the revolution developed.

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30 Georg G. Iiggers, Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From scientific objectivity to the postmodern challenge (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 108.
32 Ginzburg, ‘Microhistory’, 33. Matti Peltonen describes the methodology of advocated by microhistorians such as Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi as ‘starting an investigation from something that does not quite fit, something odd that needs to be explained’. See ‘Clues, Margins, and Monads: The micro-macro link in historical research’, History and Theory 40 (October 2001), 349.
33 Sigurdur Magnússon, ‘ “The Singularization of History”: Social history and microhistory within the postmodern state of knowledge’, Journal of Social History 36.3 (Spring 2003), 709–710.
35 Microhistorian Giovanni Levi articulates this perspective when he discusses the way microhistory concentrates on ‘the contradictions of normative systems’ in ‘On Microhistory’ in ‘New Perspectives on Historical Writing’, edited by Peter Burke (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 107.
Introduction

An isolated, numerically small group of foreign, sometimes inarticulate, ideologically distinct immigrant-activists operating in Queensland may be seen as a marginal element on the wider home front, even within the history of surveillance. However, it is the acuteness of their story that is revealing, particularly through the events of the Red Flag Riots; the intensity of their characterisation by the censors in the intelligence reports; and the bureaucratic coldness displayed when deporting those convicted of breaching the War Precautions Regulations. Through official treatment the Russian activists were dehumanised to such an extent that the censors depicted Russian clubs as nests to be exterminated through incarceration.

In a sense this story has been both hidden and marginalised. It has been hidden in the way that home front troubles were largely omitted from official war histories. The very nature of state surveillance on a population is covert and this was reinforced by a ‘Secret – Not to be Released’ classification that applied to censorship records. The story has been marginalised in the way that Queensland has been constructed within the dominant Australian discourse as out of step with the polished southern capitals. Perhaps it is the roughness, the spots of corrosion that reveal the most about this story of Australia’s wartime intelligence.

Sources and methodology

The difficulty with the writing of history is the existence of multiple and often competing histories; the notion of multiple truths. Any rigorous scholarship must be designed, researched and written with academic objectivity, keeping in mind the subjectivity of sources, interpretation and the person producing the study. The challenge for this project is to achieve balance in the retrieval and interpretation of the documents created by state and federal authorities and the radical Russian community in Brisbane. That is, a balance between a view informed by hindsight and the rhetoric of the time. It is likely that the censors were, in all probability, more influenced by the bigoted, parochial attitudes of wartime jingoism on a distant colonial home front than they were by hard evidence of subversion, measured analysis and sensitivity to the plight of immigrants. Yet a self-awareness of the constraints of the home front is to be found within their reports along with good record keeping. Similarly, judgement needs to be exercised to represent the Russians not as visionaries of the new world or as dangerous ideologues, but as immigrants who worked to improve the working-class conditions. Regardless of one’s political stance, any interpretation will be distanced by hindsight. It is not the intention of this work to evaluate the morality of the home front, but rather to examine its censorship and surveillance in greater depth.

Most certainly the Australian activities of RWA members pale in comparison with their contributions to the 1905 uprising, October 1917 revolution and the building of the Soviet dream after World War I. However, their Australian experiences are worthy of intensive scholarship because of their contribution to left-wing politics, organisational abilities and leadership, and role as journalists of suppressed publications. Significant insight into these experiences can be achieved
through study of their correspondence which survived as intercepts compiled by government censors. The newspapers the RWA leadership had a guiding hand in writing, setting, printing, advertising and distributing are another tangible aspect of the group’s time in Australia. In 1913 historian Percy Marks commented that ‘the future historian will be largely indebted for his facts to the records of the newspapers’. While Russian archival material has not been consulted nor holdings in the Ukraine, available copies of RWA papers *Ekho Australii*, *Isvestia* and *Rabochaya Zhizn’* as well as the near complete set of *Knowledge and Unity* editions held in Australia have been reviewed. A valuable collection of correspondence – memories of the era – was compiled in the 1960s by labour activist and historian Bill Sutton. These documents are personal and subjective; nonetheless, they provide the researcher with a unique opportunity to meet the Russian activists as labourers, leaders, campaigners and educators.

The time frame of the 1910s was chosen to coincide with the heyday of the Brisbane Russians. It also maximises convenience of evidence in terms of access to state and federal agencies files on Russians. A survey of archival material in the Queensland State Archives (QSA) and the National Archives of Australia (NAA) revealed that official concern with the Russian Club in Brisbane emerged soon after its foundation in 1911. Immigration files – primarily passenger arrival records – indicate that members of the radical leadership of the RWA primarily arrived in Brisbane after 1911. While some material dealt with Russians in Australia before this date, it is really only after this time that official correspondence dealt with, for example, the undesirable or concerning nature of Russians. Wartime censorship had wound down by the end of 1919 and the availability of archival material on the RWA decreases into the early 1920s.

The methodologies employed here are qualitative in their examination of archival material and, to a much lesser extent, quantitative in their use of patterns drawn from this material. The thesis in its simplest form is a study of primary texts contextualised by the use of secondary material. An exploratory historical perspective is used when reviewing texts, complemented by analysis of themes and discourses. Interpretation is driven by the need to establish a fuller understanding of

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38 William (Bill) Sutton was a well-known Brisbane communist who ran the People’s Bookshop in Fortitude Valley. Copies of the research and correspondence of Sutton are held in box 7, Poole-Fried Collection, Fryer Library, UQFL336, University of Queensland.

39 References for archival material will cite the item (file number) before the series. Full citations will be given for documents in the notes. Where a whole file is cited for the first time, the file title will be noted before the item. See the bibliography for series information.

40 For an early selection of records see Deputation to Minister Regarding Undesirable Immigrants 1911–1912, 1912/1915, series A/1, NAA; Immigrants, undesirable Russians 1912, 1912/1378, series A/2, NAA; Immigrant, Undesirable Asiatic – Russians, 1915/442, A/2, NAA; Russian Society 1911, 86529, series 14812 (previously PRV10729/1/86 and POL/J34), QSA; and Undesirable Immigrants, 86531, series 14812 (previously PRV10729/1/88 and POL/J34), QSA.
wartime censorship and surveillance through the intelligence collected, analysed and distributed by government agencies on the RWA and its members. The principal sources of archival evidence have been drawn from the records of federal and state agencies that collected intelligence on disloyalists during World War I including: the Queensland Police Force, First Military District of Australian Defence Force, Special Intelligence Bureau and the Commonwealth Police Force. Records of the Prime Minister’s Office, Queensland Chief Secretary’s Office as well as the Department of External Affairs and the Home Office, including correspondence with British and Canadian government agencies, were also considered.

Like any project dependent on the identification and interpretation of handwritten and carbon-copied-in-quadruple documents produced by competing government departments during wartime, it needs to be acknowledged that while the review of sources is comprehensive, it can never claim to be exhaustive. Commenting on the study of British intelligence history, Christopher Andrew observes that the sources are ‘laundered by honourable men in what they believed to be the national interest’. Andrew’s term laundering refers to the British government censoring the historical record. While this may be the case for the history of modern intelligence agencies such as the ASIO and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) in Australia, it is not the case for the World War I period. However, sources on World War I are laundered in the sense that not all documents survived or were deemed worthy of archiving. Despite the employment of office clerks with filing duties by the recording agencies and seemingly well-maintained indexes, the filing culture of the time may come across as sporadic. The jurisdictions of the agencies themselves were often overlapping and hence pieces of the puzzles can be found scattered throughout the files of dozens of subsequent agencies over two or more decades.

The censors’ reports – comprising an intercept of the correspondence item with censors’ notes – have been explored in other studies, but not in an intensive study of the wartime censorship and surveillance of the RWA. Censors’ reports offer a window on the happenings and characters in this history. The correspondence, the feelings and ideas, were translated by language experts and then interpreted by the censors. These reports should not be viewed as standalone files; they were documents produced by civil servants for the distinct purpose of monitoring trends in the domestic

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41 Andrew, ‘Secret Intelligence and British Foreign Policy 1900–1939’, 9.
42 The records of ASIO and ASIS are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 and those records that are released under the Archives Act 1983 are censored. Under section 29 of the Archives Act, records controlled by ASIO and ASIS (along with other members of the Australian Intelligence Community (AIC)) are exempt from transfer and hence comprehensive listings for records controlled by the AIC are not in the public domain. When records are transferred in response to an application for access under section 40, the provisions of section 33 of the Archives Act are invoked to protect matters of national security, defence and international relations. Additionally, agencies can neither confirm nor deny the existence of records under section 39 of the Act.
43 A wonderful example being the filing system used to store photographic records of a) internees, b) German deserters and c) communists: ‘filed in safe in room 24. “a” on floor left hand side of safe, “b” on left hand top shelf, “c” ditto (on left hand top shelf), V/14, series B741, NAA. Unfortunately the only surviving section is this index to the filing location; the photographs themselves are missing.
population. Taking this context into consideration, censorship reports allow the reader to track how intelligence agencies at the coalface of wartime surveillance monitored the RWA.

These records also speak strongly of their original authors. Many of the censors’ reports are riddled with subjectivities and inconsistencies. They are the result of human choice on the behalf of the postal staff (which items fit the censorship lists?), the translators (which words to choose to best fit the original text?) and the censors themselves (which bits to summarise and which to quote directly?). This process was dictated by the application of the War Precautions Regulations, but it is likely that selection was influenced by the personal agenda of the censor and the previous intelligence history of the correspondents themselves. Even considering the fraught nature of the sources, they are fragments that showcase otherwise lost details. It is the personalities and events of the censorship, surveillance and suppression of the RWA that this thesis is interested in. Such minutiae reveal the dealings of the authorities with the disloyal. The documentation of the censors’ reports is a very large cog in the greater timepiece of the state apparatus during the Great War.

It was practice for censors’ reports to be carbon-copied with the originals submitted to the Deputy Chief Censor (DCC) in Melbourne and, when requested, to the Chief Censor in London. Every available censorship report produced by the First Military District in Queensland (internal item prefixes District 1, Q, QF, QG, QR, QS QU) held by the National Archives of Australia was examined as well as the Second and Third Military District reports from New South Wales and Victoria focused on disloyalty and sedition (RE, SR and MF, MR respectively). The censors’ reports were examined against several categories to determine their inclusion in this study. It was necessary to narrow down the thousands of intercepts to only those directly relevant to the scope of this study: the Russian Workers Association in Brisbane. All intercepts mentioning Russians in Brisbane, Russian language, Russian publications and known Russian addresses were noted. Additionally intercepts targeting known sympathisers of the Russian cause (such as the IWW) were included. This set of entries was again narrowed to exclude business correspondence clearly not related to the RWA. A quantitative overview of relevant censors’ reports is provided in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Relevant censors’ reports systematically surveyed

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44 The NAA did not universally record this internal reference system on relevant item/bundle and series entries. Nonetheless, each censors’ report was allocated its own unique reference number by its authors and an elaborate system of cross-referencing was used at the time of production by the recording agencies. This reference system is a powerful and overwhelmingly accurate tool in following the threads on individuals, addresses and events. For this reason I will refer to individual reports by the unique reference number (and not the week or page number). All censors’ reports referenced in this thesis are held in 3 series at NAA: A6286, BP4/2 and MP95/1. This research draws on several thousand individual censors’ reports across three main districts as well as sporadic reference to reports produced by the Fourth and Fifth Military Districts in South Australia and Tasmania. Whilst every effort has been made to correctly interpret the original text, occasional [bracketed] inserts will be made where text and paper integrity made it virtually impossible to transcribe the original.

45 For example, the business correspondence of the Brisbane office of the Russian tallow export company, the Popoff Brothers, was excluded, but the personal correspondence of Popoff employees was included.
Chapter outlines

This thesis begins by establishing the historical context for censorship and surveillance and the case of the RWA in Brisbane. Focusing on the association’s establishment as a club, Chapter 1 reconstructs the origins and development of its radical identity which made it an object of government interest. Chapter 2 examines the historical context for the development of the intelligence agencies. It explores the workings of the Intelligence Section General Staff (military intelligence) of the Department of Defence, Special Intelligence Bureau and the Commonwealth Police. Relevant sections of the *War Precaution Act 1914*, *Unlawful Associations Act 1916* and *Aliens Registration Act 1920* are also reviewed.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 form the narrative core of the thesis. Chapter 3 traces early Queensland state government correspondence and police reports on the growing Russian community centred in South Brisbane, and discussions at state and federal levels on how best to manage this group. The final part of the chapter tracks the initial collection of data on the RWA by intelligence agencies under newly passed wartime legislation. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the intelligence collected through censorship and surveillance, and how the intelligence agencies analysed and distributed this information. Through this process the agencies determined which members of the RWA were subversive, disloyal or seditious. The interaction between the intelligence agencies and the RWA was multi-faceted and illustrates the areas of national security with which the government was primarily concerned. Together these chapters construct the historical narrative of wartime censorship and surveillance through the case of the RWA.
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION OF RUSSIAN NAMES

Russian names have been transliterated as they were at the times of these events by the Russians and the censors (usually faithful to the source). For example, I have used Simonoff rather than Simonov. I have not corrected misspellings of names in government documents.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Work on the names of Russians who were members of the Brisbane community has been completed by Kevin Windle. He has explored the various misspellings of the Russians’ names and aliases by government officials and newspapers during the war. See ‘Unmajestic Bombast’, 29–51.
CHAPTER 1

THE RUSSIAN COMMUNITY IN BRISBANE

Spread your wings my angel of hope and show me the way to the country, where we lived before, to the nation, where blood is being shed for freedom's sake. Only then, we will begin to live in the people's country.¹

Introduction

This chapter explores the background of the Russian community in Brisbane. Russians who left their homeland to escape political and economic conditions were part of an international diaspora. A small group of the Russians who arrived in Brisbane fell into the category of political émigré. In order to understand the wider historical context of the suppression of the Russian Workers Association (RWA) it is important to recognise that some members of the RWA were politically active and these members influenced how the rest of the Russian group fitted into local politics in Australia. First, the analysis in this chapter draws on studies of Russian groups in the United States and the United Kingdom to tease out the wider international context of radical clubs and their membership and dynamics. Second, the history of the Russians who arrived in Australia, and specifically those based in Queensland, is examined with focus on the Russian group in South Brisbane. The chapter then looks at the conditions that led to the formation of the RWA. Profiles of key members in the RWA leadership are pieced together as well as their contribution to the development of the group and its politics. Finally, the chapter explores the major publishing activities of the RWA. The series of newspapers the group published not only brought news from Russia but raised the profile of the group with the wider labour movement and alerted state and federal governments to the RWA’s seditious activities.

The political immigrant

In 1999 Mikhail Epstein wrote:

Perhaps the twentieth century will be remembered as the century of ‘ideas’, since their inexorable logic reigned over all spheres of life, caught up in the network on causal relationships and held in check by the steel chains of premises and inferences. The ideas and the people who became their tools are responsible for

¹ N. Shapiro, 28 King Street, Newtown to D. Shapiro, Harbin, Manchuria, 10 February 1919, RE1614.
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the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century: world and civil wars, death camps, atomic explosions, ecological catastrophes, political terror. This was the principle of subordination of one side of being to another or its annihilation by the other.2 This sombre comment is the other side of the romanticism of revolution and selflessness of the revolutionary. Revolution was the paradigm in which exiled Russians in Brisbane operated, a world in which ideas were worth dying for, and where political supporters became professional revolutionaries and sacrificed a personal life and material rewards for an overwhelming political or party persona. Verity Burgmann observes that ‘agitators explained society from a working-class viewpoint, offered a critique of that society and suggested that a society instead be created where workers were not exploited and oppressed’.3 Commenting on one of the most well-known radical groups in Australia, the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), Stuart Macintyre states that ‘its revolutionary mission extended into a whole range of emancipatory projects ... [and] it connected Australians to the outside world in new ways that broke with older colonial linkages and went beyond the normal reference points of the Anglophone diaspora’.4 The Russians in Brisbane were instrumental in establishing communism in Australia and members such as Peter Simonoff and Aleksandr Zuzenko were instrumental in the founding of the CPA.

This exploration of the RWA focuses on the censorship, surveillance and suppression of the group under federal legislation rather than analysing networks and other social factors. However, key trends in the literature on exile and political émigré groups are important for understanding some of the group dynamics of an association such as the RWA. Migration history is a relatively new area for scholarly research in comparison with more established fields of social history. This recent body of work has paid little attention to Russian emigrants. On one level Soviet scholarship explored in depth the contributions of tsarist radical exiles to the international revolution. Yet the experiences of refugees from the Soviet system and former radicals opposed to the Bolshevik coup d’état were not generally the subject of publication until after 1991.5 Access to migrant material in Russian archives has greatly contributed to the increase in this area, and to the rise in guides to archival material.6 In the 1990s a number of works appeared that strove to reassess the place of émigrés in

5 In reference to Russians in Australia, Boris Christa suggests that: As a direct consequence of the collapse of the Soviet system, Russian migrant historians now feel relaxed enough to reveal the truth about life in the USSR. Although there has always been a trickle of biographies, many Russians who migrated were extremely reluctant to publicly divulge details about themselves and their past, especially if they still had close relatives in the USSR, fearing that they might be approached by Soviet agents and subjected to some form of blackmail. This spectre of an omnipotent KGB ready to bend Russians in the diaspora to its will has now been exorcised. See ‘Russians’, in The Australian People: An encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins, edited by James Jupp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 642.
6 For instance, A.V. Popov, Russkoe Zarubezh'e i Arkhivy: Dokumenty Rossiiskoi emigratsii v arkhivakh Mskv: Problemy vyiavleniya, komplektovaniia, opisanii, ispol'zovaniia [Russian Diaspora Aboard and Archives: Documents of the
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Russian history. The other side of the history of political émigrés concerns the opportunity to broaden understandings of their host societies, and this study of the RWA demonstrates that understandings of Australian history can be enriched through examination of the experiences of immigrant groups.

The full spectrum of anti-tsarist politics journeyed with Russian immigrants and defeated radicals to the New World from around 1880 onwards. However, it is an exaggeration to claim that these immigrants came to the New World with ‘a completely formed set of political principles’. A distinction needs to be made between those who left Russia due to fear of the repercussions of their illegal, often violent actions against the state and those who left for a range of reasons, including poverty, social and ethnic tensions, and political repression. Once in host societies, the paths of these two groups inevitably crossed. National clubs attracted the attention of newly arrived immigrants, providing them with a sense of linguistic and cultural identity in a foreign environment. Some sought the semblance of a non-radical life in their new homes, often with the intention of returning to party work when times were more opportune. Others continued to work exclusively for the party structure, continuing their attack on tsarism from abroad.

The conditions of life for new immigrants resulted in many working in piecemeal manufacturing and industrial jobs that were easily lost. Most rented rooms in crowded boarding houses in poorer city areas where ethnic communities congregated. Some Russians who had left for economic reasons were radicalised jointly by the circumstances that they now found themselves in and their contact with political exiles through the workers’ movements, trade unions, ethnic press or cultural clubs. Some societies formed initially for reasons of social and economic support, such as the RWA, were transformed into groups that pursued radical politics through their activities to improve their lot as migrants and workers. The immigrants who established themselves as leaders of these groups were invariably those who had had significant early exposure to radical politics in Russia, either as participants or witnesses.

Defined political groups tended either to work only with other like-minded societies or to cooperate occasionally for the greater ideal on specific protests. The more radical the politics and goals of individual groups, the more likely they were to operate secretly and in isolation from potential allies. Governments, both in Russia and the various host countries, exploited these political divisions to play one group off against another, exploiting the various revolutionary groups

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Russian émigré society in archives of Moscow: Problems of identification, accessioning, description and use] (Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, Institute for History and Archives, 1998).


8 This required an established network that drew financial support from wider Russian and radical communities. RWA radicals did not have access to a network in Brisbane which could alleviate the need to engage in paid work for long periods of time. Indeed, the fragile financial security of workers during World War I was not able to provide any long-term financial support. The financial plight of the RWA newspapers and the beleaguered ambassadorial efforts of Peter Simonoff clearly illustrate this point.
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and their factions with the intention of disrupting their cohesiveness. As exemplified by the internal politics of the comparatively small RWA core in Brisbane, inter-party disagreements and mistrust of other groups were impediments to the RWA sustaining productive working relationships with other groups. Despite this, many groups formed strong communities which enriched the political culture of their host societies. They brought with them to the New World not just money and skills, but in many cases a model of how to live a politically engaged life ‘based on the interrelatedness of politics, culture and life’.9

Work on the political activities of the Russian diaspora reveals several key émigré centres: continental Europe (particularly Germany and Switzerland, France), England and the United States. Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa also hosted radical groups influenced by Russian politics. The close ties between Australia and the United Kingdom and the links between RWA members and the United States10 make it useful to consider examples of radical immigrants in these two host sites. Unlike the RWA – which was essentially the single group for immigrants from the Russian Empire in Brisbane regardless of ethnicity, religion and political party – the sheer number of émigrés in the UK and the USA allowed for the emergence of several organisations which represented specific ideological thrusts within the spectrum of Russian politics. Despite this key difference, important similarities exist between the RWA and groups in these countries, in particular the experience of being migrants in English-language host societies that exhibited animosity towards foreigners especially during wartime.

The behaviour of Russians with political ties in Brisbane was similar to that of Old World immigrants in the New World elsewhere. In his study of the Red Scare in the United States, Robert Murray points to the formation of ‘autonomous groups of proletarian immigrants speaking the same language and having the same ethnic background’ operating within socialist groups.11 Activists shaped in the Old World generally promoted political goals in the New World which were so sweeping and so critical that they appeared to be ‘prophetic voices out of time with … nonradical colleagues’.12 in the labour movement. Miller points to the application of Old World perceptions to New World conditions. Recently arrived immigrants tended to translate economics, politics, class and law into European terms. Politically conscious immigrants from the Old World brought with them to the United States (and England) a ‘much more pronounced class spirit characteristic of professional revolutionaries than had been present before’.13 Frustrated by the failure of the movement in their homelands, exiled radicals were more likely than New World activists to be alienated from the path of peaceful protest and be convinced of the efficacy of direct action. This trend was reflected in Queensland, where rural Russian workers largely supported

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10 This claim is supported by the letters, subscriptions and later the travels of RWA members such as Aleksandr Zuzenko to and from America.
13 Miller, The Radical Immigrant, 120.
union activism based on principles advocated by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). For the revolutionary movements attempting to bring about a more equitable and liberal society in the autocratic regimes of old Europe, direct action had been the only option as peaceful means were hindered by repressive censorship and surveillance. Miller proposes that these radical immigrant groups ‘brought with them suggestions of force and violence’ that she interprets as being ‘new to the United States’. While Miller’s claim is debatable, in some cases, the precision of the immigrants’ visions of a future society and the means to achieve social change were the main limitations to the flexibility of their activism. In order to achieve success outside their homelands, revolutionaries needed to be able to identify the key issues pertinent to the struggle in the host society but more importantly to remake their revolutionary program to fit the reality of the New World.

As in Russia, different types of radical work were available in host societies. For example, leadership roles involved networking and travel between groups, and therefore were more likely to be filled by educated party members. Journalists and other party intelligentsia were involved in the writing of propaganda and the evasion of censorship. Local work was generally executed by shopfloor activists who held down day jobs. This last category was more flexible and allowed workers to be more responsive to family and economic needs. Rita Simon’s profile of the range of activities organised by Russian and later Soviet Jewish groups in the United States reveals that the rationale and purpose of Jewish organisations was often different from that of Russian groups, yet the trajectory of the growth of cultural activities and support for emigrants into highly structured educational and publishing enterprises was common. While Simon separates trade union and political activity from publishing, theatre, cultural, educational, philanthropic and leisure time initiatives, it is worth noting that these fields often overlapped, such as in the case of the RWA.

The education provided through workers’ schools, lecture series and the ethnic press contributed to the intensification of the RWA members’ political commitment. As other labour groups became more organised and participated under the banner of the RWA cause in wider protests and strikes, the Russians attracted more attention from police and intelligence officers. For many smaller groups, it was survival practice to mix cultural events with cautious political debate. In the eyes of the intelligence agencies, mushrooming organisations were linked to wider secret conspiracies, and the oppressive environment of World War I militated against the chance for real structural changes.

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15 Miller, The Radical Immigrant, 119–120.

Another site of Russian émigré activity was in England. Since the late 1700s, London, in particular, had been the backdrop to critical political and ideological developments, such as the institution of Parliament. Karl Marx and later Peter Kropotkin settled in London during their revolutionary careers. Russian exiles chose London as a place to work and send money back to their homeland and as a space to regroup and plan radical activities directed at the tsarist government after the defeat of 1905. Frank Clarke’s work on anti-tsarist groups in London examines a closed revolutionary group within the wider context of Russian radicalism. Clarke investigates a group of Lettish radicals called Leesma (The Flame) from the Russian province on the border with Latvia who escaped to join the burgeoning exiled community in London after their involvement in the failed 1905 revolution. Leesma was a close-knit, grass-roots organisation composed of interdependent revolutionary cells that expropriated from the capitalist community (for example through bank robberies, burglaries and theft) in order to support the larger Lettish revolutionary movement and to finance their own activities.

Clarke presents a detailed background to revolutionary activism that includes anti-semitism, persecution, corruption and poverty. Exploring the struggle of several radicals to escape with their lives after 1905 and regroup in safer environs, he indicates that Britain was an ideal location because of its proximity to their European homelands and liberal immigration laws that provided asylum for political and religious refugees. It was an environment conducive both to the coordination of activism abroad and to police subversion of these groups. The Leesma group in London was unique in comparison with its contemporaries because its members extended terrorism to their host community. Their bungled, violent actions resulted in escape, arrest and prosecution. On a wider scale, British immigration laws were changed in response to Leesma terrorism and the alien threats posed during World War I. Forced to leave once again, Leesma members came to Western Australia, where once again they were subject to War Precautions Regulations of the World War I era. It emerges through Clarke’s study that the discovery of Leesma terrorists in 1911 ‘panicked [the

17 London has long been a centre of exile for intellectuals and even governments. Exiles from various political regimes have used London as a safe base in which they lived and continued their work. For instance, during World War II German-speaking refugees from the Nazi regime lived in London. In the same period the Polish government-in-exile moved to London where it continued until the 1989 success of the Solidarity movement.

18 Frank Gordon Clarke, *Will-o’ the Wisp: Peter the Painter and the anti-tsarist terrorists in Britain and Australia* (Melbourne; Oxford University Press, 1983).

19 Famously, this group was involved in the robbery of a Houndsditch jeweller on 16 December 1910. In their escape the group killed and injured several police. On 2 January 1911 Leesma members were located in a house in Sidney Street, Stepney. The operation to capture the Leesma gunmen became known as the Sidney Street Siege. The young Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, observed the siege firsthand and authorised the Scots Guards to assist the police and the deployment of artillery. As Clarke discovered, several members of this organisation later found themselves in Western Australia.

20 The British experience with Lettish radicals may have prompted the interrogators of RWA activist Zuzenko at Brixton Prison to question whether he was a Lettish subject. See Interrogation of Suzenko (Zuzenko) or Toni Tollagsen Tjorn by Captain H.M. Miller and Captain Guy Liddell, 20 December 1922, copies held in A.M. Soosenko – Undesirable, alias Zuzenko, alias Matulishenko, 24/30649, series A1, NAA.
Western Australian state government into altering its immigration policy to one that not only discriminated on the basis of colour, but also on the basis of culture.21

The situation of the radical immigrant in Australia is different to the English and American cases in terms of numbers, rather than in revolutionary flavour. Russians in Brisbane led an active intellectual, cultural, and even political life. Their main organisation, the RWA, engaged in activities such as publishing the key Russian language newspapers for Russians in Queensland and, as evidenced by the subscription lists, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. International subscriptions for these publications were also received from individuals and groups in New Zealand and the United States. These publications represented Russians in wider labour movement circles and provided a vestige of ideological coherence during the flood of conflicting information regarding the Russian Revolution. Regular lecture series and educational workshops dominated the association’s political calendar. Secondary activities included contributions to social events, literary and intellectual circles, and cultural events such as picnics, plays and dinners with singing and dancing.

Radicals in immigrant communities were not just activists in theory but also ‘dynamic personalities and able leaders’.22 They published newspapers, organised fundraising events, liaised with other organisations, and represented their communities at meetings and demonstrations. The public nature of their work also means that they are noted in historical records. We can read their articles and letters in surviving newspapers and learn about their activities through police and intelligence agency reports. One problem that needs to be addressed before accepting the RWA and its leadership as the voice of Russian immigrant politics in World War I era Brisbane is establishing how representative the small group was of the overall population.23 It is a worthy consideration to keep in mind when conducting research on an immigrant or political group of any nature. What is certain is that the experience of RWA leaders in Australia as non-British migrants and workers were representative of the experiences of most Russians who came to Australia, the UK and the USA and were politically active between 1911 and the end of World War I.

The Russians in Brisbane

There are six distinguishable waves of Russian immigration to Australia. While the time frames for each wave are elastic, the reasons behind the migration are comparatively distinctive. The most

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21 Clarke, *Will-o’-the-Wisp*, 113. Additionally, as Clarke notes, tsarist secret police officers continued ‘to oversee and report on the illegal machinations of dissidents both within Russia and in exile’ (21). Until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, tsarist Russia had the most professional intelligence community. Tsarist Russia, like the Bolsheviks after 1917, used intelligence to maintain political power and ‘probably led the world both in cryptanalysis and in intelligence penetration of “subversive” movements’. See Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, *The Missing Dimension: Governments and intelligence communities in the twentieth century* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 7.

22 Christa, ‘Russians’, 638.

comprehensive work completed on Russian emigration to Australia is that of Boris Christa and demographer Charles Price. Dates and figures in the following section are drawn from Boris Christa’s excellent history of Russians in Australia.\footnote{Christa, ‘Russians’, 636–642.} More recently Elena Govor has published several works exploring the rich contributions Russians have made to Australian life. The first wave of Russian immigration to Australia encapsulates the Russians who arrived before the fall of the tsarist government. Migration occurred primarily between the 1905 uprising and the 1917 February Revolution. This wave was characterised by political exiles, although settlers also arrived in Australia from the Russian empire during this time. Partly due to its location as the first port of call on the Pacific route, Brisbane was the key destination for immigrants who travelled from Asian ports. The Russians who travelled this route left Russia through China and Siberia. As Stedman highlights,

Brisbane was not selected because of any particular merit as a city, or for any intrinsic value. It just happened to be the first large city, the port of entry into Australia. And a second reason was that the Russians knew very little about Australia and were quite ignorant of the existence of cities like Sydney and Melbourne.\footnote{Solomon Stedman, ‘The Russian Revolution in Australia’, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society 65.3 (December 1979), 201. See also Elena Govor, Australia in the Russian Mirror: Changing perceptions 1770–1919 (Carlton South, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 150; Boris Christa, ‘Great Bear and Southern Cross’, in Russia and the Fifth Continent: Aspects of Russian-Australian relations, edited by John McNair and Thomas Poole (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1992), 97; and Eric Fried, ‘The First Consul: Peter Simonoff and the formation of the Australian Communist Party’, in Russia and the Fifth Continent, 111.}

Active recruitment of migrants was Queensland government policy from the 1880s onwards and the presence of migration agencies overseas helped promote the state. Additionally, Brisbane had a large reception centre from which migrants were released into Queensland and other states. From 1925 through to World War II a second wave of Russians arrived. Similar to the first wave many were political exiles, but the identity of the group was dominated by 2,000 defeated White Russians fleeing the Soviets. Most escaped on the Pacific route and disembarked in Brisbane. After World War II until the early 1950s a third wave of approximately 8,000 displaced Russians from the war zone arrived, travelling via Western Europe on a route that arrived in Sydney and Melbourne via Perth. This immigration path helped determine Sydney as the new Russian centre in Australia. This third wave of displaced persons was the least ethnocentric and politically active group of Russian immigrants.

The fourth wave arrived from the mid 1950s through to the early 1960s. Over 5,000 Russians (mainly White) migrated from Harbin and elsewhere in China when, at the conclusion of the Korean War, the Chinese government no longer wanted the heavy (some 7,000) White Russian presence within its borders. Half of these well-educated and qualified Russian immigrants settled in Sydney, one third in Brisbane and the rest in other parts of Australia. Compared with earlier groups these Russians were more able to secure professional employment. Interestingly this wave included a group of Old Believers who settled in Yarwun, near Gladstone. In the early 1970s a fifth wave was dominated by Russian Jews who were granted emigration visas by Soviet authorities. Like the
third wave, these immigrants generally travelled via Western Europe to Australia. There were
17,000 fifth wave Russian immigrants in Australia by the early 1980s. More than half this
population was over 55 years of age. The age of the fifth wave population is in stark contrast to the
youthful population that migrated in the first three waves. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in
1991, a sixth wave of ‘new Russians’ has made its way to Australian shores. Christa reports that the
number of people making inquiries at the Australian embassy in Moscow was so high in the early
1990s that riot police had to be called in to control the crowds. Once again Russians were coming
to Australia’s northern states with the Gold Coast as a popular destination.

This project is only concerned with the first wave and the transition into the second. Prior to the
Great War, settlers, exiles and escaped prisoners alike migrated to Australia. The settlers who came
to Australia as part of the first wave were overwhelmingly from minority groups persecuted in
tsarist Russia for religious or ethnic difference. Joining these settlers, numerous exiles opposing the
regime travelled to Australia, hoping that political progress in their home country would make their
stay in the new Southern land temporary. Australian authorities, like the British, were sympathetic
to political and religious exiles from tsarist Russia, the so-called last bastion of autocracy in Europe.
The tsarist Russian government was generally viewed in Australia as a dictatorship. The number of
political refugees increased markedly after the abortive 1905 revolution as dissenters fled tsarist
reprisals via Siberia to Pacific ports in China and Korea.

Australia was seen as an increasingly attractive option for radicals who travelled on the Trans-
Siberian railway, which was completed in 1903. Australia provided Russian exiles with the
opportunity to ‘be as far from Russia as we possibly can’.26 Some activists were exiled to Siberia or
the Far East as punishment, and managed to escape over the border to Pacific Ports via Harbin in
Manchuria. Here, Japanese steamers provided passage to other parts of Asia and finally Australia.
Brisbane was the destination for the majority of these Russian immigrants, followed by New South
Wales and Victoria. In addition to its position as the first Western port of call from the Far East,
the entry controls in Brisbane were rumoured to be favourably lax. News of an established
community in Brisbane also reached potential immigrants who sought information at the
Queensland government’s migration agency in Vladivostok. In Queensland, the influx of refugees
in the following years added to the sinister reputation of the tsarist regime. Fried remarks that
Brisbane ‘emerged as an important centre of the Russian radical movement in exile’.27 Charles Price
concludes that Queensland ‘was clearly the favourite state’, attracting over half the Russians coming
to Australia.28 Evans writes that 2,000 refugees entered Queensland between 1911 and 1914, most
of whom joined the 800 Russians already present in the 1911 census. By 1918 the Queensland

26 Unsigned letter sent to Kalashnikoff, General Hospital, No 3, Brisbane, 24 March 1919, QF3515. This was
in fact a bitter-sweet situation to be in. While the distance allowed exiles freedom, many Russians felt great
isolation during the repressive circumstances of World War I and the period following the Red Flag events.
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Russian community had approximately 4,000 of Australia’s 6,000 Russian residents.29 Of these 6,000 Russians, it was thought at the time by RWA leader Alexander Zuzenko that less than 500 were political emigrants. Zuzenko estimates that prior to the 1917 revolutions membership of the RWA and associated branches was no more than 150 members. However, under his leadership membership exceeded 500.30 A cursory examination of arrival and alien registration records indicate that most Russians in Queensland during this period were unmarried males in their twenties or thirties.31 The majority of them lived in Brisbane and exerted the strongest Russian influence in any Australian city.

The years after the revolution saw a dramatic sway in the ideological balance of the Russian community in Australia. This was the result of a dual process in which those sympathetic to the Soviets returned to Russia (many left in the period between the February and October Revolutions assisted by Provisional Government sponsorship) while an increasing flood of White Russians and others persecuted under the new ‘Red’ regime clambered to safety. At the news of the February Revolution many Russians desired to return home immediately. Legal opportunities and paid passage back to Russia were granted to approximately 500 political exiles from Australia. The Provisional Government in Petrograd allocated funds and sponsored a ship specifically for the Australian group.32 Evans indicates that it was easier for moderates to claim assistance than it was for radicals.33 For the Brisbane Russian community, the exodus back to Russia in 1917–1918 and deportation of undesirable radicals in 1919–1920, combined with the new wave of White Russian immigration during the Civil War, changed the ideological stance of the community.

White Russians were at one stage so numerous that the Australian authorities curbed the intake. The migration figures give some indication of just how substantial this shift in political tone was: in the twenty-year period after 1920, 2,563 Russians left (most to return to Russia) while 4,711 Russians entered.34 Significant numbers of these new arrivals were aligned with the old regime, many having fought against the Soviets.35 Enriching the cultural rather than political life of

32 Christa, ‘Great Bear and Southern Cross’, 96; and Govor, Australia in the Russian Mirror, 156, 225.
34 Christa, ‘Russians’, 639.
35 Christa examines the Ural Cossacks who arrived in Brisbane under their regimental banner and leadership of their Russian general, V. S. Tolstoff, as did sections of the Orenburg Cossacks, the Izhevsky Regiment and
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Australia, the White Russian community sponsored artistic and intellectual tours, contributed to architecture and built venues such as Brisbane’s Twelfth Night Theatre, as well as establishing the academic study of Russia in Australia’s tertiary institutions. The first Russian Orthodox Church, St Nicholas in Vulture Street, South Brisbane, was built in 1925 to service the religious development of its burgeoning populace. This is in contrast to the pre-revolutionary community who concentrated on the ideological development, class awareness and political unity of its members. Also in opposition to their predecessors, post-revolutionary arrivals were strikingly divided in their political stances, with anti-tsarists coexisting alongside strident monarchists. One particularly notable post-October immigrant was Aleksandr Kerensky, the Prime Minister in the Provisional Government that rose to power after the February Revolution. He arrived in Australia in 1945 and lived in Brisbane until the death of his Australian wife Nell Tritton in 1946. During his brief sojourn, Kerensky provided some middle ground for the disparate Brisbane Russians.

The politics of the first wave of Russians was better known to the Australian community than the politics of successive waves of Russian immigrants to arrive in the Commonwealth. The reason for this was twofold. First, the dedicated political exiles striving to fulfil a political program against tsarism played crucial roles in presenting an alternative understanding of political development in Australia, the First World War and the building of revolution in Russia. Australia had been of interest to Lenin and the wider Bolshevik party intellectual caucus for some time. The new country was seen as a social laboratory in which socialists across Europe could watch the growth of reformist socialism and its impact on social and economic developments. Careful scrutiny of Australian developments is detectable in Bolshevik writings, often challenging the notion of a proletarian utopia in favour of a more realistic appraisal of Australian capitalism. Second, Russians were keen to contribute to the expansion of workers’ rights in their new found home. The typical path to survival in Australia was to don the mantle of an itinerant worker, shuffling from place to place in search of work around the Commonwealth. Recently arrived Russians, like other immigrants, took whatever work they could find in order to secure financial stability. Members of the two largest communities in Queensland, located in Brisbane and Ipswich, were employed on government enterprises such as the railways. Considering that many of these new immigrants were engaged in hard labour (regardless of their skills or education in their native country), Russians were experiencing firsthand the life of an Australian worker. Leaving the professional

the Zabaikal Cossacks. As with the first wave, the majority of Russians settled in Brisbane although Sydney’s community also experienced a boost in numbers.

36 See Stuart Macintyre’s The Reds for information about the Russian appraisal of the Australian situation.

37 Russian Paul Yolkin recalled that in his first decade in Australia he worked in almost every state in the Commonwealth, moving from Bundaberg to Mt Chalmers, Albany in Western Australia, Boulder City (1914), Kalgoorlie, Port Pirie (1915), Mildura, Broken Hill (1917–1918) and finally to Sydney before settling in Bulli (1923). This work pattern was typical of new migrants to Australia especially unskilled workers. See Laurie Aarons, ‘Paul Yolkin: A pioneer of Australian socialism’, Tribune (28 July 1982), 2pp.

38 The state government railway was the largest employer in the state during this time. Ross Fitzgerald and Harold Thornton indicate that 11,267 workers were employed by the Railways Commission in 1915, with an additional 3,000 contracted on construction projects. See Labor in Queensland: From the 1880s to 1988 (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1989), 59.
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revolutionaries aside, it seems likely that members of the RWA became radical because circumstances made them so. It was in their interest to join with the wider labour cause to improve working-class conditions.

If the winter in Russia is long and harsh, it can be said that the summer in Australia is long and exhausting. For workers toiling in the outdoors, the summer season in the humid tropical north produced a fatigue that compounded the problems faced by new immigrants. One Russian, reminiscing on his arrival several years later, commented that:

> When we arrived here, 40 of us on one boat, we did not receive a very good reception. The Englishmen called us ‘white Chinamen’ who came into their country to take their money away from them. The only jobs we had were in railway construction and mines. Then, when the war started the most of us were paid off, then they started to take us on again [sic]. We were knocked from pillar to post, saying nothing about the terrible heat.\(^{39}\)

Each year, workers would receive well-earned breaks for the festivities over Christmas and New Year. Many Russians journeyed back to Brisbane from outlying areas during this time. This was an opportunity to socialise, as well as to engage in much needed cultural activities. In 1911, during such festivities, it was decided to form a club, based in South Brisbane. It is worth commenting on the socio-economic conditions of South Brisbane.\(^{40}\) For many years South Brisbane was the poor industrial and immigrant heartland of the capital, located across the river from the commercial, business and more British hub. The Victoria Bridge, which connected the two, was for many years the only way for workers to cross the river. Living conditions in South Brisbane were plagued with problems. For example, in the decade after Federation a high concentration of baby farms looking after the children of domestic servants were located in South Brisbane. These baby farms had an infant mortality rate of up to forty-one per cent, when the state average was only eleven per cent.\(^{41}\)

The Russian Club was formed to cater for the general well being as well as the intellectual, industrial and cultural needs of the Russian community. It was instrumental in strengthening the sense of collective belonging of this reasonably large but scattered community. It quickly developed into a central office in Stanley Street, South Brisbane, providing a range of services from social and cultural to educational and legal to Russians in Brisbane and wider Queensland. The RWA organised plays, dances, musical events and dinners that became pivotal social gatherings. Importantly it was also a place where members could get news from home.\(^{42}\) Regular meetings spawned debates and lecture series, key events in which members explored ideas and interacted.

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\(^{39}\) M. Voitenoff, PO Rockhampton to A. Lazareff, Krasnojarsk, Siberia, 26 July 1919, QF4797.  
\(^{40}\) South Brisbane was, and still is, the centre of Russian community and religious life in Brisbane. For more information see Eric Fried, ‘Russians in Queensland 1886–1925 ’ (BA Hons thesis, University of Queensland, 1980), 41.  
\(^{42}\) Stedman explores his memories of the group in ‘The Russian Revolution in Australia’, 202–204.
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with other groups such as the IWW. Importantly the RWA organised English language classes for interested community members. Leaders of the RWA represented the group’s ideals on the Domain stage and in newspapers, joining with the wider labour movement in pivotal events such as the 1912 General Strike and later Peace Demonstrations.

There exists some discrepancy in the literature about when the Russian Club was officially established and when its name changed to the Union of Russian Emigrants and subsequently the Union of Russian Workers. Fried indicates the Russian Club was established in 1911, whereas Stedman cites 1913. Christa states 1910 for the Union of Russian Emigrants, Govor 1911, and Fried 1912. Govor determines 1915 was when the name changes to the Union of Russian Workers, whereas Turner puts it at 1919. The adoption of a new name and constitution by the Union of Russian Workers in 1915 was printed in the RWA newspaper Izvestia. For the purposes of examining the censorship, surveillance and suppression of the group under wartime legislation, the disparities in the literature can be tolerated. Clear evidence in the archival holdings of the Queensland State Archives indicates that a Russian Club was corresponding with the Russian Consul in 1911. Additionally, a high proportion of correspondence to and from the South Brisbane group features the name Russian Association throughout the period under investigation.

The beginnings of the club were shaky as the group had few members, no fixed premises and few funds to attract a full time secretary. However, the leadership and activities of the group soon attracted more people to join and to financially support the organisation. This is important to note since these factors – experienced leadership and a large membership – soon set the Brisbane group apart from Russian clubs in Sydney and Melbourne and enabled it to distinguish itself in two

43 The rooms of the RWA in South Brisbane also, on occasion, housed the progeny of the IWW, the One Big Union (OBU).
44 For example, Edith Brodney (Esther Siebel, American wife of newspaper journalist Leon Hebert Spencer Brodsky who was better known as Spencer Brodney) taught English to classes of up to 30 Russians. For Brodney’s thoughts on these classes see, for instance, Ed (Mrs Brodney), Manhattan, Brunswick Street, Brisbane to Mrs K. Siebel, 2055 Davidson Avenue, New York, 29 December 1918, QF2725; and Leon (Brodney), Brisbane to Mrs K. Siebel, New York, 20 December 1918, QF2726.
45 Brisbane and other state capitals in Australia had spaces on the fringes of the city centres, often wasteland near rivers, which were appropriated as meeting places. These spaces were known as ‘the Domain’. Meetings held in the Domain were large open air forums where political, social, religious and local issues were discussed by speakers on raised platforms in front of crowds in the hundreds. Photographs of Domain meetings in Brisbane depict the audience to be largely male, although it is known that women activists were regular speakers. The space now occupied by the Queensland University of Technology’s Gardens Point Campus roughly equates to the area once used as the Domain in Brisbane.
47 Stedman, ‘The Russian Revolution in Australia’, 202
48 Christa, ‘Great Bear and Southern Cross’, 94.
49 Govor, Australia in the Russian Mirror, 219.
51 Govor, Australia in the Russian Mirror, 220.
52 Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics: The dynamics of the labour movement in eastern Australia 1900–1921 (Sydney: Hale, 1979), 203.
54 See Russian Society 1911, 86529, series 14812, QSA.
important ways. First, the Brisbane group sought to centralise Russian interests through its alliances with smaller groups in outlying areas throughout Queensland as well as in Darwin, Port Pirie and Broken Hill. The RWA was in constant correspondence with Russians around the Commonwealth and the leadership aspirations of the Brisbane activists were particularly apparent in 1918 when they attempted to federate Russian groups in Australia, even floating the idea of a trans-Tasman alliance with Russians in New Zealand. Second, the publishing enterprise of the Brisbane RWA was unique in terms of its size and longevity. The Brisbane-based series of Russian and later English language newspapers had a national subscription base. Exchanges with a range of international newspapers indicate that the Brisbane Russians were also sending their publications to the United States, New Zealand and Switzerland.

The role of the Russian Club in Brisbane, and its often fiery interaction with the wider community after the revolution, is a poignant example of the Bolshevikisation of Russians within Australia by experienced and skilled exiled activists. Reflecting on the role of the RWA, member and activist Tom Pikunoff wrote in the late 1930s that the intention and duty of the group’s leadership was to enlighten the mixed mass of Russian immigrants in Brisbane who he described as politically backward and uncultured. The image of Bolsheviks in Australia soon became one of criminal immigrants who were infiltrating the working class. It is likely that dedicated RWA activists fostered links with the working-class organisations, such as the trade unions, as a vehicle of access to political power. These methods are not unique and were used by many grassroots groups at the time. As the war progressed, the cultural and political isolation of Russians, indeed all non-Britishers, intensified their need to associate with others who understood their language, identity and shared experiences. After the revolution, the Russians in Australia were somewhat estranged from the Soviet regime. This is confirmed in the censored mail in which the chillingly stark picture of Russians-on-the-ground in incoming correspondence was sharply juxtaposed to the idealistic attitudes expressed in outgoing mail. The political differences between the inward looking local labour scene and the increasingly internationalist views of the Russians became marked.

The Russian Workers Association primarily served as a cultural club helping new immigrants to establish themselves in the new country through links with considerable numbers of already settled Russians. At another level, the RWA put forward a comprehensive political program founded on

55. *Ekho Australii* [Echo of Australia], 1911–1914; *Izvestia Soyuza Russkikh Emigrantov* [Bulletin of the Union of Russian Emigrants], 1914–1916; *Rabochaya Zhizn* [Workers’ Life], 1916–1918; *Znanie i Edinenie* 1918, in English as *Knowledge and Unity* 1918–1921. Other related newspapers include *Deviatyi Val* [The Ninth Wave] and *Nabat* [The Tocsin].

56. Tom Pickunoff, 'Russian Workers in Australia', *Communist Review* (February 1938), 59. Copies of Pikunoff’s writing are held in the Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.

57. The reputation of the RWA as the contact in Brisbane was quite strong. Even as late as April 1919 the RWA received letters from Russia asking for help. One such letter was from a father who asked for news about his sons Moses and Samuel Kotton – two Russians who had immigrated to Australia before the war. Moses had been killed in action on the front when he served with the Australian Imperial Force. Samuel still lived in Brisbane. Mr Kotton, Harbin to Russian Workers Association, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 30 April 1919, QF3835.
the radical education several members received before their exile. While only a handful had belonged to the European radical émigré community in Paris and Geneva – embarking on an intense lifestyle of discussion, forums, workers’ schools and interaction with the ideological elite – many had been involved in coordinated action aimed at bettering the lives of the people in their homeland. These Russians ‘did not wish to stand aloof from the proceedings in Russia because they were abroad’ and keenly followed events at home.58 However, unlike exiles in major European centres, activists seeking refuge in Australia did not have access to a recognised émigré community, let alone wider social awareness of the lofty ideals they were attempting to bring into reality. Foreigners in colonial Australia were expected to leave their cultural and linguistic roots at the port and to embark on a life that benefited the development of the British Empire. Very few in the domestic labour movement had experience outside the structures of British unionism,59 nor were they focused on internationalist goals. The unions and labour movement that the RWA joined in Australia were protectionist and local in their programs. For many, the coming world revolution was as alien to them as the non-British workers they were attempting to eliminate. It is perhaps for these reasons that RWA leaders (as did Lenin) assessed the pinnacle of the movement, the Australian Labor Party (ALP), despite its self-proclaimed socialist clause, to be the liberal-bourgeois party representing non-socialist workers unions. Considering this, there was a space in Brisbane’s political scene for the lecture series, lending library, publishing service, alternative perspective and philosophical acumen provided by the RWA.

The personalities and development of the RWA deserve detailed attention themselves. Fried has completed extensive work into the backgrounds and affiliations of Russians in Brisbane before and during the war.60 Brief profiles of RWA secretaries and newspaper editors as well as general information on the membership of the RWA help construct the political flavour of the group. The Brisbane association’s core membership consisted of political dissenters and radical exiles. These Russians had a wide range of political affiliations and many had participated – some in commanding roles – in uprisings and subversive activities in Russia, often leading to trial and imprisonment. It was their influence that became increasingly dominant in the local Russian Club. Originally a politically moderate organisation aiming to support newly arrived compatriots led by L.G. Kalinin and B. Munter,61 its leadership had changed by December 1911 and F.A. Sergeyev (also known as Artem) directed the association. The successive name changes – the Union of Russian Emigrants and the Union of Russian Workers – reflect the political development of the group. This same Association – albeit under several different leaders (namely Nikolai Lagutin, Peter Simonoff and Aleksandr Zuzenko) – participated in the Red Flag March in 1919 and declared itself to be a Soviet in August of that year. Key RWA members rose to political power quickly within the Brisbane

58 Pickunoff, ‘Russian Workers in Australia’, 60.
59 Those who thought outside these constraints, such as William Lane, became Australia’s first political emigrants in an attempt to fulfil their political goals.
60 See Fried, ‘Russians in Queensland’; and the Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.
61 L.G. Kalinin, President to Russian Consulate, Brisbane, 8 February 1911, 86529, series 14812, QSA.
community as there was no radical old guard to be displaced. These men and women rapidly transformed a social club based on mutual aid into a class conscious union struggling for ethnic (if not class) emancipation. A similar process has also been identified in groups operating in the USA during this period. The frustrations of more seasoned radicals such as Simonoff and Zuzenko stemmed from the fact that they began to feel that their political freedom was as limited in wartime Australia as it had been in tsarist Russia.

The RWA’s early leadership reflected the goals of the club – a broad left-wing perspective with social and cultural activities. The club was not a collective of political émigrés modelled on more established communities in London and Paris; it was ultimately an association of migrant workers who participated in political activism. The political work of members was conducted in the evenings, on the way to work and at lunch breaks, on days off and during all-night meetings. Membership cost 12 shillings for entry and 2 shillings per month. In 1911 the recorded president was Kalinin. A motorman employed on Brisbane tramways, he was well known in the community as a man of good repute.

Kalinin was joined on the 5 member committee executive by Munter and later Nicholas Dorf as secretary. Munter is recorded as being an optical traveller who spoke several languages and was frequently employed as an interpreter in court cases. Dorf on the other hand was a wharf labourer from Spring Hill. A few years later, on 3 May 1914, Peter Utkin, Ivan Cook, Artem and Ivanov were elected to the management committee. Peter Utkin was another key leader in this early period. Like Kalinin, Utkin had strong political opinions. Along with V. Pikunoff, Utkin published snippets in the Worker, the labour weekly in Brisbane. These brief news items reported on club happenings and the political work of members.

By far the most influential leader of the Brisbane community and president of the RWA was Artem, or Fedor Sergeyev. Born in the Kursk province in the Ukraine in 1883, his life and political contributions are covered in a sizeable body of literature that show Artem to be a revolutionary from the age of 14 who later joined the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP). In

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62 For more information, see Miller, The Radical Immigrant, 75.
63 Notes on early RWA leaders are sourced from a Criminal Investigation Branch report by P. O'Hara, 12 June 1911, 86529, series 14812, QSA.
64 Izvestia 21 (8 May 1914). Summary in box 22 Russian language newspapers, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.
65 Utkin returned to Russia shortly after news of the February Revolution and held high ranking positions in Siberia, such as the President of the Central Executive of the Vladivostock Red Guards and editor of a journal Workers and Soldiers. However, by the end of 1918 a letter was intercepted that told that Utkin was now serving time in jail. See Peter Utkin, Vladivostock to Editor, Worker, Brisbane, 7 April 1918, QF1207; Peter Utkin, Vladivostock to Dunlop, Technical College, Brisbane, 7 May 1918, QF1206; Norman E. Freeberg, Brisbane to P. Simonoff, 350 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne, 11 June 1918, MF1185; and A. Popoff (wife of a Popoff brother), Harbin to Mrs Mendrin, c/o Popoff Brothers, Brisbane, 26 December 1918 (intercepted week ending 22 March 1919), QF3458.
66 Pikunoff and Utkin, ‘Russian Association’, Worker. These pieces were published sporadically from 1913 to 1915.
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1903 he avoided imprisonment when he went to France via Austria. In Paris he met Lenin who lectured at the Free Russian University. Back in Russia, Artem was active in the unsuccessful 1905 Revolution and from 1906 he rose to the leadership of the Perm regional and Ural Oblast committees. Arrested and imprisoned several times for his political activities, he eventually escaped from a Siberian penal camp in 1910. In 1911 he began his journey to Australia, where he was instrumental in founding the Russian Club in Brisbane soon after his arrival in June that year. Pikunoff states that Artem’s own experience as an exile in Paris contributed to Artem’s desire to politically educate other Russian immigrants in Brisbane. Artem became the driving force behind the club’s publishing activities and political education and under his guidance many ‘workers became fully class-conscious proletarians’. In addition to his membership of the RWA, Artem maintained active membership in several labour organisations – the Waterside Workers’ Federation, the Australian Meat Industries Employees Union and the Australian Socialist Party – and Queensland police reports note that he participated in meetings at Trades Hall. His activism Bolshevised the Russian community and introduced Leninist theory to the labour arena.

In Australia, Sergeyev was known as Big Tom. This nickname not only described his physical strength but his big hearted nature and generosity with his time. Artem’s life in Australia was primarily taken up with political work, but it is also known that he shared family life with an Australian woman and had a daughter with her. He was a genuinely popular leader. In mid 1915, for example, the RWA raised £9 through advertisements in the *Izvestia* newspaper to support Artem when he was too sick to work. Although an inspirational leader to the RWA, Artem’s career was essentially in Russia. During his exile in Australia he continued to publish in Russian newspapers. He was an archetypal member of the exile diaspora and this is typified by his hurried journey to get back to Russia in 1917. Shortly after the February Revolution, Artem returned to Russia via Darwin, where he organised a May Day Demonstration before he left. He arrived in Russia in July 1917 and was politically successful there, rising to the Bolshevik elite loyal to the Leninist faction. After his departure from Australia in 1917 he kept his Australian comrades in touch with his

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68 Pikunoff, ‘Russian Workers in Australia’, 59.

69 Pikunoff, ‘Russian Workers in Australia’, 61.

70 See Russians 1913–1954, 318868, series 16865, QSA.

71 Marusia Nester, 11 Warwick St, Stanmore NSW to Bill Sutton, 30 October 1966. Copy held in box 7 Artem, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library. See also box 10 Immigration II. Two letters from Artem to his Australian wife Minnie and daughter Lily were intercepted. See Tom, Russia to Minnie Sergaeff, Coopers Plains, 1 January 1918, QS12; and Tom Sergaeff, Russia to Lily Sergaeff, Coopers Plains, intercepted week ending 2 March 1918, QF2851. Queensland police reports also note Artem’s relationship with an Australian woman in 1913, see Russians 1913–1954, 318868, series 16865, QSA.

72 *Izvestia* 82 (15 July 1915) and 85 (5 August 1915). Summaries in box 22 Russian language newspapers, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.

73 For a selection of Artem’s writings in the Bolshevik journal *Prosveshchenie* [Enlightenment] see ‘Iz Avstralii [From Australia]’, 10 (October 1913), 52–61; ‘Stariki: Pazskaz’, 10 (October 1913), 51–61; ‘Klassovaya borba v Novoi Zelandin’ (Artem on NZ), 6 (June 1914), 47–62; ‘Australia, the Lucky Country’, 6 (June 1914), 47–62; and ‘Iz Svobodnoi Avstralii [From Free Australia]’, 3 (March 1918), 63–79.
progress through letters, some of which were published in the *Daily Standard* and the *International Socialist*. A few months after his return to Russia he was appointed Party leader of the Donbass (Ukraine) and was a member of Central Committee of Russian Communist Party. Two years later in 1919 he was elevated to the Vice-Presidency of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets and attended the First Congress of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in March. The ECCI was the main executive organ of Soviet-directed international communism. By 1920 Artem was the secretary of Moscow Party Committee and in 1921 he was put in charge of the Mineworkers’ Union as the Commissar of Mines. He was killed in 1921 in the crash of the experimental train in which he and delegates to the Soviet Comintern (including Paul Freeman of the Australian Socialist Party) were travelling. His burial in the Kremlin Wall behind Lenin’s Mausoleum was a day of national mourning. The Soviet political system commemorated his achievements by naming cities, institutes, memorials and even postal stamps in his honour.

After Artem’s departure, the RWA’s publishing venture was continued by activist Peter Simonoff. Born in 1883 in Saratov province, Simonoff was well-educated, fluent in English with a slight American accent, and a skilled journalist. He arrived in Australia in 1911 where he supported himself with seasonal work as a trucker in Port Lincoln, Port Augusta and Broken Hill, and on the cane fields in Bundaberg and Mourilyan, before moving to Brisbane in 1912. His time in Australia was largely spent in urban areas working on revolutionary newspapers or party business. Like Artem, Simonoff was a supporter of Lenin, who had been involved in the revolutionary movement in Russia. He took over the secretariatship of the RWA and edited its newspapers after Artem. Simonoff’s career and life in Australia have been explored by Fried in several works. He persistently represented the interests of Russians to the Commonwealth government and his position became official in March 1918 when Soviet-representative Litvinoff in London nominated Simonoff as Russian Consul. Despite his successes Simonoff’s leadership also saw a split in the RWA, with Herman Bykoff breaking away to form a splinter group.

Simonoff was not a unilaterally popular nomination to represent the new Soviet government. Indeed, in the years after his appointment he received strong opposition. The Australian

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74 Simonoff’s history prior to his arrival in Australia is explored by Eric Fried particularly in ‘Simonoff, Peter (1883?–1938?)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 11 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), 607–608; and Kevin Windle in ‘A Troika of Agitators: Three Comintern liaison agents in Australia, 1920–22’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 52.1 (2006): 32. There is uncertainty surrounding Simonoff’s origins. In 1915 Petro Simenoff declared in Adelaide that he was born in 1879 in Selo Asenovo, Bulgaria. Three years later in Brisbane Simonoff stated he was born in 1883 in Saratov, Russia. His arrival in Australia is as equally hard to pin down. It is most likely that he arrived in Australia in 1911. However, Simonoff also stated that he entered the Commonwealth in 1912 by ship into Adelaide.


76 Bykoff was also known as Resanoff and Arov. For example, he published translated material in *Ninth Wave* (see Arov (Resanoff), Brisbane to S. Bolotnikoff, PO Ingham, 11 March 1919, QF3408).

77 For example, Simonoff received a resolution from Russians in Brisbane that condemned his political activities in his first 12 months as consul. This resolution, signed by J. Loginoff and F. Kridoonoff on behalf of the Russian Group of Workers on 16 January 1919, was made public by its authors who published it in the *Daily Standard* on 17 January. For Simonoff’s response P. Simonoff, Sydney to Robertson, Subeditor, *Daily
government did not recognise Simonoff as Russian consul nor was he accorded diplomatic status. Regardless of the Australian government's failure to recognise Simonoff, his potential threat to the home front distinguished him in the censors' reports. Simonoff's main political activity in Australia was publishing political propaganda and editing newspapers and journals. He also was a member of various associations including the underground Secret Seven group (discussed below). His most remarkable achievement was the publication of his own monthly journal called *Soviet Russia* in 1920. Arthur James Vogan, a conservative journalist, interviewed Simonoff on behalf of the Department of Defence and submitted his findings to Prime Minister Hughes. Vogan recognised in Simonoff 'the superior-criminal type: the suavity, the “Jew-eye”, the delicate “thief-hands”, the modulated voice of persuasion, and the look with which he regards one as a possible dupe'. Simonoff participated in the foundation conference on 30 October 1920 at the Liverpool Street headquarters of the Australian Socialist Party in Sydney that established the Communist Party of Australia. He later sponsored Bill Earsman's Sussex Street branch of the party in its early rivalry with the Liverpool Street branch. Simonoff left Australia to return to Russia in 1921 where he worked with the Comintern on activities in British colonies. Arrested in 1938 for associations with Trotsky, he is presumed to have been shot.

One of Simonoff's supporters in the RWA was Nikolai Lagutin, born in 1885, who entered Australia in August 1913. He moved to Brisbane three years later in October 1916, where he worked as a waiter and hawker. In the following years he worked with Simonoff and on Simonoff's departure for diplomatic duties Lagutin succeeded Rosenberg as secretary of the RWA on 15 April 1918. At Simonoff's suggestion, Lagutin resuscitated the RWA's newspaper venture, publishing *Znanie i Edinenie* (the Russian language edition of *Knowledge and Unity*) in 1918. Lagutin had been a regular contributor to earlier RWA newspapers under the pseudonym Hruzky. It soon became apparent that Lagutin was not a strong leader in the same vein as those before him. Despite his dedication to the revolutionary cause he did not possess Artem's charisma or Simonoff's intellectualism. It was during this period Lagutin was also appointed RWA secretary, but his leadership was challenged almost immediately – firstly by Simonoff who criticised the rigor of Lagutin's work, secondly by Zuzenko who complained that Lagutin was not producing enough Standard, Brisbane, 23 January 1919, QF2951. For more information also see H.C. Ullman, SDL (Social Democratic League), 43 Wentworth Avenue, Sydney to Norman Freeberg, Worker, Brisbane, 27 January 1919, QF2980.

78 A patriot, Arthur Vogan was a sketch article and correspondent for Illustrated London News and other specialist publications in Australia and New Zealand.

79 Arthur Vogan, Interview with P. Simonoff, Communist Propagandist in Sydney, 30 August 1920, SC294, series A3932, NAA. See also Consuls Soviet Russia General, CONS 240, series A981, NAA.

80 Fried, ‘Simonov’, 608. Kevin Windle cites Giva Rosenberg (Zuzenko's wife) who states that Simonoff committed suicide. See Windle, ‘Troika of Agitators’, 32. Rosenberg was interviewed by Eric Fried in Moscow in 1990. A video of this interview is held by Raymond Evans. Prof Evans kindly allowed me to watch this interview at the University of Queensland in 2000.

81 See P. Simonoff, Sydney to Lagutin, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 31 March 1918, QF793; and P. Simonoff, Melbourne to Lagutin, Box 10, South Brisbane, 25 April 1918, QF875.

82 See intelligence report, week ending 19 February 1919, QF3161.
original work, and thirdly by a range of complaining subscribers.\textsuperscript{83} Zuzenko was living outside Brisbane at the time of Lagutin’s appointment and in June 1918 Zuzenko wrote that he would provide better leadership for the RWA.\textsuperscript{84} While Lagutin was skilled at organising political events – such as May Day celebrations and the first and second anniversaries of the October Revolution – he had little experience in editing or producing a newspaper, or leading a political/community association such as the RWA. Nevertheless, he had support from Russians in Ipswich and was a prominent member of the One Big Union Propaganda Union (OBUPL). He worked within and outside of the RWA to organise propaganda against British capitalism and was a founding member of the Russian Communist Group that joined the CPA in May 1920.\textsuperscript{85} Lagutin gained notoriety with the Investigation Branch for his involvement during the 1920s in the CPA and in an underground group called the Secret Seven. Formed in September 1920, the Secret Seven – ‘the most silent, militant and dangerous of the forces … working in Australia’ – had the explicit goal to further the communist revolution in Australia and was in contact with communist parties overseas.\textsuperscript{86} Lagutin, unlike other key RWA players during the period, stayed in Australia. Archival records on Lagutin show him to be working for the CPA, Young Communist Movement and union groups into the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{87}

Succeeding Lagutin was Alexander Zuzenko who took up the editorship of the Russian \textit{Knowledge and Unity} and the secretaryship of the RWA in September 1918. Born in Riga in 1884, Zuzenko trained as a naval officer in Russia. Zuzenko served on the Black Sea Fleet during the Potemkin Mutiny in the abortive 1905 Revolution. He entered Australia in November 1911 as a labourer. He moved around Mourilyan, South Johnstone, Halifax and Ingham in the early years.\textsuperscript{88} In August 1918 Zuzenko moved to Brisbane from Ingham to work for the RWA and quickly gained support. As Melbourne-based Russian Petruchenia said, ‘I don’t know Susenko personally, but judging from his paper I rather like him for his energy. In opinions we are mortal enemies…’.\textsuperscript{89} Zuzenko’s political persuasion and support of anarchism put him at odds with other Russians on a number of occasions. Even at the height of his leadership of the RWA in March 1919 a circular was sent out

\textsuperscript{83} See P. Simonoff, StKilda to Mrs Rainschmidt, Balaclava Street, Woolloongabba, 11 May 1918, QF1133; G. Boldyreff, Selwyn to N. Lagutin, Russian Association, Brisbane, intercepted week ending 19 June 1918, QF1221; A. Lyubinoff, Pelican Street, North Ipswich to S. Shuyupoff, 139 Stanley Street, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 26 June 1918, QF1305; S. Petroff, PO D’Agualar, Kilcoy Line to Russian Group of Workers, PO Box 15 South Brisbane, 3 July 1918, QF1391; and P. Simonoff, Melbourne to N. Lagutin, PO Box 10, South Melbourne, 18 July 1918, QF1469.

\textsuperscript{84} See A. Zuzenko, PO Ingham to Russian Association, Brisbane, 6 June 1918, QF1229.

\textsuperscript{85} See Lagutin entries, Summary of Communism, 111, series A6122, NAA.

\textsuperscript{86} See Secret Seven entries, Summary of Communism, 111, series A6122, NAA.

\textsuperscript{87} See Regarding N. Lagutin – Secretary of Russian Club South Brisbane, 66/4/3557, series BP4/1; Papers seized from Australian Communist Party Brisbane Branch, 5, series BP230/6; Nicholas Lagutin, 13, series A6335; and Lagutin and Secret Seven entries, Summary of Communism, 111, series A6122, NAA. A letter from J.B. Miles, 13 Kurrawa Road, North Sydney NSW 2060 to Bill Sutton, 5 September 1967 states that Lagutin died in Brisbane and was buried in the Toowong Cemetery. A copy of this letter is held in box 7, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.

\textsuperscript{88} See Zuzenko’s alien registration forms, series BP4/3, NAA.

\textsuperscript{89} Petruchanya, 3 Tennyson Street, Kensington to Russian Association, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 22 March 1919, QF3508.
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by hardline Bolsheviks discrediting his loyalty to the Soviet and labelling him a ‘local Bakunist’. It was Zuzenko’s ability to unite and rouse the enthusiasm in those around him – even those who might disagree with him on political grounds – that contributed to the considerable growth of the RWA in the first quarter of 1919. By January 1919 Zuzenko had been prosecuted under the *War Precautions Act* for political propaganda and on 17 April 1919 he was deported for his role in the Red Flag events in late March of that year.

After Zuzenko received a ban under the War Precautions Regulations he was officially replaced on the leadership panel of the RWA by his wife Civa Rosenberg as editor of *Knowledge and Unity*. In the day to day administration of the RWA other members such as Herman Bykoff stepped up to manage correspondence. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that this replacement was in name only and that Zuzenko still maintained a considerable voice in the decision making. Indeed, the Investigation Branch credited Zuzenko with raising the idea of the underground group which was to become the Secret Seven as a way to avoid the restrictions of the War Precautions Regulations.

Zuzenko was deported separately from his heavily pregnant wife Civa, who followed him in May 1919. They were reunited in Constantinople and travelled to Odessa where they waited anxiously for the Reds. Soviet forces occupied Odessa in February 1920. Zuzenko joined the Red Army and worked for Comintern. In this role Zuzenko returned to Australia in 1922 (and was rumoured to be planning another trip in 1924) on behalf of the Soviet government as part of a world revolutionary tour that took in the United States, Canada and New Zealand. This part of Zuzenko’s career has been examined in several publications by Kevin Windle. Later he served as a captain on long distance merchant ships between Leningrad and London. In 1938 he was arrested by the NKVD (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del or People’s Commissariat Internal Affairs) and charged with being a British spy. He was executed in August 1938. Zuzenko’s case was reconsidered posthumously and cancelled in the Krushchev era. In October 1956 Zuzenko was rehabilitated.

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90 Circular ‘Only by struggle, freedom you’ll gain’, Brisbane Soviet to M. Polteff, PO Townsville, 19 March 1919, QF3509.
91 Civa was the nickname that Tsetsiliia Mikhailovna – Boris Rosenberg’s daughter and Zuzenko’s wife – was known by in Australia. Her family came to Australia in February 1913 and she worked as a domestic in Brisbane. Her father Boris was deported on the *S.S. Frankfurt* on 19 September 1919. See the Rosenberg family’s alien registration forms, series BP4/3, NAA.
92 For instance, see Arov (Resanoff), Brisbane to S. Bolotnikoff, PO Ingham, 11 March 1919, QF3408.
93 See Zuzenko and Secret Seven entries, Summary of Communism, 111, series A6122, NAA.
94 See D.A. Mackiehan, Inspector, Commonwealth Investigation Branch, Brisbane to Collector of Customs, Brisbane, 3 December 1924, 713/1929, series J2773. See also Alexander Michael Zuzenko, N59/21/962, series SP43/2; and Zuzenko, Alexander Michael (district register W95/2/231), series A401, NAA.
97 Copy of USSR military high court decision of 4 October 1956. Copy held in Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.
The period after the departure of leaders like Utkin and Artem saw dissent within the RWA as Simonoff was raised to the role of Soviet Consul. In response to the leadership vacuum and discontent with Simonoff, Herman Bykoff\(^{98}\) and several other RWA members from South Brisbane and Ipswich broke away to form a splinter group called the Russian Group of Workers. Although short lived, this second group served to emphasise internal divisions and personality differences. Even the popular RWA paper, \textit{Knowledge and Unity}, was challenged by this group's \textit{Nabat} [The \textit{Tocsin}].\(^{99}\)

Born in Saratov in 1891, Bykoff entered Australia in March 1916 as a seaman on the \textit{S.S. Mallina}. He was cast by a censor as being ‘the embodiment of the ultra-criminal Russian instinct’.\(^{100}\) While his primary occupation was as a seaman on the \textit{S.S. Cantara} and later the \textit{S.S. Malina} trading between Sydney and Fremantle, it is likely that he worked as a labourer while he wrote and translated articles for RWA newspapers in Brisbane.\(^{101}\) Several of his pieces were also published in the \textit{Daily Standard} under the pseudonym A. Resanoff. Bykoff’s work focused on political struggle and extreme politics.\(^{102}\) He also found the time to pen a satirical play on the feisty politics of the Russian community in Brisbane.\(^{103}\) Like many in the émigré diaspora he secured travel documentation and attempted to return to Russia after the February Revolution.\(^{104}\) Drawing on references to police reports of his activities in Russia, censors alleged that Bykoff was a hardened convicted criminal in his homeland who had served considerable time in multiple tsarist prisons for ‘making bombs and using them for assassination’. In the aftermath of the Red Flag march, on 24 March 1919, Bykoff was seized and assaulted by a group of returned soldiers during the riots. He was rescued by the police as his attackers attempted to throw him into the river. As a result of this attack Bykoff sustained a knife wound and head and spinal injuries.\(^{105}\) Bykoff’s place in local politics after the deportation of the Red Flaggers was clearly recognised by censors, who felt that ‘few if any Russians are his equal in downright blackguardism and criminality’.\(^{106}\) He was closely watched upon his release from Boggo Road jail on 19 July 1919 and was arrested – ‘gobbled up again by the Australian alligators’ – on 13 August and sent to Sydney from where he was deported.

\(^{98}\) Bykoff was also known as Resanoff and Arov. For example, he published translated material in \textit{Ninth Wave} (see Arov (Resanoff), Brisbane to S. Bolotnikoff, PO Ingham, 11 March 1919, QF3408).


\(^{100}\) Censors’ notes, week ending 16 July 1919, QF4615.

\(^{101}\) See Bykoff’s alien registration forms, series BP4/3, NAA.


\(^{103}\) See Kevin Windle, ‘Unmajestic Bombast: The Brisbane Union of Russian Workers as shown in a 1919 play by Herman Bykoff’, \textit{Australian Slavonic and East European Studies} 19.1–2 (2005), 29–51.

\(^{104}\) His papers from the Provisional Russian Government are held on Bykoff, Herman – arrived Melbourne 1917, BYKOFF H, BP313/1; and The Red Flag – incidents regarding the flying of same, 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA.

\(^{105}\) For commentary see for instance Unknown, Brisbane to Kalashnikoff, General Hospital No 3, Brisbane, 24 March 1919, QF3515.

\(^{106}\) Censors’ notes, week ending 28 July 1919, QF4670.
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in September. Ultimately the authorities saw Bykoff as ‘a deceptive gentleman ... [who] can disguise his criminal temperament cleverly when it suits him’. The censors felt that Bykoff's Russianness and radical behaviour represented a militancy that was new to Australian left-wing politics. He was seen by the authorities as a figure who engaged in criminal activities to further the political goals of the RWA. One of Bykoff’s associates, Timms, owned the alleged ‘bomb plant’ in his hut near the river at South Brisbane that was used by Bykoff and others to produce rudimentary defensive weapons around the time of the Red Flag events. In the aftermath of the Red Flag events, and the arrest and detention of the RWA leadership, less well known members Tocaroff and Gorsky took over the correspondence of the Association. Their rise to prominence was noted by the censors who mapped the changed leadership of the group.

RWA leaders knew both the world of organised labour and the world of immigrants, and this familiarity allowed them to straddle barriers other immigrants could not. Discussing radical movements in the United States, Miller emphasises that ‘leadership seemed to be the key element required to infuse life into an immigrant movement. Where a militant voice addressed itself to their needs, the immigrants responded’. This goes some way to explaining the popularity of leaders like Artem and Zuzenko over Simonoff. Zuzenko and Artem explicitly spoke to the immediate needs of the worker population, within which they firmly located themselves. Both Artem and Zuzenko had experience working in isolated colonial outposts. They gave other Russian workers a voice and association through class (that is, radical) action. The politically diverse nature of the RWA should be recalled here. While it is evident that a high percentage of members held political opinions across the left-wing spectrum and had extensive experience in the political underground in Russia, few were professional Bolsheviks apart from Artem. His domination of the ideological direction of the group was due to his leadership skill. Artem was able to provide the community with the militant voice necessary for group activism, and he expressed solidarity with their cultural and social alienation. In the period after Artem, Zuzenko worked to coordinate the Russian communities in Queensland and in the southern states. While in frequent correspondence with distant communities, even in New Zealand, he remained in the Brisbane community. He too demonstrated affinity with working immigrants that came from his hands-on experience as a labourer cutting cane and building railroads in north Queensland. He was a talented journalist, experienced activist and party worker.

107 Russian Library, Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane to Socialist Hall, Sulphide Street, Russian Section, Broken Hill, 17 August 1919, QF4794. For Russian and left-wing accounts of Bykoff’s rearrest see Bykoff’s alien registration forms, series BP4/3, NAA as well as Polteff, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane to Losan, Arcadia Saloon, Finders Street, Townsville, 13 August 1919, QF4783; A. Kroopka, 60 Francis Street, Kangaroo Point to Shoupoff, c/o Ezersky, Fairymead Plantation, via Bundaberg, 17 August 1919, QF4796; Norman (Jeffrey), GPO Brisbane to B. Huggett, c/o P. Hemingsen, Scarborough, NSW, 17 August 1919, QF4800; and M.B.K., Brisbane to Mrs M. Timms, PO Box 115, Haymarket Street, Sydney, 4 April 1919, QF4854.

108 Censors’ notes, week ending 16 July 1919, QF4615.

109 Censors’ notes, week ending 16 July 1919, QF4615.

110 See censors’ notes, week ending 11 June 1919, QF4291.

111 Miller, The Radical Immigrant, 100.
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On the other hand, the equally militant Simonoff was concerned with the big picture of world revolution. He was removed from the average Russian worker geographically and vocationally. When Simonoff criticised the standard of *Knowledge and Unity* under Lagutin, he was concerned with journalistic standards and intellectual originality rather than how adequately the paper addressed the needs of its readers. Unlike other leaders, Simonoff did not engage in manual labour nor did he ever leave the urban spaces of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne for long periods of time. Additionally, Simonoff secured his income solely through his writing and activism. During tough times, he procured subscriptions from the Russian community for his services. This behaviour was labelled by some Russians as ‘feeding a parasite’. Nevertheless, Simonoff operated on a shoestring budget: by his accounts his official salary for July 1918 to March 1919 was £17 when his travel expenses alone had been over £50 for this period. These figures suggest that he had other sources of funding.

Russian activists had something of a dual identity in Brisbane. They were regarded as quintessentially foreign by their host society yet their experience of years of itinerant work in Queensland gave them local knowledge. Even their status as highly skilled workers was problematic. They were hard workers – a quality valued by employers – but their alien status afforded little job security during the war period. While their political activities were contextualised within the wider labour paradigm, they were at a militant forefront of revolutionary progress that was essentially alien to Australian labour. Several members of the RWA were highly familiar with the political situation in Russia but at the same time they were exiles from the heart of the revolution. The working-class identification of the RWA ignored the fact that not all members had been workers in Russia; indeed some were part of the intelligentsia. RWA members who contributed letters and articles to newspapers were often highly skilled writers with an expert level of knowledge on political matters yet they were not always understood by their English speaking audiences. This division extended to RWA participation in wider labour activities. For example, Russians joined labour marches yet they were identified by newspapers and censors alike as a group within a group: the Russian Association. This duality was particularly acute and contributed to the Russian community being an object of surveillance by the authorities. The censors examined the activities of the RWA on several levels: foreign language publication, radical content, alien activists and for evidence of collusion with other groups.

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112 This might have also been connected to the impediments placed on his movements under the War Precautions Regulations (repealed in 1920). Despite the Australian government’s failure to recognise Simonoff as Soviet Consul, his potential threat to the home front distinguished him in the censors’ reports.

113 Unknown, Sydney post stamp to Kurguz (Koorgoos), 5 Hope Street, South Brisbane, 7 December 1919, QF3072 The procurement of subscriptions to cover Simonoff’s political work necessitated an extended set of negotiations which required him to reaffirm his value to the community time and time again. It is very likely that Simonoff overestimated his importance and that many Russians begrudged paying Simonoff’s subscriptions.

114 Peter Simonoff, Sydney to Russian Association, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 21 March 1919, QF3517.

115 Intelligence officers’ reports indicate that English speaking audiences would energetically clap the Russian language speeches of RWA representatives at labour events. While it is likely that some audience members clapped out of politeness, perhaps the positive reception of these speeches demonstrated respect for the expertise of Russians on all matters revolutionary.
The Russian community became a valuable source of interpretation of revolutionary events for the labour movement. Several works have examined reportage on the Russian Revolution in the Australian press. Kirsten Zweck’s study of the conservative press in Sydney concludes that the coverage demonstrated ‘a lack of comprehension on the part of the press to report accurately on the Russian situation. In addition, it indicates the eagerness of the Australian press to explain events outside their control as manifestations of the enemy’. Zweck, ‘The Fear of Bolshevism in Australia: The Sydney conservative press and the ALP, 1917–1924’ (BA Hons thesis, University of Queensland, 1993), 42.


Ian Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics: The dynamics of the labour movement in eastern Australia 1900–1921 (Sydney: Hale, 1979), 203; and Evans, Loyalty and Disloyalty, 114.

Fitzgerald and Thornton, Labor in Queensland, 30.


Andrew Moore, The Right Road? A history of right-wing politics in Australia (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), 22. See also Verity Burgmann’s assessment of Ménin’s work on Australia in In Our Time, 10.
successive efforts of individual leaders (Artem, Simonoff and Zuzenko) as well as Russian Groups within unions indicate that cooperation with the Left did exist. Yet strong differences remained between the identity, aims and practices of the Russian activists and their mainstream Australian Labor Party and unionist counterparts. In particular, Russian leaders such as Artem felt that the work of unions in Brisbane did not go far enough. For the experienced Russian radical it was clear that ‘to demonstrate collective action is not to prove that class cohesiveness or even a firm sense of class consciousness existed’.125

The Russians who arrived in Brisbane before and during the Great War were joining a country that had its own radical tradition. During this period the IWW was heavily agitating for change and the Wobblies lent their support to the 1916 shearers’ strike in Queensland and New South Wales. In the northern city of Townsville, IWW tactics were most effectively merged with domestic industrial activism and North Queensland meat-workers combined the go-slow technique with strike activity.126 The work of IWW activists was in the public eye as Wobblies ‘attracted attention by chaining themselves to railings on sidewalks and hiring city hotel rooms to address street gatherings’.127 It is not unreasonable to assume that these strategies appealed to disillusioned, unemployed workers, even to those within the union structure who harked back to the militancy of the 1890s. The workplace troubles of the 1890s in rural Queensland spurred the militancy of the industrial wing of the labour movement, although this was later subordinated to the electoralism of the political wing. The violent industrial phase of socialist development was permanently delayed and de-emphasised in Australia. For leaders of the RWA this amounted to ideological emptiness, material misunderstanding and class betrayal. Reform and parliamentary participation were also seen as a sell-out by activists in the Queensland labour movement, such as Ernest Lane.128

The Australian slant stressed reform, with revolution often viewed as not relevant to the domestic context. Queensland socialism of the 1910s followed this trend combined with a focus on municipal socialism. As Burgmann observes, Queensland’s focus on municipal politics ‘reflected the impact on the labour movement of Queensland’s economic geography’: the state had a large number of developed regional centres that supported working-class organisations.129 A network of state-run enterprises was being developed, but the focus was on promoting the security and quality of life for individuals and their families, rather than on class emancipation. The philosophy is encapsulated in the terms of working man’s paradise as opposed to working-class paradise. The political and economic environment of Brisbane lacked ‘the desperate sense of alienation which

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125 Miller, The Radical Immigrant, 51.
126 For details see Burgmann, Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, 165, 177.
128 See his revealing autobiography and reflections on labour in Queensland: Ernest Lane (Jack Cade), Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a rebel (Brisbane: William Brooks, 1939).
129 Burgmann, In Our Time, 177.
characterised the revolutionaries living in autocratic systems. As Clifton Yearley concludes, ‘Britons demonstrated by peaceful methods that labor could go far toward achieving its goals, even alter the complexion of government without smashing existing institutions’.

Some of the strongest links forged by the RWA with mainstream groups were the relationships that grew around the association’s publications, particularly its series of newspapers. One of the most enduring links was with the Industrial Workers of the World and its protégé the One Big Union (OBU). The OBU shared the RWA’s premises in Stanley Street and its PO Box 10 in South Brisbane and provided practical assistance to print and distribute RWA publications. Through its OBU connection, the RWA gained access to groups such as the Industrial Council, Children’s Peace Army and the Queensland Socialist League. In addition to their links to the RWA, many Russians also held membership of the IWW. In Cairns the all-Russian Local ‘operated as a focus point for Russian workers in several parts of Australia’ and the Russians working at the Cloncurry mines were amongst the most prominent IWW supporters in the region. The inclusion of Russian literature in lending libraries was also undertaken by the IWW. Burgmann observes the Russian Wobbly Joe Fagin organised the distribution of Russian language publications such as Golos Truda and Rabochaya Rech to workers from the Sydney headquarters.

At times the RWA’s relationships with other left-wing groups were strained. For most of the war newspaper editors walked a fine line to keep their prints afloat, balancing the censors’ requirements with reader interest and the rising costs of paper, printing and distribution. Often these conditions called for compromise, generally on the political character of the articles and letters published. This was one area where the RWA leadership was not prepared to compromise and predictably its newspapers were heavily censored. The Russians were adept at fielding speakers at meetings to promote their cause and to ask for support from their English worker comrades. In the months prior to the second anniversary of the October Revolution on 10 November 1919, a reinvigorated RWA under the leadership of men like Bykoff and Lagutin called for unity with comrades across the labour movement. The Brisbane Soviet urged workers to engage in locally targeted direct action under revolutionary slogans such as ‘Forward is our cry. Struggle we are telling you’.

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130 Miller, The Radical Immigrant, 53.
132 For example, the OBU assisted the RWA to publish and distribute several hundred copies of the Russian Constitution in December 1918. See the OBU chair’s recollection of this ‘stunt’ in J. Burke, OBUPI (One Big Union Propaganda League), Box 10, PO South Brisbane to W.A. Shepherd, Hotel Delta, Ayr via Townsville, 17 January 1919, QF2986.
133 These relationships resulted in joint activities, for example, the demonstration on 26 January 1919. For accounts see intelligence reports, week ending 29 January 1919, QF2959 and QF2960; and Turner, Gibb Street, Kelvin Grove to Mrs Scott Griffiths, Dornoch Terrace, South Brisbane, 12 February 1919, QF3106.
134 Burgmann, Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, 88–89, 170.
135 Burgmann, Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, 89.
136 See for instance the rousing circular from Soviet, Brisbane to Peter Kriulin, Victoria Street, Cairns, 6 August 1919, QF4747.
attempt to build stronger links with workers off the shopfloor the RWA frequently joined the workers’ picnics held by larger groups such as the socialist league.

Despite generally respectful links with other groups, tensions arose between Russians and mainstream labour. For instance, several Russians protested against the levy paid by AMIEU to support *The Daily Standard*. They disagreed with their money going to support a newspaper which did not represent their interests. The case escalated to the courts when union members refused to work with the Russian members until the levy was paid. The RWA did gain some support from the socialists when *Solidarity* editor Betsy Matthias agreed to publish the Russians’ side of the story. The Brisbane Industrial Council put out a dodger condemning the soldier violence against the Russians as being ‘instigated by the enemies of Labour’. The dodger is also a strong defence of the Russian workers. In 1919, after the Red Flag Riots, the wives of the imprisoned Red Flaggers appealed to the Industrial Council for assistance. Mrs Timms, for instance, received financial and legal assistance from the Industrial Council.

Trade unions were also supportive of the work of Russians in Australia. Many Russian men were union members in their workplaces and, in turn, the unions represented them during industrial disputes. The Queensland Railway Union (QRU) provided ‘material and moral assistance’ to its members when they were imprisoned for their role in the Red Flag events. The affinity between the QRU and the Bolshevik cause was publicly acknowledged through frequent articles and resolutions attributed to the union that were published in newspapers such as *The Daily Standard*. The support network for the imprisoned Red Flaggers was lampooned by the censors, who noted a chain reaction when Bykoff protested against prison regulations aimed at preventing prisoners speaking in foreign languages:

> It is the simplest thing to forecast the procedure: Gorsky will report to the Industrial Council, the Council will interview the Home Secretary; there will be a tirade against the regulations by Jack Cade in the *Standard* and a day or two afterwards the solicitude of the Home Secretary ... will be exemplified by a permit to the imprisoned Russians to converse in their native language – the lever is the Industrial Council.

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137 For more information see the circular ‘No sympathy for you’ signed by K. Klushin, V. Pikunoff and S. Kotten that set out the Russian perspective on the case, intercepted week ending 5 March 1919, QF3268; and Betsy Matthias, Ediress [sic], *Solidarity*, 117 Bathurst Street, Sydney to K. Klushin, V. Pickunoff or S. Kotten, c/o Russian Association, South Brisbane, 27 February 1919, QF3339.

138 Declaration of the Brisbane Industrial Council on the Recent Disturbances, Trades Hall, Brisbane, dated 16 April 1919, QF4125.

139 Not only did the Industrial Council send Mrs Timms money to help her live near her husband in Sydney, but they assisted with her legal case to prove her marriage. See Timms, Sydney to Industrial Council, Trades Hall, Brisbane, 14 July 1919, QF4554.

140 C. Ostapenko wrote from HM Prison in Brisbane to T. Moroney to thank the Queensland Railway Union on 28 June 1919, QF4570.

141 Censors’ notes, week ending 16 July 1919, QF4615.
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The frequency with which the *Daily Standard* devoted considerable space to the Bolshevik cause – both Soviet successes in Russia and the Red Flaggers’ experiences in Australia – prompted censors to conclude that its ‘columns are not clean’.142

The RWA made representations to the ALP for support in securing passage for Russians to return home. A few MPs did rally to support the Russians’ plea to leave Australia. For instance, the Secretary of the Australian Labor Party, P.C. Evans, wrote to Kreslin that he had received a response from Acting Prime Minister Watt to his query on the issue.143 Evans included a copy of Watt’s response dated 4 April 1919 in which Watt stated that approval would not be given to Russians to depart Australia. Watt does indicate that men desirous of serving with the allied forces in the fight against Soviet Russia could be repatriated via Odessa.

The Russian Workers Association in Sydney was also involved with the wider labour movement. This is noted in censors’ reports, for instance, when the group’s delegates attended a meeting of the ALP Williamstown Branch on 17 May 1918 and added its name to a multi-organisation resolution of protest against the federal leadership of Hughes and Cook.144 In contrast, the Russian community in Brisbane, despite its ideological earnestness, was still viewed as distinct from the rest of the labour movement. Left-wing commentators, such as the Lane brothers remarked that ‘in Brisbane the Russians seem much more closely “colonised” than in either Sydney or Melbourne’.145

This article recounted a meeting with the breakaway Russian Workers Group and depicted the Russians as separate or different from regular workers groups. The Russians met in ‘a top-room in a darkened shop, in a semi-deserted street’. In this ‘weird room aloft’, ‘Russians were gloriously singing’ and the meeting itself made for ‘another strange and unfamiliar experience’.146

Attitudes of traditional labour elements toward the Russian workers and their association were at first ambiguous, sometimes suspicious and not always smooth. The Australian trade union movement was influenced by the British tradition of organising by craft or trade rather than industry or class. Thus, there was opposition to the growth of movements such as the IWW and OBU from traditional working-class cohorts as well as from bourgeois sections of society. Even radical labour expressed reservations about the approach of Russian activism. A copy of a resolution passed at an OBUPL meeting in 1918 indicates that a dispute existed between the OBUPL and members of the Russian Workers Association over a pro-OBU letter Klushin published in a newspaper:

142 Censors’ notes, week ending 28 July 1919, QF4699.
143 P.C. Evans, Secretary, Australian Labor Party, Sydney to P. Kreslin, Secretary, Russian Association, Brisbane, 9 April 1919, QF3728.
144 See enclosed report by Third Military District intelligence officer to Deputy Chief Censor for the MF reports for the week ending 20 May 1918.
145 Ernest Lane (professionally known as columnist Jake Cade in the *Daily Standard*) and Frank Lane. See ‘Travel Gossip: With the Russians’, *Worker* (6 June 1918), 7.
146 ‘Travel Gossip: With the Russians’, *Worker* (6 June 1918), 7.
… We, the One Big Union Propaganda League, consider the action of Comrade Klushin ... detrimental to the best interests of the working-class movement ... we consider his action indiscreet.147

The ideologically gung-ho attitude of the Russians also led to their isolation from moderate elements. For instance, an anonymous letter asked Norman Freeberg, editor of the *Worker*, to ‘split from the Russians; [as] they are only making a convenience of you, they do nothing, they never go to any of your meetings ... they hide while you do the dirty work for them; they don’t mind what trouble they get others into as long as they can keep out of it, you can go to jail for them as long as they keep out and laugh at you’.148

The propaganda work of the RWA was not universally appreciated by the wider labour movement. Left-wing intellectuals – from T.C. Witherby to V.G. Childe – identified a need for solid socialist propaganda. Witherby and Childe saw the writings of groups like the RWA as too exotic and ‘wonderfully lacking in originality’.149 A.S. Reardon, Secretary of the Australian Socialist Party, cautioned that not all Russians were Bolsheviks; in fact ‘there’ll be a hell of a lot of reactionary anarchists amongst them who need keeping out’ of left-wing politics.150 Nikolai Illin of North Queensland targeted Simonoff in particular for gagging his opponents and commandeering ‘the press to mislead the uneducated class by mutilating the facts’.151

The RWA, unlike other immigrant associations, was not absorbed by their new environment. Tiny radical groups, such as the RWA, that operated on the fringes of the labour movement spoke a language that was both foreign and familiar to Australian workers. Their criticism of capitalism and program for better working conditions were easily accepted. But the ‘insistence on the forcible overthrow of capitalism fell on deaf ears as impractical, indeed unimaginable, in a country that prided itself on its progressive traditions and democratic opportunities’.152 The association lost support from the wider Russian community because of activities such as the Red Flag Demonstration, and remaining core members were associated with the new Communist Party as a Russian Language sub-group. Even this link with the CPA was problematic. As Lovell and Windle observe ‘a group of Russian workers in Brisbane contacted the Comintern asking for recognition’ separately from the Party. For much of the 1920s the Queensland Russians – namely the Brisbane and Ipswich Groups – ‘would not become part of the CPA’.153 Brisbane Russians, like those elsewhere, were captivated by the mesmerising rise of the Bolsheviks during the Great War. While some of the Brisbane number had been Bolshevik Party members before exile, others of socialist

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147 Copy of Resolution signed by John Burke, Secretary OBUPL, 27 November 1918, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA. This resolution was in response to pro-OBU comments published by Klushin in a letter. The source does not identify the publication details of Klushin’s letter.


149 T.C. Witherby, c/o Prof Atkinson, University of Melbourne to V.G. Childe, Wickham Terrace, Brisbane, 21 February 1919, QF3249.

150 See A.S. Reardon, Sydney to A.S. Brodney, Brunswick Street, New Farm, 25 April 1919, QF3949.

151 N. Illin, Peeramon to A. Resanoff, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 24 April 1919, QF3859.


revolutionary or anarchist persuasion began to view Bolshevik successes as genuine political progress for their homeland. This was not an unchallenged process as demonstrated by the disputes documented in the surviving correspondence of the RWA. Nevertheless, it does mirror the fleeting Bolshevisation of left-wing politics at the time.

RWA membership included a core of professional revolutionaries preparing the way for social and political upheaval in a larger group of immigrants with political leanings. The political program of the group revolved around agitation, education and leadership. Simonoff and Zuzenko eloquently promoted the conditions for the forceful and systematic reconstruction of society. This trend intensified as Russians were denied passports, leave to travel and diplomatic representation. The impact upon the Russian community was to create pressure-cooker atmosphere, similar to the autocratic conditions in tsarist Russia that had nurtured their original radicalism. Suddenly, the roles of the Old World and New World blurred as tsarist Russia embarked on a Soviet experiment and Australia tightened the reins on civil liberties in the name of empire. Russians themselves began to compare their experiences in Australian jails after the Red Flag events to their time in the ‘nursery of great ideas’ in their homeland.\[154\]

Ceaseless agitation: The press

The most tangible legacy of the Russian Workers Association is its series of newspapers. These publications are on the cusp of the ethnic press and the radical press. The political nature and persistence of the RWA’s publications helped bring the association to the attention of the censors and military intelligence officers. The newspapers, at first aimed at Russian groups in Queensland, were later expanded to include pamphlets and an English language weekly that was distributed across Australia and into pockets of New Zealand. Copies of RWA publications also made their way back to the Soviet Union. Information on the RWA’s quartet of newspapers primarily edited by Artem, Peter Simonoff, Nikolai Lagutin, Alexander Zuzenko, Civa Rosenberg and Herman Bykoff can be obtained from surviving copies as well as in secondary literature. The first three newspapers the group published are in Russian. As each paper was closed down by Australian authorities, new publications would appear.\[155\] In 1912 the first Russian language newspaper in Australia *Ekho Australii* [Echo of Australia] was released. The small editions were hand printed in Artem’s home by amateur compositors, ‘political immigrants who gained their experience in

\[154\] A. Gorsky, Brisbane to H. Bykoff, HM Prison, Brisbane, 19 June 1919, QF4423.
\[155\] Newspaper publication details have been drawn from copies of the papers held in Fryer Library, QSA and NAA as well as Govor, *Australian in the Russian Mirror*, box 22 Russian language newspapers, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library; and Frank Farrell and Edgar Ross in Herbert James (Jim) Gibbney, *Labour in Print: A guide to the people who created a labour press in Australia between 1850–1939* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975), 123, 170, 174, 476. Through comparing copies of the newspapers with dates cited by Govor it is likely that *Ekho Australii* was in publication from 27 July 1912 to September 1912, *Izvestia* 29 November 1913 to 3 February 1916, *Workers’ Life* February 1916 to December 1917, and *Knowledge and Unity* 31 December 1918 to 23 July 1921. See also J. Normington-Rawling, ‘Foundation of the Communist Party in Australia’, *Quadrant* 37.9.5 (September–October 1965): 73; and Boris Christa, ‘Great Bear and Southern Cross’. 43
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underground typographies of Siberian exile’. The Russian Club was prosecuted for publishing an unregistered newspaper in September 1912 which led to the closure of Echo of Australia. After its closure the club started publishing Izvestia Soyuza Russkikh Emigrantov [Bulletin of the Union of Russian Emigrants] in 1913. Izvestia, the name of a national Russian newspaper also, is a general term for information, proceedings and news. Pikunoff notes that Izvestia was distributed throughout Queensland and in the southern states as well. It was replaced in 1916 with Rabochaya Zhizn [Workers’ Life], which like its two predecessors, was owned by the RWA and edited by Artem. Workers’ Life was suppressed under the War Precautions Regulations in December 1917. The final challenge came after Artem’s departure with a bold new publishing move. First in Russian as Znanie i Edinenie then in English from December 1918, Knowledge and Unity was the fourth and final challenge of the RWA. Due to financial difficulties and legal actions against its main editors Simonoff and Zuzenko, the RWA shared the ownership of the paper with the Queensland Socialist League and, from issue 65, the paper was the mouthpiece of the Brisbane Branch of the CPA until its last edition in July 1921.

The fluid editorship and ownership of Knowledge and Unity could be interpreted as an attempt to evade surveillance. An examination of intercepted correspondence reveals a leadership vacuum after Simonoff’s departure and Lagutin struggled with the rigours of the task. However, as Zuzenko reveals, when ‘the editor is put in prison, in his place steps another person and continues the work’. Zuzenko demonstrated real leadership and under him the paper was hoisted as a flag for Russians in Australia and even New Zealand. In the months after the Red Flag events, the RWA struggled to secure funds and was not able to publish regular editions of Knowledge and Unity despite promises to subscribers that ‘the publication of the paper will be exactly in the same spirit as before’. Peter Landie, a Russian employed at the Moreton Bay Printing Company, was instrumental in securing the printing contract for the RWA of Knowledge and Unity. Printing support was provided by the Daily Standard. Postal intercepts reveal that two other papers were associated with the RWA. In 1919 the RWA attempted to register a new newspaper Deviatyi Val [Ninth Wave] for the Russian language readers whose needs had not been met by the

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156 Pikunoff, ‘Russian Workers in Australia’, 59.
157 Details of the Queensland government’s prosecution of the Russian Club and its editor F. Sergaeff (Artem) can be found in Russian Newspaper (Echo Australia), 86548, series 14812, QSA.
158 Pikunoff, ‘Russian Workers in Australia’, 60.
159 For the case against Workers’ Life see box 5, 66/4/2072, series BP4/1, NAA.
160 Zuzenko cited in censors’ notes, week ending 29 January 1919, QF2941.
161 Soviet of Russian Workers, Brisbane to S. Kalssin, PO Mirivanni, 26 May 1919, QF4283; and Bill, Brisbane to Tintane, PO Cairns, 11 June 1919, QF4326. The financial welfare of the paper did not improve. A statement published in Knowledge and Unity (15 January 1921, 3) a few months before the paper ceased publication in July 1921 states that the expenditure of the paper equalled its income down to the last penny.
162 See Elsie, c/o Hampson Brothers, Toowoomba to Peter Landie, c/o Moreton Printing Company, Ann Street, Brisbane, 11 November 1918, QF2387; and Vesta Messervy [sic], Geebung to Peter Landie, Corner Russell and Merivale Streets, South Brisbane, 13 February 1919, QF3137.
163 See discussion in censors’ notes, week ending 2 April 1919, QF3575; and Knowledge and Unity entry in Gibbney, Labour in Print.
English language *Knowledge and Unity*. A short-lived breakaway Russian Group of Workers, led by Bykoff in 1918, published its own newspaper called *Nabat [The Tocsin]*. Landie organised for *Nabat* to be printed at the Moreton Bay Printing Company. In addition to the series of newspapers, pamphlets were a more permanent publishing activity undertaken by RWA activist-editors. Cheaper to produce and easier to distribute than books, pamphlets provided an ideal medium for focused analysis of political ideas and world events. In Joy Guyatt’s work on labour publicists, she discusses how another newspaper, the *Worker*, raised capital during the war by printing and disseminating labour friendly propaganda pamphlets. The RWA newspapers and pamphlets were primarily distributed via mail subscription to nominated salespersons but once *Knowledge and Unity* was published in English it was dispersed through the labour movement channels of sales at meetings and processions.

In terms of frequency of publication, runs of editions and regular subscription lists, the RWA publishing enterprise was not outstanding. Its record can be seen as representative of any ethnic or exile community. What set the group apart from contemporary Russian associations elsewhere in Australia was its persistence and national (even international) marketing of its products. During the war, the difficulty of production skyrocketed. The price of paper rose substantially along with the costs of inks, labour and distribution, not to mention the dearth of regular subscriptions. Independent newspapers across the political spectrum faced cutbacks in length and printing regularity. It was not uncommon for dailies to be reissued as biweeklies, weeklies and even fortnightlies. Even landmark labour papers such as the *The Daily Standard* in Brisbane faced financial uncertainty. The RWA’s papers were plagued by conditions which necessitated sporadic publication. The duty with which the RWA executed its publishing enterprise becomes evident when the newspapers and political brochures are considered within the context of the repressive political climate of the World War I home front, the recurring difficulties associated with securing finance and printing, and the personal toll independent newspaper production took on its editors.

In historian Dmitry Shlapentokh’s analysis of Eurasianism in Russian émigré communities from the 1920s, he comments that:

> In the politically tense and intellectually (even more so financially) crowded world of the Russian émigré community, there were always too many people who wished


165 *Ivestia* was advertised for sale in Brisbane, Ipswich, Sydney, Mount Morgan, Melbourne and Broken Hill. See *Ivestia* 21 (8 May 1914). Summary in box 22 Russian language newspapers, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library. Intelligence reports from 1919 mention the selling of Russian newspapers at the Sunday Domain meetings. For instance, intelligence reports, week ending 29 January 1919, QF2959 and QF2960; and week ending 19 February 1919, QF3151.

166 Under the *War Precautions Act*, leading publicists Peter Simonoff and Aleksandr Zuzenko were harassed, fined and even imprisoned. Other writers and editors such as Nikolai Lagutin and Herman Bykoff also faced police searches and official scrutiny.
to make their living by writing. The buying of a newspaper or magazine was not so much of an act of satisfying one’s thirst for information or simple curiosity as it was an act of support.\textsuperscript{167}

This applies equally to radical communities before the revolution. Certainly the RWA editorship intended their newspapers to be a sort of guide to the ideological maze which was unfolding. It is likely that senior members of the RWA were as much reliant on community support as they were on regular employment.\textsuperscript{168} The dedicated group of RWA members who edited the newspapers also wrote and commissioned articles, arranged sponsorship through advertising local businesses, and set the type. RWA editors distributed the newspapers at meetings such as the Sunday afternoon sessions at the Domain. They managed mail subscriptions from individuals and groups around Australia and overseas. These duties were in addition to the editors’ day jobs as labourers, cane cutters and railway workers. Regular RWA contributors often used editorial and feature article pseudonyms, particularly Zuzenko and Bykoff. Zuzenko alludes to the reasoning behind the creation of varied aliases:

\begin{quote}
If you have a newspaper … and you only have one or two men filling the columns you want to show that not one man is working, but 15 different men supplying articles. ... I signed 4 or 5 names. ... Matoulichenko and Sani Maman. ... Sometimes initials and so on, but in Australia, in the Home Office they knew Zuzenko, Matoulichenko and Maman. ... Podoprigero.\textsuperscript{169}
\end{quote}

In his study of the Ukrainian press in Australia, Marko Pavlyshyn states that the use of pseudonyms to sign an expression of opinion is a common feature albeit ‘the informed public in general knows to whom these pseudonyms belong’.\textsuperscript{170} In homogeneous communities such as the RWA ties between the political and media elites were closer than those in larger, diverse populations.

The editorial choices of the small RWA team are reflected in the newspaper content which primarily centred on Russian developments. Amidst the Russian language adverts from South Brisbane businesses, ran a range of articles and discussions that tackled big philosophical issues through to more factual chronologies of revolutionary events. Great figures of the revolutionary tradition as well as explorations of critical events provided popular human interest stories. Contributors also edited news items selected from subscriptions to international papers of other groups. Thus, by reading a RWA newspaper, one could get a sense of what was happening in the movement around the world, albeit several months after the fact. The critical element for the activist leadership was the ability of the newspapers to influence the way its readership interpreted the events of the unfolding revolution in Russia. This was not a straightforward task. Raymond Evans notes how difficult it was for editors to discern what was actually happening on the other

\textsuperscript{168} This was the case for Peter Simonoff who regularly collected subscriptions to finance his writing from communities along the east coast of Australia.
\textsuperscript{169} Interrogation of Suzenko or Toni Tollagsen Tjorn by Captain H.M. Miller and Captain Guy Liddell, 19 December 1922, 24/30649, series A1, NAA. Zuzenko claimed in the follow-up interview on 20 December 1922 to have had 75 names!
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The Russian community in Brisbane

side of the world, to separate conservative bias and national jingoism from news in the cables. He examines the case of how Brisbane weekly newspaper the *Worker* changed its stance on Germany over the course of the war: as the war progressed ‘it operated as though it simply did not know quite what to believe’ at times and at others ‘it toed the party line’.

Examining editorial choices is an important step in piecing together how a newspaper fits into the community it serves. Australian Jewish scholar Percy Marks, in his 1913 paper on the Jewish press in Australia, introduced his work by indicating that ‘this subject is really one, if not the chief, source, of the annals of Jewry’. This observation can be applied to the newspapers of the radical Russian community in Brisbane. Through the community’s succession of papers we can glean an understanding of the events, passions and aims of the group. RWA newspapers reveal that contributors were aware of revolutionary ideas, the revolution as a larger goal, the existence of a Russian radical diaspora, their position in Australia as immigrants, and the limitation of the Australian labour movement for achieving their goals. The newspapers also functioned ‘as one of the principle vehicles of socialisation and communication’ within the Russian community. Additionally, the idea of revolution by word, or the ancillary goal of worker education, could perhaps be achieved through newspapers. This was demonstrated through the RWA’s choice to publish *Knowledge and Unity* in English despite the added risks this strategy posed in terms of alienating Russian readers and making the paper more accessible to military intelligence officers. The RWA readership was dedicated, and interest in its papers strong, but the decision to publish *Knowledge and Unity* in English in 1918 alienated Russians who wanted a Russian language paper. Letters complaining to the editors about the English paper flooded the *Knowledge and Unity* office. However, many Russians were keenly aware of the advantage of an English publication. N. Blinoff of Selwyn wrote to Zuzenko: ‘with paper in English language we can close our ranks solid – both English and Russian. Then they can understand, that us, Russians, a hand full only, represent glorious Bolshevism. … As for usself [sic], *Knowledge and Unity* is absolutely useless, because we have no English’. Nevertheless, the decision to publish in English was a calculated step by the RWA leadership. The switch to English allowed the RWA to prolong the editorial autonomy of its media with support from the Queensland Socialist League, before its sale to the young CPA. Both of these claims are supported by correspondence to the RWA editors intercepted by the censors.

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171 The main cables at this time were United-Reuter-Times and the Australian Combined Service.
174 A survey of RWA newspapers in the Queensland State Archives and the National Archives of Australia was supplemented with summaries compiled by Thomas Poole. See Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.
176 N. Blinoff, Selwyn PO to *Knowledge and Unity*, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 27 February 1919, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
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The foreign language press could serve as an instrument of empowerment for immigrant groups. For the RWA, it was very important for their community of readers to be familiar with the growth of Bolshevik power in the homeland and the internationalisation of the revolution. How could Bolshevism be credible in the wider labour movement if Russians did not even accept it? The principal forum for the exchange of ideas for the RWA was its press organs. This process was marked by the inclusion of editorial material that promoted Bolshevism through rebuttal of alternative ideological perspectives. The papers set out the key developments of the revolution and showed readers how to understand these developments. In Halyna Myroniuk’s analysis of the Russian press and its immigrant readership in America, she observes that ‘it taught them how to read, think, and formulate their political opinion’.

This could take a variety of forms from advice to new immigrants on how to integrate into their new community to preparing future radicals to return home to perpetuate the revolution. In short, newspapers served to educate the migrant and set the public agenda for discussion and play an active role in defining issues.

Steven Cassedy notes the emergence of a sub-genre in the memoirs and press of Jewish radicals: the reading list.

This trend is also recognisable in the RWA’s *Izvestia* and *Knowledge and Unity* where editors included lists of recommended political books and pamphlets. These reading lists are evidence of the volume of left-wing political works being produced during this period. Fortunately copies of the type of document promoted in these reading lists – some fiery, some didactic – survive in libraries and archives around Australia.

The promotion of reading material by the RWA newspapers was supported by the association’s mail order subscription service run through its library. This is further evidence of the association’s mission to educate and politicise their readership. This function was picked up by the censors and intelligence staff who regulated publications and monitored the promotion of seditious material. The fact that the RWA editors were openly advertising works on the prohibited books list continued to alarm the government staff. The increasingly radical tone expressed in editorials and feature articles emphasised the political nature of the whole Russian community for the federal and state authorities.

Brisbane was home to a flourishing, local left-wing press during the war, and wider, national-scale publishing activities were sweeping labour groups across the Commonwealth. The daily press kept readers abreast of the fast moving times, particularly union politics as well as the industrial upheavals and strikes during the war. The biggest slice of the left-wing press market was held by labour dailies. The national network formed by these labour dailies was the lifeblood of the movement during the first decades of the twentieth century. As Max Corden points out, labour dailies were published in every capital city in the Commonwealth except for Perth and Melbourne. Labour’s early investment in the press is indicated by Joy Guyatt who observes that ‘labour men, from the late 1890s, had recognised the importance of a daily paper to present “the facts” from a labour point of view to counter the distortions of the commercial press and to educate the electorate’. A common feature of labour newspapers, such as the *Labour Daily*, was related to this presentation of the facts: ‘the constant struggle for editorial control’.

In Brisbane two labour papers stand out in terms of their impact and longevity: the *Daily Standard* and the *Worker*. Russian activists such as Artem, Zuzenko, Bykoff, Simonoff and Pikunoff were regular letter writers to (and presumably readers of) these papers. The *Daily Standard* was ‘Brisbane’s stalwart Labor daily’, in publication six evenings a week from 10 December 1912 to 7 July 1936. The second oldest of last century’s labour dailies, it was the primary press organ of the ALP in Queensland during its existence. Born of the enormously successful *Strike Bulletins* of the 1912 General Strike, the *Daily Standard* aimed to rival morning papers with its superiority ‘in point of literary and journalistic ability’. Established with union backing, the paper claimed a sizeable circulation that exceeded that of more established rival labour dailies. The *Daily Standard* was at the forefront of reportage on weighty occurrences and issues, such as the General Strike of 1912, the Irish Rebellion in April 1916, the Conscription (or more aptly the anti-Conscription) Campaigns and Referenda in 1916 and 1917. In Kevin Fewster’s work on censorship in Australia during World War I, he assessed the *Daily Standard* to be ‘the most outspoken journal of the 1916 campaign’ in Australia against conscription.

The paper faced federal censorship under the *War Precautions Act* by Brisbane censor J.J. Stable, originally for the publication of anti-conscription material. Its premises continued to be monitored

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185 *Worker* (24 July 1918), 7.
189 The *Daily Standard* was originally financed by unions, with the AWU holding the dominant share. See Gibbney, *Labour in Print*, 106; and Corden, ‘Towards a History’, 177.
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by military officers even after the end of the war. Viewed as a mouthpiece for Bolshevik propaganda by the conservative Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA), it was the victim of civil unrest during the Red Flag Riots that began on 23 March 1919. On 26 March, a mob attack was mounted on the premises with windows being broken and at least one firearm being used. Its links with Russians and publication of their letters prompted one censor to state that ‘the Standard has gone out of its way to father the Russian Association, to uphold Bolshevism and in many other ways to fan the Bolshevik flame’. The Daily Standard survived this period with loyal support from the ALP and its significant readership buoyed its somewhat financially precarious existence until 1936. Despite having widespread left-wing support, the ideological quality of the Daily Standard was found to be questionable by more politically astute activists. In particular, members of the Russian Workers Association objected to a mandatory union subscription to the newspaper made even more unpalatable by the Daily Standard’s support for parliamentary Labor.

The Worker was founded during the establishment of the Brisbane labour press. First printed on 1 March 1890 and published until 1975, it had a circulation above 30,000 issues per week by 1914. As Brian Dalton notes, the long surviving Worker ‘was to become the premier labour journal of Australia’. Available by subscription as well as from selected newsagents, the one penny price of the sixteen page ‘attractively illustrated weekly’ was principally paid by semi-skilled and unskilled workers, although it did have appeal throughout the unions. Initially the official organ of the Australian Labor Federation (ALF) in Queensland, the Worker strongly affiliated with the moderate AWU from 1914 onwards (the Worker building was the centre of the AWU). Ever the loyal union supporter, the Worker took over the publishing of the 1912 Strike Bulletins after ‘the demand for the bulletins increased beyond the capacity of [its co-publisher] Patriot’s plant’. Because of its close alliance with the AWU, it remained interested in the political labour cause, defending the ALP’s platform on a number of occasions as well as being a key publisher of political

192 Evans, Loyalty and Disloyalty, 106, 145–146.
193 For detailed accounts of this event see Rawson, ‘Political Violence I’, 20–21; Evans, The Red Flag Riots, 144–145 and Loyalty and Disloyalty, 163. See also ‘Mob Rule in Brisbane’, Worker (27 March 1919), 14.
194 Censors’ notes, week ending 26 February 1919, QF3191.
196 Although the Worker claimed to be a journal – Pioneer Co-operative Labor Journal – it is termed a newspaper here for the purposes of this analysis.
197 Evans, ‘The Pen and the Sword’, 19. It should be noted that Gibbney indicates that the Worker ceased to be published a year earlier, in 1974 (Gibbney, Labor in Print, 470).
199 Worker (23 January 1919), 29.
201 Worker (15 April 1905), editorial.
202 Ownership of the Worker from 1914 (after its ALF association) was by a group of unions dominated by the AWU. Theodore was among those on the board of directors. A more detailed account of the Worker’s backers is given in Gibbney, Labor in Print, 470. See also Allan A. Morrison, ‘Militant Labour in Queensland 1912–1927’, Australian Historical Society: Journal and proceedings 38.5 (1952), 220.
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This alliance was strengthened as it habitually followed internal party developments and election campaigns. For instance, Ryan’s second election campaign in 1919 was thoroughly covered by the Worker, although to a lesser extent than by the Daily Standard.

The Worker published substantial amounts of criticism of the conservative reaction towards the Russian Revolution. The sentiments of the Worker on conservative press reportage are well expressed in the following caution to its readers:

The Capitalist Press is in possession of all the strategic points of publicity throughout the world. Don’t believe all it prints about Russia, whether as opinions or as ‘news’. Wait and see, a new star may be rising in the East, sinister in its significance for international capitalism. Judgement should not be pronounced until all the evidence is in. In the meantime, an open mind should be kept.

The strong editorial board of the Worker during the wartime period was headed by J.S. Hanlon (editor 1915–1936), Norman Freeburg (sub-editor), and adroit cartoonist James Thomas Case (c.1906–1921). As with The Daily Standard, Russian community members submitted letters to the Worker and the RWA’s own Knowledge and Unity referenced articles from the Worker. Additionally the RWA chose to publish an account of the 30 January 1919 military raid on its premises in the Worker. The newspaper also printed a striking defence of those prosecuted for the Red Flag events. Russian branches around Queensland appealed to the Worker to support their cause during 1919. Due to its left-wing perspective on radical politics, the Great War and conscription, the Worker’s pages were also monitored by the censors after 1919.

A thirst for knowledge on radical politics in Australia and Russia prompted the formation of the RWA publishing enterprise. On the one hand, the radical and acutely political tone of the editors aligned their work with the flourishing of radical papers around the world in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Radical papers were political propaganda aimed at disseminating a set of ideas into the wider public. They were often written with the explicit goal of changing society. On the other hand, the association’s Russian language papers were very clearly matched to needs of new immigrants in a foreign host society. Similar to ethnic newspapers in the United States, the RWA papers became a popular educator for their readers. Editions featured articles on current affairs as well as economic developments, political profiles and historical tracts. Along with

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206 Worker (17 October 1918), 10.
207 See Gibbney, Labor in Print, 470 for Knowledge and Unity staff.
208 ‘Our Liberty: Prussianism of federal authorities’, Worker (19 February 1919). See also intelligence report, week ending 19 February 1919, QF3156.
209 See for instance the Worker’s coverage of the speeches delivered by the defendant’s in court (10 April 1919).
210 Such as the Rockhampton’s group query ‘if it could be arranged for the Worker to print our messages in English’. Mick Voilenoff, PO Rockhampton to Industrial Council, PO Brisbane, 1 May 1919, QF3948.
211 Evans, Loyalty and Disloyalty, 106, 145–146.
212 This function has been examined by a range of authors. See, for instance, Rita Simon’s exploration of the educative function of the Russian and Soviet Jewish press In the Golden Land, 83–86.
grassroots journalists elsewhere, the RWA writers walked a precarious path, struggling to keep alive one newspaper after another. Wartime legislation compounded problems such as funding, subscriptions and effective distribution. The members who staffed ethnic and radical newspapers during this period were primarily educators, organisers and cultivators. They gave readers the chance to be active participants in local community events as well as the wider revolutionary movement that connected isolated groups of exiles. This was especially important if one was cutting cane or laying railway sleepers in north Queensland.

It can be taken for granted that the editors and journalists who staffed the newspapers during this period were either members of the intelligentsia or radical organisations and had experience in dealing with political and philosophical material. This was not always the case with their readers, who may not have developed literacy skills or familiarity with complex material. A repeated criticism of socialist papers in America was that they were above the heads of their readers. In 1922, with specific reference to the Russian paper *Novy Mir* (to which the RWA subscribed and translated articles for inclusion in its papers), sociologist Robert Park commented that ‘the paper was running at a deficit, but none of the editors were obliging enough to write so that they could be understood’. Indeed, considering the intellectual status of many editors, ‘the reporting in the newspapers [was] more likely to be distributive rather than feedback in orientation’.

As in the United States, early European language publications in Australia were German and later Italian newspapers, *Die deutsche Post für die australischen Kolonien oder The German Australian Post* (Adelaide 1847) and *Voce d’Italia—Voice from Italy* (Melbourne 1918) respectively. Foreign language newspapers in Australia were also published by the Chinese community, such as the Sydney based *The Chinese Australian Herald* (*Guangyi huabao*), launched on 1 September 1894, and the *Tung Wah Times* in 1898. The two centres for German language publications were Queensland and South Australia. These communities were hit with particular vengeance under the War Precautions Regulations when German clubs, associations and media were banned. These early papers, like their English language counterparts, debated social, ideological and philosophical

214 *Novy Mir* editorial greats include Russian intellectuals Nicholas Bukharin in 1916 and Leon Trotsky in early 1917. Its alliance with the burgeoning Communist Party gives it the place of being the first dedicated Bolshevik newspaper in the United States. *Novy Mir’s* reputation as being the voice of revolutionaries brought it into conflict with the state during World War I. In Australia, *Novy Mir* was prohibited from being circulated under the *War Precautions Act*. J.H. Starling, Acting Secretary, Prime Minister’s Department, Melbourne to Secretary, Postmaster-General’s Department, 24 May 1916, 1919/53, series A2, NAA.
216 Viswanath and Arora comment on this in ‘Ethnic Media in the United States’, 45.
218 For more on the *Tung Wah News* (from 1902 the *Tung Wah Times*) see John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007).
questions. Two of the first scholars to examine the Australian ethnic press, Miriam Gilson and Jerzy Zubrzycki, refer to these papers as the organs of free opinion.\(^{219}\)

The ethnic press can also act as a form of cultural transmission whereby the newspapers of the RWA, for instance, served the wider Russian community in a transparent way by assuming a distributive function for publicising events, local business calendars and so forth. For the censors, this information was a valuable source that allowed them thoroughly to map the Russian community and its ties to other groups. The press allows immigrants to maintain their cultural identity but also, as in the case of the RWA, to be informed of the ideological developments at home. The newspapers, or perhaps more accurately the newspaper office, had the ‘consequence of “reviving the ethnicity”, strengthening the ethnic identity of the community’.\(^{220}\) While Viswanath and Arora indicate that this consequence was often unintended in the papers they studied, it is likely that the RWA editors saw their publications as an explicit propaganda tool to strengthen the political identity of the Russians in Queensland. The prominent editors of the community – Artem, Zuzenko and Simonoff – were highly astute radicals with direct experience and participation in the political newspapers of their homeland. All three continued their publishing careers after they left the RWA.\(^{221}\) They were aware of the influence the press might have in isolated ethnic communities, particularly in the sense of strengthening the cause or purpose of a movement. Nor were they oblivious to the censorship process and how to push the boundaries of what would pass the censors’ gaze and what would be cut. The subjective reportage and propaganda work – the ceaseless agitation repeatedly called for by Civa Rosenberg when she was editor of *Knowledge and Unity* – could be seen as a key objective of the RWA’s publications.

An important factor to consider when examining specialist newspapers such as those published by the RWA is the role ethnicity plays in the identity of an immigrant in a new country. Ethnicity is not a constant or uniform social experience. Rather, it reveals itself in different forms with different levels of intensity. With the case of Russians in Brisbane, the identity associated with the Russians and the Russian association was an emerging phenomenon. Crucially, ‘ethnicity involves an individual’s choice to identify with a group and the reaction to that group by outsiders’.\(^{222}\) The press is a key site of public representation of social relations and power play where the construction of

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\(^{221}\) Of particular note, Zuzenko went on to take an active role in the radical press in Canada, the United States and Russia. For the most comprehensive exploration of his international journalistic career, see Kevin Windle, ‘A Journalist and Revolutionary on Three Continents: A.M. Zuzenko and his journalism 1916–24’, *Tynianovskii Sbornik*, 12 (2006); and ‘A Troika of Agitators’, 30–47.

identity is defined through an us-them dichotomy. In short, ‘its discourse is that of the new world and the old’.

Newspapers promoted strategies for fitting in to the host society. Russians in Queensland during this period were largely successful in establishing homes, securing jobs and mixing with the wider host society. However, the RWA as an organisation was not as successful in integrating itself into the wider domestic labour movement. The reasons for this are twofold. On the one hand, the parochial nature of the Queensland labour movement precluded the internationalism of the RWA from taking root. On the other hand, the RWA assessed the domestic labour program to be ideologically different to its aims, particularly so after the events of 1917. As society became increasingly pluralistic, so did the perceived threats felt by the host society. In World War I Queensland, the perceived threats were copiously acknowledged whilst the plurality was suppressed.

One function of a specialist media is to nurture the empowerment of the targeted minority group. This can be reinforced by newspaper content that embraces the differences between the minority group and their host society. On occasion, as with the RWA, this exploration of difference allowed radical Russians to define themselves in ideological opposition to the bourgeois labour movement and its parliamentary arm, the ALP. Yet, as sociologist Stephen Riggins questions, ‘can minority journalists—however militant—escape the influence of the majority culture in which they are immersed?’ The intellectual, economic and social lives of the minority group are inadvertently conditioned by the bounds of the host society. During World War I, the War Precautions Act empowered intelligence officers to scrutinise and analyse all foreign language communications. The War Precautions Regulations required censors to make specific comment on foreign residents and their activities. By the end of the war the scope had broadened to include British subjects of foreign descent. The war conditions facilitated the connection between ethnicity and subversion to an intensity that had not existed before. The existence of an ethnic press and associations which facilitated non-British culture were at the core of this connection. The impact of government legislation on foreign language papers is clear in Australia as well as the United States.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the story of the Russians in Brisbane by reconstructing the origins and development of the radical identity that made it an object of government interest. The Russians who arrived in Australia before World War I were part of an international diaspora who left their

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homeland to escape political and economic conditions. The story of the Queensland Russians is similar to that of Russian emigrants in other locations at that time – notably in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The individuals who set up the RWA in Brisbane were politically active and willing to fight for change. To a certain extent they found a sympathetic ally in the Australian socialist left, who were also active in local politics at that time. The leaders of the RWA were charismatic Russians, and many of them already had political experience in Russia with political groups and the media. Their stories are interesting in themselves, and this chapter has sought to provide some background personal information on the main characters.

A key way the RWA leadership was able to garner support from the wider Russian community was through its newspapers. These publications brought news from Russia to the Russian community, but also raised the profile of the group within the wider labour movement. More importantly for this story, however, the newspapers alerted state and federal agencies to the RWA's seditious activities. With the outbreak of World War I and the introduction of mass postal and cable censorship, the threat posed by the Russian group was taken seriously by authorities. A large part of the government’s response was to use censorship to monitor the group.
CHAPTER 2

WARTIME LEGISLATION AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

Introduction
As Australia prepared to rise to the challenge of fighting for king and country overseas, tensions surrounded the identification and subjugation of the enemy within. This chapter contextualises the censorship and surveillance of the Russian Workers Association as part of a wider suppression of disloyalty on the home front. First, it covers the well-established history of social and political upheaval associated with the preparations for war and the maintenance of the home front. Right-wing ideas of conspiracies and nationalism persuaded many influential community figures and government members that a key threat to the home front was disloyalty. This assessment influenced the development of legislation, and the defence of the home front was increasingly based on vigilance. The second part of the chapter explores three pieces of federal legislation that gave rise to the suppression of subversive groups like the RWA through the censorship and surveillance of their members. Key sections from the War Precautions Act, Unlawful Associations Act and the later Aliens Restrictions Act are analysed. Last, the chapter charts the relationships between agencies responsible for implementing these Acts before detailing the machinery of Australian wartime censorship and its products.

War mobilisation and the home front
Examining the intelligence agencies in Australia during the war reveals two key things relevant to the Russian community in the history of the home front. First, it allows us to chart the development of a domestic intelligence and security force separate from Britain but still directed by imperial concerns. This enduring British influence affected Australia’s treatment of the Russians, but it is likely that the suppression of non-British elements in Australia was more a reflection of wider social and governmental pressures than a concerted effort to locate Australia firmly in the shadow of Britain. Second, it helps to build insight into the way in which groups were subjected to the social values of the time through the responses of the intelligence agencies. The federal government, swayed by right-wing ideas of conspiracies and nationalism, ‘capitulated to the fear...
Chapter 2: Wartime legislation and federal agencies

that Australia was endangered by disloyal people. This notion underpinned the development of much of the wartime legislation and drove its implementation throughout the nation.

Brisbane society was deeply affected by the war. A sizeable proportion of its men were being sent to support the imperial cause in Europe and a serious battle was being conducted on the home front against disloyalty and sedition. The fear of sedition was a long established concern for the English motherland and this concern filtered through to its dominions. As Michele Langfield observes ‘the war reinforced the concern over the future of the empire’. It was a struggle to suppress those within who challenged the mainstream vision of Australian society and its place within the British Empire. The Russians in Australia were perceived as a serious threat because many of them had experience in their homeland of supporting groups opposed to the State and ideas that challenged mainstream opinion. Indeed, it was the rabid persecution of political groups in Russia that prompted many to come to Australia as political exiles. In response, as David Dutton suggests, ‘the Commonwealth cultivated nationalist hatred and a jingoistic fervor became the dominant policy impulse’ during this period. One of the war’s key ‘legacies was an imputed connection between nationality and allegiance from which it was assumed that nationality determined political behaviour.

Eric Richards argues that ‘one of the ways that Australia girded itself for the conflict [of World War I] was to stir up xenophobia’. Adventurer and politician John Strachan published a book at the beginning of the war titled An Unheeded Warning: A danger foretold which has now come but is not yet passed. The Japanese, the Chinese, the Germans, and the Empty North. The cryptic wording of the title was alarmist in nature and, for loyalist Australians striving to survive as British subjects in a farflung colony, Strachan’s work advocated vigilance on the danger within: foreigners. Gerhard Fischer observes that Strachan’s book ‘neatly encapsulated the extended racist vision of many Australians after August 1914’. The book sets the tone for examination of the defence of the Commonwealth during the Great War, when the racist exclusions of Federation were extended, further closing the circle around what the state saw as a subversive underclass. David Walker discusses this debate which was fuelled by empty north propagandists such as Strachan. This literature periodically

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1 Glenn Nicholls, *Deported: A history of forced departures from Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 41.
2 Michele Langfield, ‘Recruiting Immigrants: The First World War and Australian immigration’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 60 (1999), 64.
4 Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 67.
5 John Strachan, *An Unheeded Warning: A danger foretold which has now come but is not yet passed. The Japanese, the Chinese, the Germans, and the Empty North* (Sydney: D.S. Ford, 1914).
6 Strachan’s book, published on the cusp of World War I, focuses on 3 groups of aliens that threaten the Commonwealth including the new threat from Germans. His title also touches on the idea that Australia’s sparse population places it at risk: if the Commonwealth does not utilise the continent, others will.
rediscovered for the Australian public the geo-political threat the Commonwealth faced due to its proximity to Asia. It also warned of the danger of unchecked immigration and the problem of non-British residents. Walker observes that ‘at this time it seemed possible that Australia’s survival as a nation might be at stake’.

The links between imperialism and the Right were consolidated by social expectations of patriotic duty and loyalty to the war effort. Andrew Moore indicates that ‘imperial patriotism led directly to racism and conspiracy theory’. During the war loyalty ‘came to relate specifically to imperial patriotism, and became a device for excluding Irish [for instance] from participation in the “Australian way of life”’. At the same time racism was underpinned by a dogged belief in the superiority of the British Empire. Radical trade unionists and conservative Anglophiles alike supported the notion that Australia should stay British. This equated to the suppression of foreign elements on the home front.

Community groups that supported these ideals had been transplanted from their British roots to colonial Australia, such as the Legion of Frontiersmen. The group appeared in Australia in 1906 and was an offshoot of the British group established by adventurer Roger Pocock in 1904. Its members dressed in uniforms similar to Canadian Mounties and organised themselves as squads of voluntary guides ‘ready to assist the authorities to maintain law and order at times of crisis’. A noteworthy example of the Legion’s assistance to authorities was during the 1912 General Strike in Brisbane when the group contributed members to be special constables to control striking workers. Other community groups that shared similar values and sentiments to the Legion of Frontiersmen were established after the war to help authorities suppress disloyalty. One of these post-war groups was the Returned Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA), the forerunner to the RSL.

The success of the home front battle against the enemy (or potential enemy) was seen as a marker of national strength and resilience; part of the making of a society that was for the first time since Federation, rallying round the flag as a united Commonwealth. In reality, the threat posed by the enemy on the Australian home front during the Great War was slim. The number of German forces in Australia’s Pacific neighbourhood was only small. Germany only maintained a military presence in its Pacific colonies in New Guinea and Nauru and these forces were easily overpowered by the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force. This small Expeditionary Force was

11 For more on the involvement of the Legion of Frontiersmen see Christopher Coulthard-Clark, ‘The Legion of Frontiersmen in Australia’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 75.2 (October 1989), 132–141.
raised separately to the Australian Imperial Force in response to a British request in August 1914. This force seized and destroyed German wireless stations and neutralised German activity in the Pacific in a matter of days in September 1914. The battles in Europe were literally a world away and quite foreign to the everyday lives of Australians at home.

A more tangible threat was the one posed by enemy aliens on the home front. Although numerically small, several groups of (now) enemy aliens were economically and culturally significant enough to attract attention outside of bureaucratic circles. As Fischer observes, the attitude of concerned patriots was ‘characterised by groundless fear and exaggerated readiness for war, by a longing almost for involvement and battle’. Those of German (and Austrian) origin were clearly a target for home front vigilance. German communities, culture, language and businesses on the Australian home front were seen as an affront to the Allied war effort. Of the approximately 7,000 men and women who were interned in camps during the war in all six Australian states, around 4,500 of them were of German origin. Most were interned for the duration of the war and many were deported at its end.

A whole range of people in Australia were cast as being a potential threat and were subjected to draconian wartime legislation. As Glenn Nicholls explains, ‘the Commonwealth government capitulated to the fear that Australia was endangered by disloyal people’ and turned ‘to zealous action against those who were allegedly disloyal, ultimately deporting them’. Fischer discusses how the government used the provisions of the War Precautions Regulations to investigate and prosecute those who spoke out against its war commitment, including Irish nationalists. Irish nationalists were under suspicion after the 1916 Dublin Uprising. It did not help that Irish Catholics voted against both the government’s conscription referenda in 1916 and 1917 and, as Jeff Kildea observes, ‘in 1917 the Catholic bishops and the Catholic Federation played a leading role in mobilising Catholic opposition’. Intercepted correspondence reveals that many Irish in Australia


13 For a more comprehensive breakdown of internee statistics see Fischer, Enemy Aliens, 77–78.

14 At the conclusion of World War I Australia deported thousands of aliens on political grounds regardless of whether they were naturalised Sections 3 to 6 of the Unlawful Associations Act empowered the Commonwealth to deport members of illegal organisations and those found guilty of conduct hindering the war effort. Dutton, One of Us, 118; and Frank Cain, The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia (London: Angus and Robertson, 1983), 19–21. For discussion of the internment and deportation of enemy aliens see Fischer, Enemy Aliens; and Nicholls, Deported. Kay Saunders and Helen Taylor cover this topic in World War II in ‘The Enemy Within? The internment of enemy aliens in Queensland 1939–45’, Australian Journal of Politics and History 34.1 (1988), 16–27.

15 Nicholls, Deported, 41.

16 Fischer, Enemy Aliens, 75.

saw the possibility of Irish independence from England in a positive light. While it is the case that some Irish openly supported Sinn Fein during this period, it seems unlikely that large numbers of Irish residents in Australia were looking to replicate the events taking place in their homeland. Nevertheless, censors’ notes on their correspondence clearly show that Australian officers did not distinguish between events involving England taking place on the other side of the world and the mostly benign interest in Irish independence expressed by Irish resident in Australia.

In addition to enemy aliens and Irish nationalists, radical left-wing supporters contributed to lively, well-attended Domain debates and to scathing newspaper reportage that criticised the government of the day. Of particular concern to the government were the perspectives put forward by conscientious objectors as well as radical groups that showed how capitalists and imperialists were using working Australians as cannon fodder for the modern military, industrial machine. This opposition to the war challenged the political and economic identity as well as the morality of the war effort promoted by the federal government. It should also be noted that the alternative understandings offered by labour personalities were viewed with antagonism both before and during the war. However, the war provided the climate in which such understandings were observed exclusively in terms of their opposition to the mainstream view. In this climate, home front cohesiveness necessitated internment, censorship and surveillance of enemies as a war precaution. As Dutton observes, ‘the retention of signs of foreign nationality meant the retention of political loyalty to another state’, and by implication disloyalty to Australia.18

Foreigners were required to assimilate and demonstrate their allegiance to Australia by leaving behind all traces of their former nationality. Having a German heritage, talk of Irish independence, or subscription to radical journals was no longer an element of individual personhood; it was an explicit expression of group sedition, and a challenge to the home front. Australia’s British identity was reinforced by those in society who deemed those of foreign origin, regardless of their convictions or immigration status, to be disloyal and dangerous. In Ernest Scott’s official history of the war, he observes that ‘all Germans and persons of German origin were looked upon with suspicion. Often there was a touch of hysteria, more often of malice’.19 What changed as a result of war conditions was the mindset that the mere physical presence of aliens was threatening to the Australian way of life. Alien communities with clubs that provided political and social links, such as the RWA, were perceived as a significant threat to society since they maintained foreign links. Where only recently Russians had integrated well into the labour force and local communities, their opposition to the war and interest in political developments in their homeland was seen as evidence of their continued allegiance to Soviet Russia. Mirroring developments in Europe and the United States, debate and political activism were now fast becoming socially and legally intolerable.

18 Dutton, One of Us, 93, 148–149.
19 Ernest Scott, Australia During the War (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1939), 106.
Chapter 2: Wartime legislation and federal agencies

Tied into concerns about non-British migrants was the risk that enemy aliens of European appearance could virtually melt into the host population. The introduction of the War Precautions Regulations in 1914 and later the *Aliens Restriction Act* in 1920 went some way to addressing this problem by requiring aliens to register and notify police districts of their movements. However, there was continued official concern that some aliens were not complying with these regulations. Uncertainty existed for the authorities and for the population more generally over who was considered to be an enemy alien. Those of enemy birth who were not naturalised were automatically dragged into the net, with British subjects of enemy ancestry, including those who came to Australia as small children and the children of naturalised parents. Increasingly, authorities tended to suspect there were non-complying aliens and some censors were particularly concerned that certain aliens were changing their names to avoid detection. Another concern during the early months of the war was information received via the military authorities from the Russian Consul-General in Melbourne that ‘certain certificates of Russian nationality … have been sold to Germans’.20

The jingoism of the wider British imperial war machine was easily transferred to isolated British subjects living on the colonial frontier in Queensland. For them, the Allied war aims sought to defend righteousness, justice, freedom, mercy and truth21 and they were eager to participate. Participation on the home front brought them closer to the war itself. Home front scrutiny can be seen as a government mechanism to facilitate and extend public support (or recognition of the necessity) for continuing war expenditure in a conflict on the other side of the world. As Fischer indicates, the Australian government firmly slotted domestic safety into the wider security context of the British Empire, which was now itself under threat. Yet the act of helping out the mother country presented Australia with a unique opportunity: ‘a chance to overcome an ingrained feeling of inadequacy born out of a mentality of dependence and inferiority’.22 Participation in the war was seen as the key not only to negotiate more equal ties between England and Australia, but also to the historical debut of Australia on the European arena which had so far overlooked the outpost colony. As Fischer argues, ‘the Australians who organised the war effort at home also needed to feel they were participating in this event that was imbued with grandeur and fraught with danger; they, too, needed their own challenge to test their determination to fight for victory and glory’.23

The federal government faced several challenges to Australia’s participation in the war from opposition groups, including the anti-conscription campaigns and strike action by the union movement. The Russians in Brisbane, through their newspapers and lectures, publicised the view

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20 Circular Memorandum 913, Office of Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 10 September 1915, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
that World War I was an unjust war that exploited workers. It was the acute public outcry against, and official response to, these alternative interpretations that are most indicative of the fear of the enemy at home that pervaded home front trenches. The discriminatory treatment of enemy aliens during World War I was intensified as a result of government policy driven by public opinion. Factors behind political decisions made on the treatment of enemy aliens and anti-war subversives included public pressure from powerful lobbies such as the labour movement as well as security advice from Australian and British agencies. On the one hand, the promotion of the war as just and important to Australia’s future peace was a necessity to support recruitment, changing workplace conditions and the new infringements on civil liberties under the War Precautions Regulations. On the other hand, the implementation of these regulations through censorship and surveillance increased widespread mistrust of enemy aliens. Enemy aliens, at first Germans, were demonised in the press and persons of German birth and ancestry found themselves the targets of personal attacks.

The threat of disloyalty and sedition initially honed on the Germans was soon transferred to other groups such as the Russians. These trends can be seen in the popular press of the war era, in conservative papers like the Daily Mail and the left-wing Worker. Political cartoons, letters to the editor and even some editorials depicted ridiculous stereotypes of the boorish Hun or whiny German, the bear-like uneducated Russian or the dagger-wielding Russian straight from the steppe, the drunk and fickle Irishman, and, increasingly, the troublesome, seditious unionist. Newspapers and official documents pointed to the vilification of opinions that varied from the status quo. As a result of the want for an acute British identity for the newly federated Commonwealth, ‘the existing, dynamic and successful multi-racial society in the northern towns – home and haunt to alien elements – was to be legislatively choked to death’.24

It was during this time that the Russian community began to put down roots (however impermanent its members felt their stay in Australia to be) and form an Association in Brisbane in the early 1910s. The Russians, like their other European counterparts, were tricky applicants in terms of the immigration process pursued by Australia prior to the Great War. White in skin colour, they were exempt from the extraordinary Dictation Test applied to non-European immigrants, and were thus eligible to enter Australia. Nevertheless, Russian immigrants were clearly not British and so were often viewed along similar lines to the foreigners Australia sought to exclude. As discussed in chapter 1, Russians, as questionable immigrants, were subject to a flurry of official investigations over the years to ensure that they were acceptable.

The spirited debate the RWA conducted through its meetings and newspapers did not go unnoticed by the police and military authorities who were employed to enforce the War Precautions Act and Unlawful Associations Act of the mid 1910s and early 1920s. In this environment, Queensland was

24 Henry Reynolds, North of Capricorn (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003), xi.
considered to be at risk of disloyalty on two levels. First, it had a Labor government whose policies did not always reflect the war interests or big business. Second, disloyal sections of the general population were seen to exercise far too much influence, as demonstrated in the notorious egg-throwing incident when Prime Minister Hughes visited Warwick. Of greater concern was the supposed inability of the Queensland Police (with its high proportion of Irish Catholic officers\(^\text{25}\)) to function as the federal government wanted it to.

These factors supported the argument for the establishment of the Commonwealth Police in 1917 to enforce Commonwealth laws independently of State police.\(^\text{26}\) Despite the powers of the Commonwealth Police to act in State jurisdictions, tensions between the federal and Queensland state governments flared up at various times during the war. One division in policy between the federal and State governments concerned the issue and enforcement of deportation orders against naturalised aliens who were called to serve in the armies of their birth countries. Despite the defeat of conscription in Australia, Italian Australians for example were still vulnerable to be conscripted into the Italian army. Queensland Premier Ryan – a passionate anti-conscriptionist – refused to let his State’s officials conscript on behalf of another government.

Ryan was the only State premier actively to support the anti-conscription campaign and openly to challenge Hughes’ wartime support. Hughes was ‘staunchly in favour of conscription’ and he endorsed ‘an emotional campaign directed against Irish elements in Australian society whom he denounced as subversive and disloyal to the Empire’.\(^\text{27}\) In Queensland, which returned no majorities in the referenda of October 1916 and December 1917, the unity within the wider labour movement was decisive. Unlike other States, the unions and wider movement rallied behind the State Labor government. Ross Fitzgerald attributes a large part of this solidarity to rural factors, namely that small farmers supported Ryan because conscription would take away the labour supply that they desperately needed during the depressed wartime economy.\(^\text{28}\) Another key factor in the success of the no campaign in Queensland was the presence of a sizeable Irish Catholic community in the State. The Irish and Roman Catholic groups had supported the labour movement and were prominent in the public service and State enterprises.\(^\text{29}\) Additionally the rural communities of

\(^{25}\) Ross Fitzgerald observes that ‘Sectarianism continued to flare periodically under Labor rule as Catholics exercised disproportionate political influence through the State bureaucracy, legal bodies and the police force’ (\textit{A History of Queensland from 1915 to the 1980s} (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), 13). High profile officers in the Queensland Police Force were of Irish descent and had served in the Royal Irish Constabulary, such as William Cahill who had been the police commissioner during this era (see Paul D. Wilson, ‘Cahill, William Geofffrey (1854–1931)’, \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography}, Vol 7, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1979), 522–523). For more information on the immigration of members of Royal Irish Constabulary to the dominions see Kent Fedorowich, ‘The Problems of Disbandment: The Royal Irish Constabulary and Imperial Migration, 1919–29’, \textit{Irish Historical Studies}, 30.117 (May 1996): 88–110.

\(^{26}\) \textit{Commonwealth Gazette}, No 215, 12 December 1917, 3341–3342.

\(^{27}\) Fitzgerald, \textit{A History of Queensland from 1915 to the 1980s}, 8.

\(^{28}\) Fitzgerald, \textit{A History of Queensland from 1915 to the 1980s}, 8.

\(^{29}\) Many Irish Catholics chose the option of the public service with its relatively low entrance requirements, secure employment and opportunities for promotion. By the time of the wartime Labor governments many positions with the Queensland public service were filled by Irish Catholics. For a broader analysis of the link
German ancestry who farmed around Bundaberg and in the south-east corner of the State were seen as contributing factors to the success of the no vote. As Fischer observes, the defeat of conscription confirmed for politicians such as Prime Minister Hughes that ‘radical pacifists, left-wing unionists, the Wobblies, [and] the Irish, [were] all working in a concerted effort with German agents to subvert Australians against the Empire’.30 Moore also supports this view that right-wing leaders promoted ideas ‘which insisted that there were sinister interconnections between the empire’s various enemies’.31

As Raymond Evans suggests, social and ideological conflicts in Queensland were more intense than those in the southern States, particularly ‘as the Federal government attempted to spread a slur of disloyalty across the entire State.’32 The slur was propagated by censors who documented the ‘many extraordinary occurrences in Queensland’, casting the State as a ‘stricken community in the north’, an endpoint for pilgrims to ‘raise the flag of rebellion’.33 Under these conditions the Labor State was a ‘congenial atmosphere’ for the genesis of propaganda.34 Captain Reginald Hayes, on behalf of the Deputy Chief Censor, visited the North and reported that ‘these extremists are emboldened by the fact that they realise and boast that they are immune from punishment as far as the State Government of Queensland is concerned’.35 Not only were authorities concerned about the spread of IWW activity across the State, they were also concerned about its recruitment, in particular travelling IWW members who would drop into communities, invigorate the workers and then move on. ‘It was in Queensland that the IWW continued longest to function’36 and correspondence sympathetic to the IWW and the OBUPL was intercepted by the First Military District Censor’s Office up until the end of censorship in late 1919. In these unsettled times it was all the censors could do to track tentacles of Bolshevism pulsing out from ‘dangerous nuclei’ such as the RWA.37

The attitude that disloyalty in Queensland was endemic and linked to the political regime was frequently expressed in the censors’ notes. The censors monitored events and discussed incidents that demonstrated the presumed disloyalty of the Labor cabinet. In July 1919, when Russians were


30 Fischer, Enemy Aliens, 57.

31 Moore, The Right Road, 24.


33 Censors’ notes, week ending 6 November 1918, QF2294; week ending 12 September 1918, MF1741; and week ending 7 January 1919, MF2454.

34 Censor’s notes, week ending 11 February 1919, MF2568.

35 Memorandum, Captain Reginald Hayes for Deputy Chief Censor, Melbourne to Chief of the General Staff, Department of Defence, 27 September 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.


37 See censors’ notes, week ending 16 August 1918, MF1546; week ending 14 January 1919, MF2492 and MF2493; week ending 11 February 1919, MF2568, series BP4/2; and week ending 2 September 1918, RE1238.
again beginning to secure employment after the social isolation they experienced in the wake of the Red Flag events, a censor noted that: ‘railway works in Queensland are a safe refuge for the Russians, they appear to be always sure of employment there’.\(^{38}\) Additionally, news that Russians from the southern States and Brisbane were flocking to north Queensland – like the Wobblies in previous years – for the cane cutting season in 1919 led one censor to claim that ‘the presence of roving bands of discontented, and perhaps desperate, aliens, owning no law but their own desires, must be a source of danger’.\(^{39}\) The underlying premise of this analysis was that the official policies of the Queensland railways were seen to be politically slanted to the Left with employment practices favouring left-wing supporters, including aliens, over other members of the Australian community such as returned soldiers.

Conservatives insinuated that the perceived influx of IWW sympathisers and other radicals to Queensland was due to the protection disloyalists received under the auspices of the left-leaning Ryan Labor government. As Verity Burgmann observes in her study of the policing of the IWW, ‘distrust of the Ryan government ran deep amongst the Commonwealth intelligence services’.\(^{40}\) First Military District staff complained that it was not possible to depend on Queensland police for assistance in prosecuting offenders.\(^{41}\) Matters were not helped when Ryan opposed the establishment of the Commonwealth Police and its jurisdiction within Queensland. It was partly due to the perceived inaction of the Ryan government that the Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) devoted additional attention to Queensland from 1918. However, as was supported by the findings of post-war inquiries, IWW crimes ‘were the products of a fevered official imagination that sought to convince itself and the public of the need for suppression’.\(^{42}\) This conclusion can be extended to the treatment of other radical groups such as the RWA. In Queensland, it was not the case that the Ryan government did not effectively deal with radicals, but rather ‘that the Ryan government chose not to incarcerate Wobblies merely for publicising their ideas’ and it was this policy that separated the Ryan government from its Labor counterparts elsewhere in the Commonwealth.\(^{43}\)

Amid the international upheaval of the war, and spurred on by the rising tide of radical groups like the Bolsheviks in Russia and the IWW in the United States and Australia, the Commonwealth

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\(^{38}\) Censors’ notes, week ending 14 July 1919, QF4555 and QF4578.

\(^{39}\) Censor’s notes, week ending 13 August 1919, QF4753. Correspondence from Russians in north Queensland (such as L. Kokayeff, South Johnstone to W. Smolenoff, PO South Brisbane, 11 July 1919, QF4712), describe a tense industrial environment where strikes were called at little notice and were able to close down the sugar industry due to the lack of alternative labour.

\(^{40}\) Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, 224. See Department of Defence report Summary of Ryan’s Disloyal Associations in Attempt to obtain Queensland Defence plans to send to Russia, 2021/1/495, B197, NAA.

\(^{41}\) Although mass arrests of Wobblies by Queensland police did not start until 1918, as Evans points out, ‘local police had circumscribed the IWW’s public meetings in several centres’ by 1917. See *Loyalty and Disloyalty*, 136.

\(^{42}\) Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, 226. The Labor government of Premier John Storey in New South Wales charged the Ewing Inquiry to report on the imprisonment of the IWW Twelve. Justice Norman Ewing’s finding in 1920 was that the sentences passed on the IWW Twelve were excessive.

\(^{43}\) Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Union*, 223.
government stepped up the internment of ‘overseas-born communists whom it perceived to be dangerously disloyal’.44 Revolution and talk of radical structural changes to society were triggers for social anxiety for British loyalists. Considering the early enthusiasm of the fledgling Commonwealth for the Great War in Europe ‘it was little wonder that Russian Revolutionaries who sought to reform Allied war aims met not only disagreement in Australia, but also blank incomprehension’.45 The perceived threat of associations like the RWA was less connected to the activism of the group itself, and more to the construction of a paranoid home front. General suspicions of the Russians because they were foreigners were given increased buoyancy when many Russians in Australia were desirous of returning to their homeland now that the political environment was free after the revolutions in 1917. While under normal circumstances most jingoistic British in Australia would have been more than happy for members of supposedly subversive, foreign communities to leave of their own accord, war conditions changed this attitude.

The catalyst for an official change of attitude was the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk that ended hostilities between Soviet Russia and the Germans in March 1918.46 While in simple terms the departure of the Russian steamroller from the united front against Prussian aggression after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk marked the new democratic Russian state as a traitor, the situation was complex. Russia’s departure from the war was less important than the motivations behind the Treaty itself. All major powers were aware of the declining economic and political prestige of the Tsarist bear. The failures of the Russian army on the eastern front were common knowledge. Their strength was seen to lie in the dispensable millions of people not technological advances or tactical know-how.

While the events of the February Revolution – more a breaking through of liberal democratic politics than a violent mass bloodletting – were hailed as the entrance of Russia to the modern world, the radical politics of Lenin and the Bolsheviks gave cause for concern to the international community. The era of the Great Soviet Socialist Revolution had the potential not just to disrupt the war but the wider economic organisation of trade and the international political order. In conjunction with the main war effort directed at Germany, a separate attack was launched against the rising Red tide in the north. Great Britain and the United States led the development of an elaborate set of intrusive measures against the fledging republic. These ranged from the military action that reduced the Soviet Union to the size of medieval Muscovy through to preventing the return of political exiles to Russia. Under the influence of the United Kingdom, Australia viewed the persistent and vocal efforts of its Russian residents as a direct subversion of the interventionist war in which its troops were now involved.

44 Nicholls, Deported, 41.
46 Soviet Russia sealed its peace negotiations with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. For an overview of Russia’s withdrawal and the lead up to the Allied Intervention, see George F. Kennan’s work Soviet-American Relations, 1917–20, 3 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956–).
Russia was now perhaps considered even more suspect than the enemy countries because it had changed sides. Australian authorities and the loyalist press had a limited understanding of the complex conditions that led to Russia’s signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. For some on the Left and those who were in opposition to the war (such as conscientious objectors), the Russian example was a positive one and censored correspondence reveals that the Russians in Australia were lauded for their supposed insider knowledge of the happenings in Europe. The Russians were, for the first part of the war, in a peculiar position. They were simultaneously aliens in a consolidating British home front and citizens of an allied power. Whatever limited security this mismatch provided the Russians in Australia at the beginning of the war was swept away as community attitudes shifted with the news of Russia’s betrayal. For those supporting Britain’s war effort, Russians represented the betrayal of the Allied cause. The fact that Russians in Australia were now prepared to desert their host country in its time of war was contemptible. Those of foreign extraction living in a British community ‘might have been expected to have imbibed some British principles—one of which is that it is contemptible for a dog to bite the hand that feeds it’. The reports in the conservative press and even newspapers sympathetic to Labor added to the confusion and the overall image of Russia was one of jumbled events and leaders who led the people astray. No loyalist could believe the reports coming out of Russia and they certainly could not trust the Russians in Australia.

**Wartime legislation**

For the first time in its short history, the national parliament had the opportunity to prepare the new Commonwealth for participation, under its own flag, in a major war. While contributions were made by Australia to the Boer War, this was the first time that the heartland of Britain was threatened rather than a colonial outpost. At the outbreak of World War I Australia saw its place ‘to be a stalwart son of mother Britain’. This burden became policy in the three key pieces of wartime legislation that set up the parameters for the experiences of Russian activists, and indeed any individual or group who challenged the loyalty of the home front. The *War Precautions Act 1914*, *Unlawful Associations Act 1916* and the later *Aliens Registration Act 1920* were highly significant in empowering the web of federal agencies that monitored and controlled opposition.

The new legislation changed the official treatment of foreigners – potential British enemies – in Australia. As Dutton explains, ‘the most important method by which the Commonwealth drew distinctions between citizens and strangers … was the deployment of criteria derived from race,

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47 Conscientious objectors or Pacificists were treated differently in Britain by the authorities. Recognition of nuances between political, religious and philosophical perspectives is absent in the majority of official Australian documents surveyed. The Australian government labelled opposition with the same brush: disloyal and disaffected.

48 Censor’s notes, week ending 6 November 1918, QF2254.

nationality and ethnicity’. Whereas previously Australia might have been seen as a country where it was possible for foreigners (preferably white, healthy and able to work) to be assimilated into society, during the war period, non-nationalised Russians, like other foreign residents, ‘were prohibited from employment on government works’. Alien residents were subject to an intense, coordinated exercise in surveillance. Through this legislation Anglo-Celtic Australia defined itself defensively against the plurality of communities which existed inside a British Australian home front.

The wartime Acts also served to extend the scope of the domestic intelligence network, separate from imperial forces in London, although with the ongoing goal of supporting the dominant, loyalist identity of colonial Australia within the British Empire. The Governor-General – whose assent was required for the passing of laws and amendment of regulations – remained the official conduit between British and Australian on matters of national security. For example, the establishment of an Australian counter espionage bureau – to be known as the Special Intelligence Bureau – was instigated through British contact through the Governor-General. Additionally, Australian government agencies closely worked with their British counterparts. David Day notes that Australian Customs officers had been collecting in formation on German merchant ships for British naval intelligence as early as September 1914, prior to Australia’s War Precautions Act.

Australian laws and regulations at this time closely reflected similar legislation in the UK and, to a lesser extent, the United States. In Britain, the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) was passed in during the first weeks of the war on 8 August 1914 and, as Christopher Andrew observes, ‘gave the government powers close to martial law’. An expanded, consolidated version was passed a few months later on 27 November outlining a wider range of wartime options. Later the Aliens Restriction Act further defined the treatment of alien residents and was amended in 1919 to extend emergency powers into peacetime, including special provisions for aliens. Although a late entrant into the war, the United States also passed legislation to better control its home front and population. The Espionage Act 1917 was in response to the wartime conditions and aimed to prevent support reaching enemies of the United States, while the Immigration Act 1917 prohibited undesirables from entering the country. In May 1918, the Sedition Act (essentially a set of amendments to the Espionage Act) extended the wartime provisions to cover a wide range of inclusions, notably making disloyalty and resistance to the government punishable offences.

50 Dutton, One of Us, 2.
54 The Immigration Act 1917 defined the Asiatic Barred Zone. People from countries within the zone were automatically excluded from entering the United States.
Chapter 2: Wartime legislation and federal agencies

The wartime legislation passed in Australia was instrumental in establishing and maintaining the boundaries placed on foreign nationals and dissenters in Australia during the war. While it is clear that foreign nationals and political dissenters generally had quite different goals, the wartime legislation allowed authorities to group them together into a multi-faceted opposition that required rigorous vigilance. This greatly empowered Australian authorities, and enabled them to more easily define disloyalists – under the overarching goal of controlling the home front for the duration of the war.

**War Precautions Act**

On 29 October 1914, the Australian parliament passed the *War Precautions Act* to enable ‘regulations for securing the public safety and the defence of the Commonwealth’.\(^{55}\) Read with the *Defence Act 1903*, the *War Precautions Act* ‘increased the ambit of Commonwealth powers in wartime, allowing the government to seize property, apply censorship and political surveillance, control movement, manpower and labour’.\(^{56}\) Importantly the Act gave the government considerable power to mobilise the country for total war and to make laws to support this effort in a way that departed from previous legislative practice. Under section 10 of the Act the Commonwealth could revoke, alter or add to the legislation. These amendments, alterations and orders under the Act were issued in Regulations. Changes to Regulations only required the Governor-General to sign off on documents outlining amendments or alterations submitted by the relevant Minister. In the words of the Australian Law Reform Commission, the Act ‘gave the Governor-General the authority to make regulations designed to suppress discussion of war aims, alliances, and conscription policy and practice’.\(^{57}\) As Jane Doulman and David Lee point out ‘this meant that parliament did not have to pass a law … parliament lost much of its control over the legislative process’.\(^{58}\) Moore attributes this dilution of liberal democratic freedoms to right-wing political leaders who believed that ‘they were locked in a ferocious battle with an internal enemy’. These leaders attempted to ‘create an authoritarian government armed with sufficient powers to thwart the “Powers of Darkness”’.\(^{59}\) The rapidity with which Regulations were issued and amended under the Hughes government was caricatured in the press at the time and the Act virtually became a ‘legislative sausage machine’.\(^{60}\) It was via this system that the federal government installed a new Commonwealth controlled passport system, for instance, without opposition.

The War Precautions Regulations comprehensively targeted the movements and communications of aliens from the declaration of war in 1914 to well past the cessation of hostilities. The

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\(^{58}\) Doulman and Lee, *Every Assistance and Protection*, 52.


\(^{60}\) Doulman and Lee discuss the popular representation of the Act was a ‘legislative sausage machine’ that churned out changes to Regulations in *Every Assistance and Protection*, 59–60.
requirement for enemy aliens to register and report changes of address foreshadowed ‘stricter controls on European immigration to Australia’ implemented in the post war period.\footnote{Langfield, ‘Recruiting Immigrants’, 61. See also Langfield, ‘White Aliens: The control of European immigration to Australia 1920–30’, \textit{Journal of Intercultural Studies}, 12.2 (1991), 1–13.} The registration and monitoring of aliens even extended to certain naturalised British subjects of alien origin in section 5(f) of the Act. This order called for the appointment of officers to carry out the new duties associated with the management of aliens upon Commonwealth shores. Local State police became responsible for the registration, investigation and monitoring of aliens. Persons of foreign dissent were required to fill out forms with personal particulars at their nearest police station and it was ‘up to the local police officers to decree any restrictions they may have thought fit’\footnote{Fischer, \textit{Enemy Aliens}, 74.} The most common order was a provisional order requiring the person to notify change of address. Police interviewed neighbours and referees to establish whether the alien was of good character and regularly reported on aliens registered in their districts to military intelligence. Military intelligence fed this information to censors who created watch lists of suspects whose correspondence was intercepted. Later the Special Intelligence Bureau and Commonwealth Police were included in this intelligence collection and sharing network.

The Regulations also countered domestic opposition to the war by suppressing ‘the spread of reports likely to cause disaffection or alarm’. Under section 5(j) of the Act, power was conferred on police and military intelligence officers ‘to arrest, detention, search of premises and persons, inspecting impounding or retention of books documents and papers, and otherwise’.\footnote{War Precautions, No 10 of 1914, \textit{Commonwealth Acts}, Vol XIII, 14.} Information gathered from police reports and mail interception informed decisions about which premises should be inspected and when the inspection should be carried out. Police officers passed impounded documents to military intelligence in Brisbane and translations of foreign language texts were provided by the Censor’s Office.\footnote{Some foreign language texts were never translated by federal or State government departments. In Queensland the wartime inquest file on the suicide of Russian worker James Shluff includes several untranslated letters in Russian. The file summary indicates that although it was concluded to be a clear case of suicide, Shluff’s motivation was unknown. The police were unable to find a translator for the letters. See Inquest file, 349111, series 36, QSA.} Throughout the war, raids by Queensland and Commonwealth Police were made on the Russian Association rooms, the Moreton Printing Company (the RWA newspaper printers) as well as on the private homes of several Russians.\footnote{For instance see censor’s notes, week ending 19 February 1919, QF3137.} Archival evidence indicates that, under section 5(j), officers more often than not made broad sweeps of Russian premises to collect a range of evidence rather than calculated searches. In the case of Nicholas Lagutin, for instance, officers impounded his sketchbooks (detailing non-political subjects such as animals and models) as well as his political writings.\footnote{See Regarding N. Lagutin – Secretary of Russian Club South Brisbane, 66/4/3557, series BP4/1, NAA.}

The importance of the \textit{War Precautions Act} to safeguarding the home front from enemy sabotage is indicated by the frequency with which this legislation was amended. Amendment 2 of 1915 on 30
April 1915 sharpened the focus on communication by the addition of new clauses in section 4. For instance section 4(1)(b) aimed to prevent the transmission ‘of any letter, post-card, letter-card, written communication, or newspaper’ abroad except through the government controlled and censored post. While this clause almost certainly did not stamp out the avoidance of censorship by sending messages via other means, it did deter the practice by making it an offence punishable by fines, imprisonment or both. Detention of any person in military custody was permitted under the guise of maintaining public safety. New amendments to the Act on 13 September 1915 conferred ‘on the Minister power, by warrant under his hand, to detain any person in military custody for such time as he thinks fit, if he is satisfied that such detention is desirable for securing the public safety and the defence of the Commonwealth’ in section 4(1)(da).67

Two notable amendments were made to the legislation on 30 May 1916 and 25 December 1918. The amendments aimed to control the activities of opposition groups and aliens. The 1916 amendment furthered government management of alien enemies or ‘persons having enemy associations or connexions’ by allowing the Commonwealth to regulate the possession, ownership and disposal of property; the continuance of trade or business; and even ‘their civil rights’ in sections 4(1A)(a)(b)(c).68 This was reflected in the War Precautions (Passports) Regulations 1916 and the Aliens Restrictions Order 1916.

Two years later on 25 December 1918, the duration of the War Precautions was extended for three months after the end of war, or until 31 July 1919, ‘whichever period is the longer’.69 Perhaps in expectation of the universal cessation of hostilities at the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919, Parliament set about extending the continuation of existing regulations and the application of terms such as ‘enemy’, ‘alien enemies’ and ‘persons having enemy associations or connexions’. Because the threat of external hostilities was ceasing and soldiers were returning to Australia from active duty, it is likely that the extension of War Precautions Regulations at the end of 1918 was in response to internal disloyalties, particularly those posed by the enemy within. The event of the Bolshevik revolution had transformed Russians from friendly into enemy aliens.70 Russians were subjected to a triple bind: Russia’s traitorous withdrawal from the Allies in 1918, the increased scrutiny of revolutionary events in Russia, and the participation of Australian soldiers in the Allied Intervention in Russia.71

70 For more information on Australian policy towards nationality, including Russians, see Dutton, One of Us, 92.
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The *War Precautions Act* was repealed by a series of amendments from 1920 through to 1928. In effect the *War Precautions Act Repeal 1920* resulted in amendments and additions which continued some of the War Precautions Regulations. While the continuance of Regulations relating to the coal industry, for instance, can be easily attributed to economic necessity, several other amendments only make sense if we take into account the government’s fear of disloyalty and sedition. Section 9 of the 1920 Act required any British subject arriving from overseas to subscribe to an oath or affirmation of their loyalty. Section 10 of the 1920 Act prevented unlawful assemblies in a clearly and extensively defined area around Parliament House in Melbourne. Sections 11 and 12 transferred sedition to part IIA of the *Crimes Act 1914* in 1920. These clauses covered not just incitement to commit an offence (including printing and publishing), but seditious intention, seditious enterprise and the use of seditious words. The penalty for sedition in any of its forms under this Act was imprisonment for 3 years, with inciting an offence incurring the lesser penalty of only 12 months.

The line between unlawful sedition and lawful endeavour is defined by whether a person used ‘good faith’ to point out mistakes with a view to ‘reformation of such errors’. For RWA publicists such as Simonoff, Lagutin and Zuzenko this was a legal nuance that made no sense in the light of their revolutionary goals. It was made almost impossible for Simonoff to fulfil his consular duties and engage in cultural exchange with his host country without prosecution under this regime. Section 22(f) of the 1920 Act, which restricted ‘the publication of newspapers or periodicals in a foreign language’, effectively suppressed foreign influence. Indeed, the economic activity of aliens was viewed as suspicious until the repeal of 1928 when the shares held by aliens were no longer subject to the War Precautions Regulations.

Under this new post-war legislation, social freedoms were more constrained than in the period prior to the outbreak of World War I. As the Australian Law Reform Commission review of sedition laws in 2006 states, ‘sedition provisions were found in state criminal law from an earlier date, but the offence entered the federal statute book when ss24A–24F were inserted into the *Crimes Act 1914 (Cth)* in 1920’. By shifting sedition from the *War Precautions Act* to the *Crimes Act*, the meaning and consequences of this offence were altered. Sedition lost its association with the war effort and ‘it was an offence to engage in a seditious enterprise with a seditious intention or to write, print, utter or publish seditious words with a seditious intention’ against the sovereign, governments, houses of parliament or constitutions of the British Commonwealth during peacetime. As Fischer observes ‘the use of the state apparatus in order to spy on its citizens for the purpose of suppressing political opposition’ constitutes one of the more ominous

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75 Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, 75. For examination of sedition in the post-war era see Roger Douglas. ‘Keeping the Revolution at Bay: The unlawful associations provisions of the Commonwealth *Crimes Act*, Adelaide Law
developments of the political culture that developed in Australia. In particular, the system of political surveillance did not cease with the end of the war: it was incorporated into the civilian government’s Special Investigation Bureau.

Unlawful Associations Act
In the midst of the home front battle led by the Left to protect the worker from conscription and unemployment, the American Industrial Workers of World group gained popularity throughout Australia. Significant work on the growth of the IWW in Australia and the state’s response has been published by Verity Burgmann, Frank Cain and Ian Turner. Segments of the labour movement including the IWW put forward the perspective that parliamentary Labor was selling out the values and goals of the working class to big business and votes. In this light the direct action of groups such as the IWW seemed an alternative and more tangible route to change for many workers. The IWW promoted techniques that could be implemented by any worker regardless of political education or ideological development, such as ‘going slow’ at work. In short the IWW spoke the language of the frustrated worker. At another level, however, the IWW promoted industrial sabotage that attacked valuable infrastructure and risked human life. The IWW crimes that the Unlawful Associations Act aimed to quash were at the same time, as Burgmann notes, ‘the products of a fevered official imagination that sought to convince itself and the public of the need for suppression’.

As in the United States, Australia passed legislation to tackle the spread of sedition represented by the IWW and its methodology. The Unlawful Associations Act passed on 21 December 1916. Section 3 of the Act specified that an unlawful association was (a) the IWW and (b) ‘any association which, by its constitution or propaganda, advocates or encourages, or incites or instigates to, the taking or endangering of human life, or the destruction or injury of property’. The Act not only established a six month penalty for those who supported unlawful associations and hindered the war effort under sections 4 and 5, but included sections on aliens and newspaper publication. Of particular relevance to RWA members, section 6 specified that any person ‘not being a natural-born British subject born in Australia’ who was convicted of an offence under the Act was liable for deportation. This clause took on an increasing relevance for the RWA and its members after their participation in the Red Flag events of March 1919 and subsequent deportation of several participants. Section 7 of the Act nominated a penalty of six months’ imprisonment for persons involved in the printing or

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77 Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, 226.
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publishing of writings that support an unlawful association as outlined in section 3. Peter Simonoff was charged under section 7 of the Act in late 1918 for his involvement in writing for radical newspapers.

On 27 July 1917 key amendments to the Unlawful Associations Act were passed that broadened the definition of groups covered by the Act. Section 3(c) gave the Governor-General specific powers to gazette any group considered to be an unlawful association under the Act. Section 3A broadened punishable offences by including new and continued memberships of unlawful association after the passing of the amendment. But the most expanded section of the Act was the section dealing with the printing and publication of matters inciting crime. The new amendments targeted the finances, staff and transmission of publications as well as the property held by unlawful associations. Under section 7A one could be liable for giving or soliciting contributions to support the work of an unlawful association including the purchase of subscriptions to newspapers. The penalty for supporting an unlawful association in this way was six months imprisonment. One no longer needed to print or publish seditious writing to be penalised; subscription to a newspaper was evidence enough. This clause opened the way for intelligence agencies to legitimately monitor people’s reading choices. Section 7C prohibited the printing, publishing, selling or exposing for sale printed matter ‘issued by or on behalf of the interests of any unlawful association’. This was a substantial enhancement of the 1916 Act which focuses on matter inciting violence. Under the new changes the focus was shifted to any printed matter linked to unlawful associations. Section 7E expanded the powers of federal agencies to seize the property of associations deemed unlawful and 7H allowed authorised officers ‘at any hour of the day or night, with such assistance as he may require, [to] break into and enter any premises or places owned or occupied by an unlawful association, or in which any member of an unlawful association or any property of an unlawful association is believed to be’. These far-reaching clauses supported the seizure of printing presses and handmade Russian typeface during the raids on the Russian rooms in South Brisbane in the wake of the Red Flag riots. This measure also threatened the financial buoyancy of the RWA as all property seized was forfeited to the Commonwealth.

Proof of membership of an association was explicated in section 7F by three proofs, any one of which would be taken as evidence of membership:

(a) attended meetings of the association; or
(b) spoke publicly in advocacy of the association; or
(c) distributed literature of the association.

Almost as an aside, section 7D pursued the infiltration of the public service by those sympathetic to the left-wing cause by sweeping away the eligibility of members of unlawful associations ‘to hold any office or employment, permanent or temporary’. This only applied to Commonwealth authorities and did not impact the employment of aliens and known sympathisers by state
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authorities such as Queensland railways. Nevertheless, the suspicion of association with unlawful groups had severe consequences for some government employees.

The 1917 amendments quite specifically targeted the printed propaganda matter produced by organisations such as the RWA by legislat ing severe penalties for contributing to, selling or buying newspapers. The amendments also empowered government authorities to impound property and equipment. Section 7G was particularly far-reaching as it allowed the membership of an unlawful association to be deemed relevant in any prosecution under Commonwealth law where ‘unlawful intent or purpose is in issue’. The *Unlawful Associations Act* ‘did not simply cover the actual commission of acts of violence against, life, property and government, and conspiracy thereto’, but as Burgmann notes, ‘made criminal the advocacy of *doctrines* of arguably violent change to the existing economic and political order’.78 Gradually the lines to draw the net around the RWA were being tightened. The *Unlawful Associations Act* was intended to continue for six months after the duration of the war.

*Aliens Registration Act*

Superseding the Aliens Restriction Regulations 1916, the *Aliens Registration Act* was passed in 1920, well after the cessation of World War I hostilities. It was aimed at controlling foreign citizens during peacetime and ‘used country of origin, with its implication of allegiance, ideological affiliation or undesirability, to define the enemy’.79 Aliens restrictions legislation was broad in its sweep to the extent that it empowered the Minister of Defence to ‘order the deportation of any alien and any alien with respect to whom such an order is made shall forthwith leave and thereafter remain out of the Commonwealth’.80 The *Aliens Registration Act* put into place the administrative tools to enforce such orders.

Drawing on the policy recommendations of the Aliens Committee to Cabinet in late 1918,81 this Act was an explicit extension of the War Precautions Regulations of 1916. Section 4(1) stated that all aliens registered under the War Precautions Regulations would now be registered under the new Act. Like the earlier wartime statutory rules, the 1920 reincarnation governed the residence, employment and movement of ‘any person over the age of 16 years who is not of British nationality’ including their wives and children. While aliens registration in and of itself is unsurprising, the administrative regulations set out by the Act were cumbersome and set harsh penalties for non-compliance. All forms had to be completed in triplicate to be valid and the Act specified varying time periods for their submission. Lapses in registration or the inability to produce

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78 Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionsim*, 220.

79 Doulman and Lee, *Every Assistance and Protection*, 86.

80 For comment on the Aliens Restrictions Order see Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, 25 June 1919, vol 88, 10025. See also Nicholls, *Deported*, 42.

81 Report of the Aliens Committee, 10 December 1918 (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1918) for these recommendations. Copy in file 1919/590, series A2, NAA. I examine these recommendations in chapter 5.
current documentation (sections 14 and 15), signatures or thumbprints (section 9) upon request by an authorised officer was punishable by a fine up to £100 or 6 months imprisonment.

Under section 11, aliens were prohibited from changing their address prior to giving ‘notice to the aliens registration officer nearest to his place of abode of the date on which he intends to change his place of abode, and of his intended new place of abode’. The phrase ‘nearest to his place of abode’ was applied rigidly and there are several mentions of aliens who submitted their documents to the wrong office in intelligence reports. The *Aliens Registration Act* codified the differences between the treatment of British subjects and aliens. After the war H.E. Jones, the director of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch (SIB’s successor), worked to have the registration of aliens reintroduced under the *Immigration Act*, but this did not come to fruition. What did eventuate was the requirement for aliens to declare personal details upon arrival, the precursor to the landing declaration.\(^{82}\) By the time the *Aliens Registration Act* was suspended on 4 June 1926 regulators were moving to ratify new laws to continue to monitor aliens and dissenters. The rationale behind this move was to ensure that Australia did not go back to its pre-war leniency.

In the years following the implementation of the *Aliens Registration Act*, numerous Russians were subjected to detention under the Act. The circumstances of their incarceration added to their perception that they were being subjected to a new type of autocratic system. A lack of understanding aggravated their treatment. Military intelligence, police and censors saw political activism only in the context of protecting home front integrity, rather than as part of an international movement by Russian exiles. The majority of officers did not appear to recognise that Russian activism was primarily directed towards changes in Russia and that most RWA members considered their return to Russia to be imminent. Australian activism – energetic as it sometimes was – was predominantly a sideline for most members of the Russian community.

Despite the clear interactions between the *War Precautions Act*, the *Unlawful Associations Act* and later the *Aliens Registration Act*, their application to home front conditions was not seamless. Federal control was a new development and conflict between State and federal authorities arose on occasion. For example, State police were authorised officers under the War Precautions Regulations and were duty bound to report non-compliance to federal intelligence authorities. However, the cumbersome paperwork (always in triplicate) must have quickly become a burden for State police who had ongoing criminal investigations to run. Nevertheless, the legislative instruments of control established during World War I defined the way in which the public/private divide, the expression of intellectual freedom and free speech, and the overall tolerance of dissent were treated in Australia.

\(^{82}\) Dutton, *One of Us*, 95–96.
Intelligence agencies and censorship

Key interactions between the state and the RWA occurred through various State and federal authorities empowered by the *War Precautions Act* and *Unlawful Associations Act*. The intensive and intrusive demands made on foreign nationals under the War Precautions Regulations cemented the state’s mistrust and concerned management of this underclass. These Regulations were continued by the *Aliens Registration Act* during peacetime. Because of the intrusive regulations, the RWA was no longer considered to be an “ethnic club” to keep an eye on. Under the Regulations, the identity and voice espoused by the RWA was interpreted as sedition in a foreign language by a group of disloyal, enemy aliens. Russians, like other alien groups in Australia at the time, were dubious foreigners in the eyes of censors, police and military intelligence by merit of not being British. That many of them were also loudly voicing their opposition to the war and praising alternative perspectives in newspapers and weekly activities were clearly outrages from the authorities’ perspective. The protection of Britishness from foreign challenges is evident in numerous documents where censors, police and military intelligence comment on aliens adopting British names, arguing they were hiding their true identity. The Russian Workers Association attracted the attention of the Queensland Police, Intelligence Section General Staff (military intelligence), First Military District and later the Special Intelligence Bureau and Commonwealth Police through its members’ political speeches at Domain meetings and frequent interaction with other socialist organisations. Of particular relevance to the Censor’s Office were the newspapers and stream of letters sent to and from the RWA’s PO Box 10, South Brisbane. Censored correspondence reveals that the RWA attracted the interest of Russians from every State. To the authorities this amounted to a tight network of malcontents who needed to be closely monitored.

This history of the establishment of State and federal intelligence organisations has been covered by several studies, in particular by Christopher Coulthard-Clark and Frank Cain.83 This section draws on a selection of archival material to piece together the history of intelligence agencies. Secondary sources on Australian intelligence agencies expand the historical context of the overview presented here. The decade after the declaration of World War I saw a flurry of new federal agencies as the Commonwealth centralised intelligence in response to promptings from London. Of great importance was the impact of new federal legislation which empowered these agencies. The universal implementation of this legislation throughout all States was a key motivation behind the support for Commonwealth agencies that were not beholden to individual State governments.

Necessarily then, the focus in this section is on the new federal agencies, and not the various State police forces.\(^84\)

In the period under review, agencies responsible for the implementation and management of the *War Precautions Act*, *Unlawful Association Act* and *Aliens Registration Act* were controlled by the Prime Minister’s Department, Attorney-General’s Department and the Department of Defence. Before Federation, arrangements for security and intelligence were maintained by the individual colonies guided by a central London headquarters. While the controlling influence of London did not necessarily diminish with Federation, new arrangements were instituted that displaced former colonial divisions. After Federation, the naval and military defence of the new Commonwealth became the responsibility of one of the original Commonwealth Departments: the Department of Defence. This new department controlled the Commonwealth Military Forces and the Queensland District Headquarters from 1901 to 1911. In 1911 the Commonwealth Department of Defence was restructured and divided into six military districts: District 1 Queensland,\(^85\) District 2 New South Wales, District 3 Victoria, District 4 South Australia, District 5 Western Australia and District 6 Tasmania.

Prior to the declaration of World War I, federal intelligence in Australia had undergone several major structural changes. The first inklings of a domestic intelligence service were realised in the Australian Intelligence Corps (AIC). Modelled on the British intelligence service, the Corps operated from 1907 to 1914. Former AIC members were represented in the ranks of the Intelligence Section General Staff. Major Edmund L. Piesse, the Director of Military Intelligence from 1916, joined the AIC in 1909. George Steward, an ex-AIC member, was chosen to head the new Counter Espionage Bureau, later known as the Special Intelligence Bureau. He was replaced by another AIC man, Major Jones. Several members of the censor’s staff had intelligence experience through service with the Australian Intelligence Corps prior to the outbreak of war.\(^86\) The Deputy Chief Censor position was filled by two former AIC officers: Colonel McKay followed later by Colonel Monash. Coulthard-Clark states that in total up to ‘twenty ex-members of the AIC appear among the list of names associated with the censorship staff, which by the end of the war totalled 530’.\(^87\) In Queensland, Lieutenant-Colonel T. Pye had been the former head of district AIC and Captain A.J. Gibson had AIC experience. The announcement of the dissolution of the AIC


\(^{85}\) The Queensland based District 1 included some northern coastal towns of NSW and the Northern Territory. See entries for H.E. Carey (censor to 1916), Mr Geraghty (Subcollector Customs and assistant censor 1917–1918), Capt E. Barker (censor and intelligence officer 1916–1919), and Capt S.S. Wills (censor and intelligence officer 1918–1919) in Vols 1, 2A, 3 and 5, series BP147/1, NAA.


\(^{87}\) Coulthard-Clark, *The Citizen General Staff*, 53.
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preceded the news of the outbreak of World War I by twenty days.88 This move allowed the residual AIC structure to be merged under the control of the Chief of General Staff of the Department of Defence to form Intelligence Section General Staff (known as MO3) in each of the six military districts. This was the structure that Australia took with it into the Great War.

Intelligence Section General Staff

Matters affecting Australia’s military defence, such as the home front supervision of enemy subjects and persons of enemy descent under the War Precautions Act, soon became the responsibility of the Intelligence Section of General Staff: part of the military intelligence branch of the Department of Defence.89 Its primary activities on the home front revolved around the collection, analysis and coordination of information under the War Precautions Regulations.90 The Intelligence Section General Staff's functions also included the provision of advice on operational intelligence, intelligence within Australian army, the development of policy for intelligence and counter-intelligence, and the coordination of selecting and training linguists.91 Considering the breadth of these functions, it is surprising that in 1918 the number of full time military intelligence staff Australia-wide was only 21 persons (Melbourne Head Quarters 3 officers; Queensland 3 officers and 2 inquiry agents; New South Wales 4 officers; Victoria 5 officers; South Australia 1 officer; and West Australia 3 officers).92 The comprehensive task of wartime surveillance required that the small group of Intelligence Section General Staff liaise and cooperate with State police, the censors and later the Special Intelligence Bureau and Commonwealth Police on a regular basis. Necessarily, wartime censorship and surveillance of the home front was an interagency effort.

The information amassed by military intelligence came from censors, police and their own intelligence gathering operations. To circulate this information military intelligence prepared weekly summaries of war intelligence (issued on the Monday each week). The weekly summaries were sent to the Director of Military Intelligence and Deputy Chief Censor in Melbourne HQ, the intelligence officers of other districts, Naval Intelligence, Commonwealth Traffic Inspectors (camouflaged SIB representatives) and district censors. From these summaries, headquarters prepared its own diary of national war intelligence.93 These reports show that Russians were closely watched, presumably

88 Coulthard-Clark, The Citizen General Staff, 49.
89 See J.W. Legge, Chief of General Staff, Duties of Intelligence Section of General Staff, 20 June 1918 to W. Watt, Acting Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Department, Melbourne, 512/1/460, series MP367/1, NAA.
90 For a full outline of the duties of the Intelligence Section of General Staff see 512/1/460, series MP367/1, NAA.
91 For more information see Coulthard-Clark, The Citizen General Staff. See also Cain’s, The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia and his later The Australian Security Intelligence Organization: An unofficial history (Richmond, VIC: Spectrum, 1994). John Hilvert briefly covers this early period of intelligence in Australia in Blue Pencil Warriors: Censorship and propaganda in World War II (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1984).
92 Duties of Intelligence Section of General Staff, 512/1/460, series MP367/1, NAA.
93 Commonwealth Traffic Inspectors reported to Steward, Director of the Special Intelligence Bureau. See Summary of War Intelligence IMI S 157/1, J.G.I., Chief of General Staff, Melbourne to Commandant, All Military Districts, 26 February 1918, V/62A, series B741/3, NAA.
through the use of linguists as secret agents to infiltrate the core of disloyal groups.\textsuperscript{94} The weekly intelligence summaries were later used as evidence in the prosecution of breaches of the Regulations. As Fischer notes, the intelligence sections of various military districts ‘wielded tremendous power’ over the fate of individuals and the formulation and execution of policies.\textsuperscript{95} The emergency War Precautions Regulations ‘effectively shielded the military apparatus from the normal constitutional safeguards of judiciary and parliamentary control’.\textsuperscript{96}

The headquarters of the Commonwealth Military Forces First Military District was in Brisbane. This agency survived the World War I period and was transformed in 1921 into 1 District Base Australian Military Forces. The local office of the Department of Defence in Queensland had its headquarters at Victoria Barracks, Petrie Terrace, Brisbane. The First Military District was controlled by the Department of Defence Headquarters at Victoria Barracks, St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Staff based here authored a variety of documents (from daily memoranda to detailed reports) to inform HQ. The key military personnel and civilian staff on the salary registers of the First Military District from 1916 to 1920 remained reasonably consistent.\textsuperscript{97} These registers indicate that the Department of Defence paid the salaries of the Censor’s Office staff. The permanence of staff for this period indicates that it was possible for intelligence officers and censors to build up high levels of working knowledge about the RWA.

**Special Intelligence Bureau**

During World War I, the British Government established a network of special intelligence throughout the British Empire.\textsuperscript{98} This network was created and controlled by the new Security Service (MI5) headed by Vernon Kell. As part of the creation process, London requested that Australia establish its own counter espionage bureau to complement the Imperial Bureau.\textsuperscript{99} On 29 November 1915 the British Government nominated and approved Major George Steward, the

\textsuperscript{94} This is demonstrated through a report submitted to the Townsville State Office of the First Military District:

An impromptu meeting of Russians numbering about twenty took place on the beach on Friday the 17th May and it lasted for about two hours…. Much discussion took place on various subjects chiefly among which as the stoppage of the Russian mail by the Censor, and the part they should play in the local industrial upheaval. (Russians in Townsville, NQ 19 May 1919, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.) This segment indicates that the secret agent was not only proficient in Russian but that he (presumably “he” as staff registers indicate that women were relegated to temporary secretarial duties) was trusted enough by the Russian community to attend a tight-knit meeting in an isolated location.

\textsuperscript{95} Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, 75.

\textsuperscript{96} Fischer, *Enemy Aliens*, 75.

\textsuperscript{97} Analysis of staff lists is based on the Salary Registers – First World War – military and civilian staff 1st Military District, Commonwealth (Australian) Military Forces and 1 District Base, Australian Military Forces, 1916 to 1920, Vols 1–10, series BP147/1, NAA.


\textsuperscript{99} For Imperial correspondence to the federal government on a domestic intelligence service refer to SC298, series A3932 and 1955/4429, series A432, NAA.
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official secretary to the governor-general, to communicate on wartime intelligence matters with Kell at MI5, who was also the head of Imperial Counter Espionage Bureau.¹⁰⁰

Reflective of its awkward administrative beginnings, establishment of the Australian branch of the Bureau is recorded in an Executive Council Minute as being approved on 14 February 1917, to take effect retrospectively from 14 January 1916.¹⁰¹ Almost from the beginning, it was known as the Australian Special Intelligence Bureau. Steward was appointed director, with Major Jones appointed assistant director.¹⁰² Steward’s progress towards the firm establishment of the new Bureau within the Prime Minister’s Department was hampered by Hughes’s absence in 1916. His workload was high because during this period he remained official secretary to Governor-General Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson. Steward’s hands-on approach to the operational side of the wartime secret service prompted Ferguson to refer to him as ‘Pickle the Spy’.¹⁰³ Steward’s correspondence with his state offices (based on the military districts) regularly included instructions for state representatives to bring matters to Steward’s personal attention in addition to the weekly reports. All communications with Steward were to be double enveloped, with ‘Rowantrees’ on the inner envelope. From 1 March 1919 Jones took over the directorship, a move recorded in an Executive Council Minute on 25 June.

On 2 February 1917 Steward proposed that the Bureau be structured with a Director, Assistant Class C salaried at £432, Clerk Class D £336, Clerk Class E £185 and Secret Agents who were to be paid as agreed upon each case until the question of a federal police service was resolved. The SIB sat within the Prime Minister’s Department and considerably increased the activities and roles of the relatively new department.¹⁰⁴ The Special Intelligence Bureau largely relied on casual agents and State police to provide detectives for secret agent work.¹⁰⁵ State Commissioners of Police were ex-officio members of the SIB. In conjunction with local police, State offices of the SIB were

¹⁰⁰ Information regarding the establishment of the Special Intelligence Bureau is drawn from Prime Minister’s Department correspondence between 1915 and 1920, SC298, series A3932, NAA.
¹⁰¹ Executive Council Minute No 7 of 1917.
¹⁰² For information on the workings of the SIB see V/62A, series B741/3, NAA.
¹⁰⁴ Unlike the Department of Defence and the Attorney-General’s Department which were original Commonwealth Departments, the Prime Minister’s Department had its origin as an office within the Department of External Affairs. The PM’s Department was created on 1 July 1911 by Executive Council Minute No 53 of 29 December 1911.
¹⁰⁵ The reliance on casual agents and State police for intelligence work reflected operating procedures of parent agencies in the UK. In Britain the pre-war Secret Service Bureau founded in 1909 was so short of money that it could not afford to employ full-time agents and was forced to rely on casual agents. Its successor agencies – the Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) – were also plagued by financial constraints. For example, in an attempt to supplement the intelligence gathered by casual agents, SIS head Mansfield Cumming collected intelligence himself using a range of disguises and carrying swordstick. Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) head in Brisbane, George Ainsworth, also supplemented casual agents’ work by collecting intelligence himself. Like Cumming, Ainsworth carried a swordstick. (Ainsworth’s swordstick is in the possession of Ainsworth’s family. It was loaned to the National Archives of Australia’s Brisbane office for an exhibition in 2005). Christopher Andrew, ‘Secret Intelligence and British Foreign Policy 1900–1939’, in Intelligence and International Relations: 1900–1945, edited by Andrew and Jeremy Noakes (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1987), 9–12.

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responsible for administration of forms for alien registration under the War Precautions Regulations (Aliens Registration) and the *Aliens Registration Act* (Forms A, A2 and E) in addition to approving visas. The central office of the new SIB, located in Melbourne, controlled local offices in several states. The Brisbane branch of the SIB operated from 1 January 1917 until it was merged with the Commonwealth Police at the end of the war in 1919 to form the Investigation Branch within the Attorney-General’s Department.

During 1918 negotiations with the Department of Defence helped establish the scope of the Special Intelligence Bureau in relation to the coordination of intelligence inquiries and censorship. A conference bringing together representatives of various Commonwealth intelligence agencies was held in February 1918. At this conference an Executive Minute was laid down that the Bureau was to focus its inquiries on hostile secret service agents, enemy activities against British trade, sedition, alien enemy agents, espionage, passenger control and circulation of information on suspects. Additionally, SIB was asked to support the collection of information and censorship by passing relevant information to censors and military intelligence to enhance their work. A request was made by the Deputy Chief Censor for SIB representatives to forward onto district censors any information the Bureau required and 'particulars as to the nature of the information likely to be obtained from the censorship of suspects’ correspondence'. For the remainder of the war the Special Intelligence Bureau fostered close working relationships with district censors and military intelligence.

A key figure in the Queensland intelligence community who had considerable involvement in the monitoring of the RWA was Special Intelligence Bureau chief in Brisbane Captain George Frederick Ainsworth. The senior Grade 2 military intelligence officer in Brisbane, Ainsworth was chosen to establish the Investigation Bureau in 1917. Ainsworth kept a series of work diaries from the time of his appointment in September 1917 to mid 1920. His diaries from this period reveal 106 Coordination of Intelligence Inquiries – Avoidance of duplication enquiries from the Police IMI S 154/2, G.F.P., Chief of the General Staff, Department of Defence, Headquarters Melbourne to Commandants, All Military Districts, 25 February 1918, V/62A, series B741/3, NAA. 107 Re Collection of Information and Censorship, Circular No. 15, Subsided Melbourne (Special Intelligence Bureau, Third Military District), 20 May 1918, V/62A, series B741/3, NAA. 108 See intelligence reports and diaries kept by G.F. Ainsworth, Special Intelligence Bureau later Investigation Branch Brisbane, 1 September 1917 to 30 April 1920, Vols 1–3, series BP230/3, NAA. These diaries are rich sources that provide a unique window on the operations of a senior figure in World War I intelligence in Brisbane and shed light on everyday machinery. The handwritten notes formed the basis for his appointments as well as the reports he submitted regarding the Brisbane office’s activities. Besides giving an insight into the daily operations of the unit – such as its surveillance targets – he recorded funding arrangements. Despite the clear importance the federal government placed on intelligence work during the war, the Brisbane office was understaffed. Ainsworth and often his clerk generally worked seven day weeks including public holidays and a half-day Christmas. During the thirty-two month period recorded in the diaries, Ainsworth missed few weekly Domain meetings. He and his agents attended meetings at North Quay, South Brisbane, Kent Buildings, Edward Street, Albert Street and Trades Hall as well as demonstrations, parades, marches and meetings of organisations like the Australian Peace Alliance. The diaries reveal that the position held by Ainsworth was a multifaceted job, requiring him to procure office space and equipment, recruit staff and acquit office finances. Ainsworth records in great detail the financial difficulties he endured while operating the Brisbane office on a tight budget. He frequently indicates having to reimburse his work expenses and salary from petty cash until
him to be a meticulous and perceptive organiser, ‘a man busily engaged listening, observing, liaising
and reporting’. One impression gained from these sources is of the interactive nature of the
network between personnel of the various intelligence collecting organisations in Brisbane at the
time. Ainsworth noted almost daily meetings with state government representatives such as the
Commissioner of Police, various Queensland Police detectives and staff from Premier Ryan’s
office. Ainsworth regularly met the directors of other agencies charged with implementing federal
government policies such as the Censor, Commandant First Military District and Postmaster
General. High ranking Special Intelligence Bureau representatives from Melbourne such as Major
Jones and Captain Hayes also travelled to Brisbane for local interagency meetings. Ainsworth
recorded his meetings with on-the-ground intelligence officers around Queensland and from
Darwin as well as staff from Customs, Immigration and the government printer. He noted paying
the salary of agents who also worked for military intelligence. He sometimes met these agents
several times each week to receive reports and give instructions. His relationship with the Censor’s
Office was equally close and he recorded discussing, receiving and analyzing the weekly intelligence
reports. Additionally, Ainsworth had meetings with the Registrar of the fledgling University of
Queensland and Sir Samuel Griffith regarding investigations into internment. He also interviewed
foreign representatives, such as local consuls. These links with consuls were so frequent that on 18
September 1917 Ainsworth began to tabulate a list of all consuls in Queensland.

Ainsworth’s approach stands out among intelligence officers as he targeted individuals rather than
working on the blanket assumption that every member of a subversive organisation was in breach
of wartime regulations. Ainsworth was responsible for indexing of the Brisbane Censor's weekly
reports as well as lists of aliens. He used traceable methods to store and cross-reference data. An

the next advance was received. Funding was tight throughout the intelligence community in Brisbane and
Ainsworth notes securing office furniture on 31 January 1919 and then loaning a chair to Captain Pike on 1
February (Vol 3).

109 John Ainsworth, ‘Captain George Frederick Ainsworth, Queensland’s Special Intelligence Bureau Chief,
1917–1919’, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 17.5 (February 2000), 193. Originally a teacher of
German and French, George Ainsworth later worked for the Bureau of Meteorology and participated in the
Mawson Expedition to Antarctica from 1911 to 1914 as a meteorological officer stationed on Macquarie
Island. Returning to Australia he volunteered for military service during World War I and worked in a range
of federal intelligence agencies, including directing Queensland operations. His language skills and scientific
experience were recognised and he was appointed to the Intelligence Section General Staff in Melbourne
before being transferred to the First Military District in Brisbane. John Ainsworth’s research on his
grandfather George Ainsworth reveals the private side of this thoughtful officer. In 1930 he was State
Organiser for the United Australia Party and stood for election as the Member of Parliament for Hamilton.
He left the military in the 1930s to work in private industry. His obsession for gambling (which saw him rent
his whole life) resulted in huge losses. He restarted his life in 1937 in Sydney, his sister housing his family
whilst he sought employment. Trying his hand at various endeavors, such as ABC Radio broadcasting, he
rejoined the military during World War II. To his disappointment, Harold Jones did not remember him for
another intelligence position and he spent the war as a meteorological officer based with the RAAF in
Sydney. Ainsworth did not return to intelligence again and pursued a successful managerial career in the
Australian and New Zealand car industries. John Ainsworth kindly met me several times in 2005 to discuss
his research. See also H.J. Gibbney, ‘Ainsworth, George Frederick (1878–1950)’, *Australian Dictionary of

110 Ainsworth Diaries, Vol 1, series BP230/3, NAA.
example of this is the remainder of what was once a card index of subversives. While only fifteen cards are known today, these records indicate that Ainsworth was carefully tracking and monitoring individuals based on specific activities in combination with their associations. It is likely that this card index was used as a database from which summary reports were drawn towards the end of the war. His diaries indicate that nodes within the federal intelligence complex accessed files across offices. For instance, Ainsworth and his clerk regularly travelled to Victoria Barracks to view files and forms. Likewise, he noted meeting military intelligence to discuss reports. Lists and profiles of alien groups were maintained using information gained from the indices of the weekly intelligence reports. This information was used to add to the weekly intelligence report submitted by the Intelligence Section General Staff to HQ. Ainsworth commented on personally coding, decoding and wiring messages to HQ and the various military districts daily. He also commented on updating military intelligence on Brisbane developments and receiving high level intelligence documents, such as the British MI5 Black List. These lists were used, for instance, to direct the precautions taken against German businesses. When SIB merged with the Commonwealth Police, the new Investigation Branch used SIB records to target subversives during peacetime.

Commonwealth Police

The investigative arm of the federal government was finally established in 1917. It was intended that the Commonwealth Police would investigate matters independently from state police, who had loyalty to state governments. Despite the far-reaching powers of the military intelligence branch of Defence and the SIB, it was still widely held at the federal level that:

It is utterly impossible to depend on the State Police in Queensland for any assistance in prosecuting offenders or in reporting breaches of the War Precautions Regulations, or other acts. If their aid is sought their reply generally is that they have no instructions from Headquarters to take action, or that the matter is not worth bothering about.

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111 MI5 controlled its intelligence data using a card index. Like in Australia, MI5’s wartime registry fed into post-war intelligence. For the inter-war fate of MI5’s Registry see Andrew, The Defence of the Realm, 122.
112 Of particular relevance is Ainsworth’s detailing of the developments of the Russians in Brisbane. His diary entries show meetings with Mendrin from his third day in office. It is likely that this is a contact he maintained from his days as an intelligence officer. The first mention of Russians is on 14 September 1917 when he interviewed intelligence officer Captain Wood ‘re several matters. Inquiries re Russian Association’ (14 September 1917). The diaries indicate that he also monitored groups such as Italians and Germans (‘went through Italian list’ on 19 November 1917 and ‘supplied N.P.C. with list of Germans districts in Q’ on 30 November 1917). HQ contacted Ainsworth regarding the Japanese population on Thursday Island for arrangements and information ‘re Japs at seaside ports’ (14–15, 17, 29 July 1919). Ainsworth Diaries, Vols 1 and 3, series BP230/3, NAA.
113 6 November 1919, Ainsworth Diaries, Vol 3, series BP230/3, NAA. British lists and reports received and used by intelligence agencies in Queensland are held in Intelligence Bureau Reports, 512/1/293 and 512/1/285, series MP367/1; and Correspondence relating to the BBL (British Black List and MI5 Black List circulars), 6, series BP230/3, NAA.
115 The clearest example of this is the Summary of Communism and the Index to Summary of Communism, 111 and 112, series A6122, NAA. See also the Investigation Branch’s personal and subject W prefix files, series A402, NAA.
116 Memorandum, Captain Reginald Hayes for Deputy Chief Censor, Melbourne to Chief of General Staff, Department of Defence, 27 September 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.
There is ample evidence suggesting that federal parliamentarians and officers were highly suspicious of the Ryan government in Queensland. This perspective was expanded in a five-page report on the establishment of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch that outlines the wartime difficulties with the State Government in Queensland that led to the creation of the Commonwealth Police:

The experience of the Commonwealth Government in Queensland at the time the Unlawful Association Act became law shows that the State Government, although not openly refusing to enforce the law, clearly showed by its general attitude that it reserved to itself the right to say whether the particular legislation referred to, was so far as Queensland was concerned, necessary.

Cases have come under notice where the Queensland Commissioner of Police on being asked for detective assistance to carry out a particular enquiry for the Commonwealth Government stated, that he had no officer suitable to make the enquiry desired, and the Commonwealth Government was compelled to send a suitable officer from one of the other States to conduct same.117

The perceived indifference on the part of the State government and Queensland Police to federal government requests, and the continued unchecked expression of disloyal speeches, statements and activities, led SIB head Steward to conclude that ‘Queensland … is now undoubtedly, to put the matter plainly and honestly, a hot bed of disloyalty, both to the Empire and Australia’. 118 In response to idiosyncratic administration of new federal laws, the Commonwealth Police was set up by the Attorney-General in December 1917 under the War Precautions Regulations 1917. 119 This move was strongly opposed by Queensland Premier Ryan at the May 1918 Premiers’ Conference.120

The operations of the Commonwealth Police appear to have been wide-ranging despite it being a small organisation. Agency correspondence from 1918 to 1919 indicates that officers investigated relatively trivial issues such as the sale of military war decorations121 right through to incidents of sedition and supporting the prosecution of those involved in the Red Flag events. Most recruits to the force had served in the war and several applications to join the new Commonwealth Police were accompanied by letters of introduction from the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia. Archival evidence suggests that RSSILA recommended many men to Inspector Anderson in Brisbane.122

While modern day intelligence and security agencies receive sizeable budgets to run their operations, this was not the case for the Commonwealth Police office in Brisbane. The reports from Brisbane which survived for archiving were often handwritten and this indicates a lack of

117 Notes on the justification for a Commonwealth Investigation Branch in the Attorney General’s Department, 1955/4429, series A432, NAA.
118 Letter, (George Steward), Melbourne to Acting Prime Minister Watt, 20 November 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.
119 Commonwealth Gazette, No 215, 12 December 1917, 3341–3342.
120 For the transcript of this conference see Premiers’ Conference (Australia). Report of the resolutions, proceedings and debates of the Premiers’ Conference held at Sydney, May 1918: together with appendices. Sydney: W.A. Applegate, Government Printer, 1918.
121 See the minutes between Constable W.J. Macgregor-Davies and Sergeant Munro of the Brisbane branch of the Commonwealth Police, 21 January 1918, 1, series BP230/4, NAA.
122 See 1, series BP230/5, NAA.

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secretarial support and equipment. In December 1918, Sergeant Short applied to the Commissar in Sydney for £1 in funds to purchase a new map of Queensland.\(^{123}\) Despite Short’s assurance that the map included new information (such as an alphabetical key ‘so that any township in the State can be located instantly’) and would indeed ‘prove a great acquisition’, the swift reply from the Commissioner stipulated that the Brisbane office should use the current Queensland Railway Guide. That it was deemed acceptable for a peak investigative force to rely on a superseded railway map, and the Brisbane branch had to apply for funds to purchase routine equipment, indicates the straitened financial position of the regional office.

In 1919 the Commonwealth Police merged with the Special Intelligence Bureau to form the peacetime Commonwealth Investigation Branch under the Attorney-General’s Department. Positions in the new Investigation Branch were created on 2 September 1920, with the promotion of staff taking effect from 1 November 1919.\(^{124}\) Harold Jones’s directorship of the SIB was transferred across to the Investigation Branch and by late 1919 Investigation Branch officers were stationed at Sydney, Brisbane, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns.

**Coordinated censorship: the machinery and its products**

Underpinning the work of military intelligence, censorship was the key administrative system capable of investigating and monitoring those considered disloyal. Censorship had long been an integral part of the British colonial network. The ideas that moved in correspondence and print throughout the empire served to collapse geographical and cultural space. While letter censorship ‘has its place in the constitutional history of Great Britain as far back as the Middle Ages’ and some telegraph censorship was used during the Boer War, it was not until World War I that organised censorship was implemented.\(^{125}\) Censorship during total war was a double-edged sword for the government: it combated espionage as a military weapon and collected information on the population as a tool to gauge affairs at home and abroad. Government control of communications during wartime not only collected intelligence vital for the war effort but also acted as a mirror for wider trends, particularly when staff made links between the actions of the RWA in Brisbane and IWW activism in the USA. The success of wartime censorship ‘depended largely on the cooperation of many departments in many countries’.\(^{126}\)

Censorship under the War Precautions Regulations in Australia was a coordinated effort by the Censor’s Office, military intelligence, the SIB and, to a lesser extent, State and Commonwealth

\(^{123}\) Map of Queensland, Sergeant A. M. Short, Commonwealth Police, Brisbane to Commissioner, Sydney, 12 December 1918, 1, series BP230/4, NAA.

\(^{124}\) *Government Gazette*, No 72, 2 September 1920, 1156. See also Departmental Organisation of the Investigation Branch, Q123/24, series BP242/1, NAA.

\(^{125}\) History of the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department 1938–1946, 2 vols, edited by E.S. Herbert and C.G. des Graz (Home Office: 1952), 22. Also held at the National Archives UK, items DEFE 1/333 and DEFE 1/334, series DEFE 1 Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department Papers, Communications and Intelligence Records, Ministry of Defence, 1914–1959.

\(^{126}\) History of the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department 1938–1946, Vol 1, 1.
Police. This domestic network slotted into a worldwide network of territories within the British Empire. The British system intersected with systems in allied and neutral countries, united against the forces of enemy territories. It was the view of loyal intelligence officers that challenges to Australia were in effect challenges to Britain. The transcript of Zuzenko’s interrogation by officers at London’s Brixton Prison reveals this sharply when they questioned him about how he came to be in Australia illegally in 1922.\textsuperscript{127}

The language of censorship reflected what was happening outside the intelligence community. Surveillance had a life of its own and was determined by other factors, not just the human and signals intelligence collected by agents. The censors saw the letters and articles they worked on as fitting into a wider social approach to subversion. New ideas on undesirables were integrated into their comments. To an extent, the censors were simultaneously finding evidence for subversion and creating new elements of this threat to the integrity of the home front. As sociologist John Gabriel argues, surveillance is defined as the state’s mechanism ‘to turn individuals into objects of information and thus amenable to constant scrutiny’. This process is also ‘an integral aspect of whiteness’\textsuperscript{128} and served to reinforce the British identity of Australia and its place in the Commonwealth during the war.

Drawing legal authority from the \textit{War Precautions Act}, the censors’ duties encompassed the interception of the press and mail. In practice this involved scrutinising newspaper and journal proofs submitted by editors; cables; telegrams; and postal mail, both personal and commercial. Most press cables during this time came out of the United Kingdom and had already been passed by British censors. Interestingly, as Kevin Fewster points out, ‘in theory anything which they [British censors] passed should have been acceptable in Australia. It was not long however, before the Australian censors found that the decisions taken in Britain did not comply with their own notions about censorship’.\textsuperscript{129} Journalism scholar Robert Jensen highlights that ‘one way to measure the fears of people in power is by the intensity of their quest for certainty and control over

\textsuperscript{127} Interrogation of Suzenko or Toni Tollagensen Tjorn by Captain H.M. Miller and Captain Guy Maynard Liddell, 19 December 1922, 24/30649, series A1, NAA:

\begin{verbatim}
T: I never came to this country.
Capt L: But here you are.
T: You dragged me to your country. You arrested me on board an Australian steamer at Hudson Bay …
Capt M: You were on a British ship, in British waters.
T: Not British.
Capt M: You were within British territorial waters.
T: I was on Australian territory. It was an Australian governmental steamer.
Capt M: No.
\end{verbatim}

Kevin Windle’s research confirms that these two officers were from Scotland Yard’s Special Branch and both later pursued high-ranking careers in the Security Service, or MI5. See Windle, ‘Round the World for the Revolution: A Bolehvik agent’s mission to Australia, 1920–22, and his interrogation by Scotland Yard’, \textit{Revolutionary Russia} 17.2 (December 2004), 93–94.


\textsuperscript{129} Fewster, ‘Expression and Suppression’, 19.
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knowledge'. Drawing on this point, the censorship regime in Australia reflected federal government, and perhaps the wider social, concern over foreign and disloyal influences. What constituted 'foreign' and 'disloyal' fluctuated to reflect the current policy for Australia’s management of the home front. At the beginning of the war the RWA’s subscription to foreign journals attracted little or no attention from censors. However, in 1919 subscription attracted regular comments from censors who now saw foreign subscriptions as evidence of subversion. The correspondence of the RWA was increasingly subject to legal interdiction over the course of the war.

Monitoring of the ethnic press in Australia commenced in 1901 directly after Federation. However, systematic domestic surveillance did not really begin until the outbreak of World War I. Under the Fisher Labor government regulations were passed that enhanced press censorship, but substantial restrictions on the press came with the Hughes Nationalist government’s Unlawful Associations Act in mid-December 1916. Hughes saw newspapers in terms of ideology and the ethnic press was a key target of his internal war campaign. Under the auspices of the War Precautions Act, political and foreign language publications were severely curtailed. Censorship was not just extended to paper content but also to their circulation. Publications that were assessed to be anti-British were targeted. For instance, the importation and circulation of the New York-published Russian socialist papers Novy Mir and Narodni List, to which the RWA subscribed, were prohibited.

The press can serve as a medium to a shared identity for small communities. The identity expressed through Knowledge and Unity was one that epitomised Russian radicalism for the censors, military intelligence and one SIB Agent 77. This is shown through the regularity of their updates on the paper’s circulation and authorship. In July 1919, Agent 77 reported that ‘this paper is run by four of the Russians and not by the Socialist League as stated in this paper, a copy can be procured if necessary’. Evidence that staff and agents in the field were forwarding copies of targeted publications under the War Precautions Regulations to the Directorate of Military Intelligence is scattered throughout the archival files examined in this study.

131 For more information on the prohibition of these newspapers refer to J.H. Starling, Acting Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, Melbourne to Secretary, Postmaster-General’s Department, 24 May 1916; Comptroller-General, Department of Trade and Customs, Melbourne to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 12 November 1915; and A. Bonar Law, Downing Street to Governor General of Australia, 4 September 1915, 1919/53, series A2, NAA.
132 In his diaries head of the SIB in Brisbane Ainsworth recorded meeting with his unnamed agent called 77 on a weekly basis (Ainsworth Diaries, Vols 1–3, series BP230/3, NAA). The anonymity of agents and the frequency of meetings points to the seriousness with which the World War I intelligence mechanism treated the Russian identity put forward by the RWA. In the censorship reports of the same period, this same identity was viewed with suspicion and subjected to close monitoring.
133 Report to Captain Woods from Agent 77, 26 and 27 July 1919, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
134 For instance the Intelligence Section General Staff 1MD forwarded recent copies of Knowledge and Unity and The Proletariat to Melbourne on 18 February 1918, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
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Censors documented correspondence of groups and reported on meetings and spy infiltration, sometimes using information from special agents. Weekly, sometimes even daily, summaries were sent to Headquarters in Melbourne. The information would then be forwarded onto HQ staff who would collate the reports into a précis format to send to London.135 In turn, international information on activism and threats would be forwarded by London to its various colonial offices. In this way, Brisbane censors could perceive the identity and propaganda of the RWA in the light of global developments: for example, the IWW in the United States and union radicalism in the United Kingdom. In this way the importance of wartime monitoring of the activities of individuals and groups was reinforced. It was as part of a global intelligence network that Queensland was dealing with disloyalty and sedition, and the burgeoning political sub-culture of its Russian community.

Censorship and intelligence records reveal that anonymous tip offs were sent to the various military district offices. Information from the community was received in the form of reports from concerned members of the public about suspicious aliens colluding at odd hours.136 The prevalence of tip offs in the files indicates that paranoia existed in sections of the wider community who were concerned about the existence of secret agents who were trying to find out information on the Commonwealth's forces and defences. The presence of enemy aliens as settlers in their midst was equally worrying for concerned citizens.

At the outset of wartime censorship, machinery was set in place whereby government departments, particularly the Intelligence Section General Staff (military intelligence), supplied the Censor's Office with subjects on which information was to be collected and lists of names of businesses and persons whose correspondence required surveillance. The Australian lists drew on local conditions as well as the Special Intelligence Black Lists produced by MI5 and other British agencies.137 The censors' notes contain evidence of censors comparing names with the General Black List, in which individuals and companies were graded A, B, C and so forth depending on their perceived threat to security. Additionally, censors made use of British intelligence records to inform their reporting.138

135 Weekly reports were prepared by the Intelligence Sections General Staff and the Censor's Offices in the six military districts. These reports were divided into sections such as Suspects and Other Persons coming Under Notice, Applications for Land Transfers and General Intelligence. Copies were forwarded by the Division of Military Intelligence to HQ in Melbourne, local censors around the Commonwealth, and the Attorney-General's Department. Defence HQ would also compile a summary of the weekly intelligence reports. This summary was sent to the Chief Censor, based in the British War Office in London as well as to Military Intelligence Offices around Australia. Generally reports were based on censored mail during the years 1914 to 1919, although on occasion they also contained comments in meetings, rallies, newspaper articles and agents' reports. The Deputy Chief Censor's Office had an oversight role. It conducted regular inspections of the reports maintained by each MD including an important annual check which resulted in a yearly certificate. Drawing on material from London, the Deputy Chief Censor's Office provided local censors with ciphers and codes that were used from the late teens well into the late 1920s (see Index to Secret Correspondence Register, box 2, 1, BP133/3, NAA).

136 For British examples see Andrew, *Secret Service*, 51.
137 For information on MI5 and the Special Intelligence Black Lists see Andrew, *Secret Service*, 175.
138 For example, in the notes for Q3802, week ending 28 December 1918, the censor comments that 'according to MI8 record 2174, writers supplied 50 barrels of liquor to German agents in Switzerland'.

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Censors’ notes, some of which were pages long, sometimes included analysis of background on situations using information from sources such as the General Black List, the MI5 Black List and MI8 records.\textsuperscript{139}

Three main methods of censorship were used in Britain and Australia:

1. watch-listing (correspondence of suspects noted on a master list was systematically intercepted)
2. mass and random testing (correspondence tested for chemical compounds and codes)
3. selectivity and concentration (selecting types of correspondence and concentrating on subjects considered to be the most important).\textsuperscript{140}

One of the key problems for intelligence-coordination was how to manage the masses of data produced on possible disloyalists. As in the United Kingdom, Australian censors used a register of aliens and authorised lists to target disloyalists. Andrew states that in the United Kingdom general warrants authorising the examination of correspondence of persons, particularly aliens, in the form of lists were established prior to the war in the early 1910s.\textsuperscript{141}

Censors’ notes on mail intercepts reveal that the information-seeking function of censorship gained increasing importance as the war continued. The underlying theme of trying to track the hidden enemy within became evident in the QF, MF and RE censors’ reports. For instance, censors’ notes include references to correspondents using false names to hide their ‘Teutonic’ background and thus trick authorities.\textsuperscript{142} The concerns of the censors were well-founded as their work depended on postal staff being able to correctly identify correspondence to be intercepted by name and address, usually from either the name of the sender or receiver. The postal system was generally able to cope with changes in addresses after a few letters by working from lists of names from other military districts. The changing of names to avoid detection called for greater vigilance and coordination between intelligence arms. In response, the SIB indexed postal intercepts from the Censor’s Office and intelligence reports from the Intelligence Section General Staff. Copies of these indexes were sent to military intelligence and the Censor’s Office in turn received intelligence reports to update their lists of names and addresses.

Early censors’ notes reveal that the backlog of documents waiting to be translated at times spanned several months. This not only delayed letters and articles, but put the translators under considerable pressure to quickly process a large amount of mostly handwritten material in a short period of time. Under such conditions it is likely that translators were sometimes not able to deliberate long over phrasing and word choice. Despite what might be considered to be professionalism in the face of limited resources and an overwhelming workload, the censors did, on occasion, demonstrate petty

\textsuperscript{139} Frequent examples can be found in the Q reports for May and June 1919.
\textsuperscript{140} History of the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department 1938–1946, Vol 1, 16.
\textsuperscript{141} Andrew, Secret Service, 60–61.
\textsuperscript{142} See censor’s notes, week ending 28 August 1918, MF1655.
mindedness. Take for example the case of Ettie Riemer from Biggenden who enclosed a few mint Australian postal stamps with a letter to Belgium. Riemer’s letter was held on the grounds that ‘no permit has been issued to the writer to export postage stamps’. Technically the War Precautions Regulations did set out that trade with countries such as Belgium was suspended, but the sending of a few stamps to a friend hardly constitutes export trade.

As the censorship process became established a dialogue emerged between the Censor’s Office and the various government departments who used the information they provided. The official British history of censorship indicates that ‘as censorship gained control of large sections of the communications of the entire world, it became evident that much material was being selected of value to using departments outside their stated requirements, who, after being put on watch by censorship, were brought to the attention of the using departments’. The censors also alerted the Intelligence Section General Staff of developing issues through intelligence reports and direct referral of pertinent information. For instance, when the censor picked up on the movement of a Russian from Brisbane to Port Douglas who may have been of interest to authorities, the intercept was forwarded to Intelligence Section General Staff for them to enquire.

As the official British history of censorship indicates, ‘the truth is that the amount of material available to Censorship was so large that the process of selection inevitably came to require original thought and action on the part of the censors’. Archival records indicate that a highly motivated, secretive and well educated workforce staffed the Censor’s Office. The examination of intercepts relied not only on the lists of subjects and names supplied by various departments but on the skill and knowledge base of individuals. The official British history of censorship states that the model in the UK, on which the Australian system was based, drew staff ‘from both sexes, all ages and the most diverse social and occupational antecedents’. Christopher Andrew notes the high percentage of women recruited for intelligence work, specifically code-breaking and censorship in the United Kingdom. Examination of the First Military District salary registers and Hansard discussions suggest that Australian censorship staff were primarily older white men with prior experience in the public service, military or university system.

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143 Ettie Riemer, Biggenden, Queensland to Alex de Rocker, Ghent, Belgium, 24 February 1919, QF3246.
144 See censor’s notes, week ending 11 June 1919, QF4309.
145 See Andrew, Secret Service, 93–97. In the UK mass recruitment for MI5 took place from January 1916. Headed by Vernon Kell, the secret department focused on counter-espionage and started the war with 19 staff in August 1914. By November 1918, MI5 employed 844 staff (174). The department responsible for postal censorship changed from a single censor working in the War Office in 1914 to a 4,861 team in their own department MO9, later MI9, in the War Office. Unlike Australia, 75% of this number were women (177).
In 1915, the first year of censorship, all 11 Queensland staff had civilian careers in the public service, law, policing, education, accounting and business. The ranks of the First Military District censors included men who had professional interests in language and literature. Captain J.J. Stable, Professor of English, joined in August 1914 as a senior assistant censor and was promoted to censor in January 1917. Stable engaged in enthusiastic surveillance of disloyalty in Queensland and submitted in-depth reports to the Deputy Chief Censor (DCC) on his findings. In February 1919, Stable briefed DCC Colonel G.G. McColl on the industrial and political situation and concluded that decisive action needed to be taken to avert an impending radical crisis in Queensland. Lieutenant F.W.S. Cumbrae-Stewart, Professor of Law, was also a writer who had long term associations with literary groups in Queensland. He joined the Censor’s Office as a part-time assistant censor in August 1914 and ceased service in June 1919. Around Australia, as Frank Cain observes, ‘members of the Censor’s staff were wordsmiths too. They believed in the significance of the published word and that a writer need not be a man of action to have a galvanising effect on the society in which he lived’. This understanding helped fuel the censors’ close observation of RWA members such as Zuzenko and Simonoff.

The affiliations of several members of the Censor’s Office are alluded to in their reports. For instance, a member of the Censor’s Office who furnished the First Military District with reports on the actions of the soldiers in the Red Flag Riots was in fact ‘a prominent official of the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League’. It was not made clear in his reports on the riots whether he participated in the events. Nevertheless the censors developed such a detailed knowledge of their work that by 1919 some staff were able to target items to intercept purely by the handwriting on the envelopes. Intelligence reports included in the censors’ reports included political commentary that drew on a variety of sources giving details of delegations to the government, meetings with the Home Secretary, outcomes of Cabinet meetings as well as interdepartmental communications. As in the UK, Australian censors were also responsible for maintaining detailed indexed reference material which allowed them to navigate the growing monolith of the combined intercept

149 Response of Jensen to McGrath on military censors, House of Representatives debate, 21 July 1915. See also Censors and censorship appointment of censors, 1917/3541, series A2; and Salary Registers, Vols 1–10, series BP147/1, NAA
150 Letter and Review, Captain J.J. Stable, Censor 1MD, Censors Office, GPO Brisbane to Colonel McColl, DCC, Melbourne, 9 February 1919, SC5/1, A3934, NAA. Stable’s covering letter indicates that he was submitting the review ‘in accordance with O.A. 30264’. O.A. numbers marked decisions to forward letters to DCC and the DCC’s decision on the correspondence. It is likely that O.A. indicated some sort of order by the DCC perhaps linked to the administration of the War Precautions Act.
151 Cain, The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia, 130.
152 Intelligence report, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3516.
153 See censors’ notes, week ending 3 May 1919, QF3928 and QF3929. The censor recorded that ‘the writing aroused suspicion as to the identity of the writing’. The letters were traced back to Zuzenko who posted them as he was deported on the transport ship Karachi in Hobart.
154 Intelligence report, week ending 9 July 1919, QF4538 makes reference to the proclamation passed in a meeting of Cabinet on the unrest in Townville.
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For example, censors also commented on the administrative aspects of censorship such as new addresses and new correspondents in their notes.

Interagency cooperation

As Mark Finnane observes, ‘the origin of a separate political police in Australia lies in the First World War’. During the war the Commonwealth government had to rely on State police for investigating subversive elements. As in the UK, police performed critical roles in wartime surveillance, undertaking raids on disloyal organisations and persons, and reporting to intelligence agencies on the activities of left-wing subversives as well as aliens. In Ernest Scott’s history of the war, he notes that military intelligence relied on local police ‘in the investigation of individual cases’. He goes on to state that local police knowledge was valuable as it drew on years of work in the community.

Kevin Fewster notes that Commonwealth government agencies and State police consulted each other over operations taken against disloyal groups, such as the IWW. Until the establishment of the Commonwealth Police, the Commonwealth possessed no investigative system. State police, customs officials and military intelligence were the key enforcers of federal legislation. Police had wide ranging responsibilities under the War Precautions Regulations to register, monitor and report on aliens in their districts. Working with military intelligence, state police also reported on radical organisations and searched offices and homes and confiscated prohibited items under the authority of warrants issued by military commandants. Police collected evidence and were witnesses for the prosecution on a variety of charges under War Precautions Act including the use of seditious language. Critically, as Burgmann observes, police compiled lists of members of unlawful associations from evidence obtained during police raids. These lists were forwarded to military intelligence who in turn, passed information to the censors. At the same time the Special Intelligence Bureau also organised raids on rooms and meetings as well as homes. Under Major

155 MI5 maintained a card index of suspicious persons based on the pre-war register of aliens. By the end of the war the card index also included British subjects. Information was fed to MI5 from police reports and surveillance of suspects as well as targeted postal censorship. See Andrew, Secret Service, 176.
156 For example, confirmation of the new address of the Sydney soviet at Box 15, PO Haymarket is confirmed in the notes of week ending 14 July 1919, QF4554.
157 Finnane, Police and Government, 60.
158 Andrew observes that a similar situation developed in the UK where police special branches conducted raids on the offices of disloyal organisations and persons on behalf of MI5. See Andrew, Secret Service, 194.
159 Scott, Australia During the War, 108.
160 Scott extends this point observing that local police knowledge of the community in fact saved many a German from malicious accusations (Scott, Australia During the War, 108). However, as Fischer indicates, Scott’s interpretation of internment was coloured by the information he was fed by government departments for the official war history (Fischer, Enemy Aliens, 60–62). Scott’s remark that Germans who did not heed advice to keep low profiles were ‘suddenly consigned to a concentration camp to meditate upon [their] folly’ supports Fischer’s critique (Scott, Australia During the War, 109).
161 Fewster, ‘Expression and Suppression’, 156. For State–federal consultation over operations against the IWW also see Burgmann, Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, 204–224.
162 Burgmann, Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, 212.
Steward the Bureau embarked on a series of raids of homes and premises of radicals and anti-conscriptionists. Steward contacted Defence Minister Pearce to set up plans to take unified action across Australia against sedition.\(^{164}\)

The implementation of the War Precautions Regulations including censorship was primarily the function of the Department of Defence, but as David Day points out, ‘the Customs department played an important supportive role implementing decisions taken by the military’.\(^{165}\) For example, doubtful items such as imported radical publications were referred by frontline Customs inspectors for assessment by the Censor. Additionally, once a publication was identified on the prohibited list, Customs officers were responsible for enforcing orders on prohibited publications. Customs officers also checked the entry of immigrants and, from May 1915, the departure of aliens whose movements were controlled by the Aliens Restriction Order. Many of the wartime prosecutions of companies trading with the enemy were made by Customs officers acting on intelligence collected by military censorship. Suspect mail and cables were intercepted and passed to Customs for investigation and possible prosecution.

Tensions between the Hughes Federal government and the Ryan Queensland State government were a key factor that opened the way for the Commonwealth to emerge as a major player in the collection and analysis of intelligence. There were two key prongs to Commonwealth involvement outside the Defence department role in wartime intelligence: the short-lived Commonwealth Police and the CIB. The Bureau – with its counter-espionage function – ‘became the base on which later Commonwealth security agencies were built’,\(^{166}\) notably ASIO in 1949. The experiences of Britain and Australia in the Great War reinforced the failings of casual agents and hastened the professionalisation of the intelligence community.\(^{167}\)

Reports were shared upwards and across agencies at frequent intervals. For instance, Secret Agent 77 submitted daily reports to Captain Woods, military intelligence, which were collated for Commandant Brigadier-General G.G.H. Irving. Irving then forwarded these summaries as weekly reports under his letter to the Secretary, Department of Defence.\(^{168}\) Likewise, reports were routed from regional offices through the military district to HQ in Melbourne. Regional reports were on occasion annotated with ‘Copy to be sent South’, indicating that the subject matter was HQ

\(^{164}\) For information on CEB raids in late 1916 see Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, 210.

\(^{165}\) Day, *Contraband and Controversy*, 125–126. Burgmann also comments on the role of Customs officers in the suppression of IWW publications in *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, 211.

\(^{166}\) Finnane, *Police and government*, 61.

\(^{167}\) For information on the wider British Commonwealth experience, see Andrew and Dilks, *Missing Dimension*, 8; and Andrew, *Secret Service*.

\(^{168}\) For an example see Brigadier-General G.G.H. Irving, Commandant 1MD to Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne, 16 December 1919 with attachment of selected daily reports from Secret Agent 77 to Captain Woods, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
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material. At the same time, 77 frequently met Ainsworth of the SIB who coordinated agent investigations in Queensland and managed their salaries.

How the censors and military intelligence worked together in the First Military District is illustrated by a censor’s comments that ‘the fact that military authority is a check against Government leniency or sympathy saves Queensland from a condition of affairs which would develop rapidly into something approaching mob rule or Bolshevism’. State and federal authorities were concerned about monitoring foreigners’ immigration to, and activities inside Queensland. A close reading of government correspondence on Russians in Queensland indicates that these concerns were present before Australia’s entry into the Great War, but that the passing of the War Precautions Act consolidated regional concerns into a national system of monitoring foreigners and dissenters.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the historical context for the development of Australian intelligence agencies. The federal government’s perception that disloyalty and sedition were strongest in Queensland led to increased vigilance by intelligence agencies in that state. Particular attention was paid to foreigners such as the Russians who were seen to be colluding with other disloyalists.

The War Precautions Act 1914 and Unlawful Associations Act 1916 mobilised the home front for war, and social tensions inevitably rose as the state sought to identify and subjugate the enemy within. Mass postal and cable censorship was introduced under these laws, enabling censors and military intelligence to collect information that was required to monitor and act on cases of disloyalty. At the same time the treatment of foreigners was codified through the introduction of a national passport system controlled by the Commonwealth. The key agency which enforced the War Precautions Regulations was the military intelligence section of the Department of Defence. It was aided by the work of the Censor’s Office, state police, Special Intelligence Bureau and Commonwealth Police. Censorship and surveillance of the RWA was increased as part of the wider suppression of disloyalty on the home front.

As the war progressed, mass censorship shifted its focus from monitoring the German enemy in Australia to systematically recording political trends in the domestic population, such as support for the IWW and the rise of communism. The censorship paper trail indicates explicit links between the wartime intelligence agencies as they worked together to monitor and suppress disloyalty. The analysis and distribution of the intelligence collected on the RWA by the Australian censorship network will be explored in following chapters.

169 See Russians in Townsville dated NQ 19 May 1919 and accompanying letters Captain Wills, Staff Office, Townsville to Captain Woods, Victoria Barracks, Brisbane, 24 May 1919 and Woods for Commandant 1MD to Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne, 11 June 1919, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA. Note the time lag of over three weeks between the initial regional report of 19 May and the forwarding to national HQ on 11 June 1919.

170 Censor’s notes, week ending 20 August 1919, QF4800.
CHAPTER 3

EARLY INTELLIGENCE ON THE RUSSIAN COMMUNITY

Introduction
This chapter explores the intelligence gathered on the emerging Russian community in Brisbane by the Queensland state government during the early 1910s, before examining the first years of federal censorship. It begins by drawing on Queensland state police files to piece together the types of investigations that were conducted on Russian immigrants to build early official understandings of the Russian community. Correspondence between the state government and federal government on wider issues such as immigration is also considered, as well as the tensions that arose between them over differences in how they treated Russian immigrants. Pre-war police reports and state-federal government correspondence are also analysed to provide useful background for the key focus of this chapter: the establishment of wartime censorship and surveillance under the *War Precautions Act*. Finally, censors' reports produced by the First Military District from 1914 through to 1917 are examined to draw out the administrative arrangements for postal interception as well as what information was collected by the censors. The analysis of the censors' reports is primarily qualitative, although some attention is paid to quantitative details to show the increasing size and scope of the censorship operation. Emerging themes are identified in the intelligence compiled by the censors to profile the RWA. This information was then fed into the new national, multi-agency network of surveillance.

Early surveillance of the Russians
Prior to federal establishment of a multi-agency, national intelligence and security network during the Great War, intelligence collection and analysis were primarily coordinated by state police forces. Queensland state police files on the Russian community during the early 1910s are mainly concerned with the investigation of alleged impostors and criminals. As Ross Johnson comments:

> The Anglo-Saxon element which dominated the power structure of Queensland had laid down a set of moral and social values, as to how everyone in the community should behave. … The police were called upon to interpret a myriad of regulations in seeking to give effect to these standards.\(^1\)

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Chapter 3: Early intelligence on the Russian community

It was within this Anglo-centric environment that Russian immigrants came to the attention of the authorities in Queensland. An early example of the policing which spawned from this environment is the tip-off that the Chief Secretary’s Department received in 1911 from self-proclaimed Russian spy F. Kechelly of Cairns. In a sensational letter he detailed the crimes of several Russians living in Queensland – poisoners, murderers, rapists, fraudsters, embezzlers – all of whom had evaded the law and prison to make their journey to Queensland. He included a thinly veiled threat to take his information to the press if the police did not act, which would expose Queensland as a harbourer of Russian criminals. These serious allegations were then followed up by the Queensland Police.2 Interviews with Russians, particularly workers on railway lines, were conducted around the state by local police officers in an attempt to verify the accusations and to trace Kechelly himself. A 1912 précis of correspondence reveals that police investigations, while not complete, instead painted a picture of hard working migrants, although it did note that several had shady pasts and peculiar personalities.3 In February 1912 the Commissioner of Police reported to the Chief Secretary’s Department that little evidence had been found to support Kechelly’s allegations.4 Although cleared by police of the allegations in this case, it is safe to conclude that the Russian community was now firmly on the radar of the authorities.

The representative of the Imperial Russian Consul in Brisbane, Benjamin W. Macdonald,5 often corresponded with the Queensland Police about matters concerning Russians and the law. An example of his correspondence appears in 1912 when he passed on information received from A. Howley, a Russian informant in New Zealand. The tip-off concerned Russian Nicholas Manowitch who it was alleged was posing as a Russian priest. The Queensland Police were thus informed of Manowitch before his arrival in the state. As a direct result, police investigations over the following year traced Manowitch’s movements and his unorthodox practices as a priest. Of particular concern to both the Russian Consul and the Queensland Police were the legal implications of any marriage ceremonies which Manowitch performed. Throughout 1912 the Queensland Police continued to correspond with Macdonald regarding Russian marriage traditions. In addition to cases like Manowitch, requests to help locate Russian subjects due for military service were made through the Consul and, on occasion, directly from Russian authorities. The Queensland Police also advised the Consul of the behaviour of Russians, such as Serger Arekin [sic] who stole from Russians in Mount Morgan to finance his return journey to Russia because poor health prevented him from working longer in Australia. He was sentenced in Australia to 12 months imprisonment in March 1914.6

2 For details of the Queensland Police’s investigations and communications with the Chief Secretary’s Department see Russians 1913–1954, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
3 Précis of Correspondence on the Subject of Allegations by Russian F. Kechelly, or Russian criminals being in Queensland, Commissioner of Police, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
4 Commissioner of Police to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary’s Department, Brisbane, 9 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
5 Macdonald was the Russian Consul for Queensland from 1907 to 1917. Originally from Scotland, Macdonald became a prominent figure in the shipping industry in Brisbane.
6 Extract Vide 6C.326, Serger Arekin, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
Chapter 3: Early intelligence on the Russian community

The extensive searches performed by the Queensland Police between 1913 and 1914 illustrate not only the cooperation between the police and the Russian Consul, but also the itinerant lifestyles of many Russian workers during this time. As is a common story for many new immigrants, it was exceedingly difficult for Russian immigrants to be able to practise their former professions in Australia. On occasion, Russians did contact the Commonwealth government about the process for gaining recognition of their skills and how to secure professional employment in Australia. Generally though, qualifications, skills and experience were not recognised, and most Russians in Queensland worked as unskilled labourers on state government railway projects or on the wharves.

Concerned citizens also provided information on alleged Russian misdeeds. In 1912, Mary Comyn, who had an office across the corridor from Marsh’s Labour Agency in Queen Street, hurriedly wrote a concerned letter directly to Commissioner of Police Major William Geoffrey Cahill when she learned that Russians at Kangaroo Point had made inquiries at the Labour Agency about the manufacture of axle-grease. Comyn suspected that the Russians were not immigrants at all, but were instead political refugees from Siberia. Her letter was promptly forwarded to Inspector Michael O’Sullivan, the newly promoted head of the Criminal Investigation Branch. The Queensland Police took her letter seriously enough to request a report from an analyst at the Government Chemical Laboratory on the chemical composition of axle-grease and its potential use in explosives. The response to Comyn’s letter may have been an overreaction, but the Queensland Police investigation did allow O’Sullivan’s colleague Detective Sergeant P. O’Hara to gather detailed (and soon to become valuable) background information on the Russians living at Kangaroo Point.

A major concern of state authorities prior to the war was the entry of Russian immigrants without identity documents. An international system of passports for international travel was just emerging and the processing of immigrants in Australia was governed by policy aimed at minimising non-European migration to Australia rather than conclusively verifying the identity of approved entrants. The entry of Europeans was almost unrestricted, particularly in the underpopulated northern regions such as the state of Queensland. State governments were officially responsible for

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7 Russian authorities wrote to the Queensland Police in August 1913 to help them inform Vasilie Lenin that he was due to fulfil his military obligations. Over the next few months, inquiries were made through regional police subinspectors to locate Lenin in Cairns and Mosman, Cloncurry and surrounding districts, Townsville and Selwyn. Despite wide-ranging investigations, the Queensland Police were forced to report back to their Russian counterparts in March 1914 that Lenin’s ‘present whereabouts cannot be ascertained’. See correspondence in Russians 1913–1954, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
8 See, for instance, Question as to whether a physician or surgeon, graduate of a Russian university, would be eligible for registration to practise his profession in Australia, 1914/4587, series A1, NAA.
9 Mary Comyn, 127 Queen Street, Brisbane to Major Cahill, 27 February 1913, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
10 O’Sullivan had a 40 year career in the Queensland Police, entering in 1883 as a mounted constable and retiring in 1923 as deputy commissioner. His publication of memoirs Cameos of Crime (Sydney: Jackson and O’Sullivan, 1935) was welcomed as a ‘fascinating and thrilling story of most of the major crimes in Queensland during the time he was in the force’ in The Sydney Mail (9 October 1935), 4.
11 Memorandum, Thomas McCall, Assistant Government Analyst, Government Chemical Laboratory to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 28 February 1913, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
12 For early information on Mendrin and tensions with the Russian community, see O’Hara’s report of 1 March 1913, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
immigration and monitoring passenger arrivals and departures. But this responsibility was not matched by action as no national or state-wide record keeping system existed to register immigrants or regulate their movements. There was no mention of the control of passports in the *War Precautions Act* passed in 1914, but subsequent Regulations transferred this function from the States to the Commonwealth. It was not until the War Precautions (Passports) Regulations were passed in June 1916 that the passport’s function as a national security tool was confirmed.13

Prior to these wartime changes, European immigrants were allowed into Australia if they were healthy and fit enough to work. In general immigrants were expected to present some identification documents – such as birth certificates or exit passes from their country of origin – but the procedure for customs officers to interpret the validity of these papers was unclear. There are even accounts of Russian immigrants successfully presenting Russian theatre programs in lieu of identity papers in the works of Solomon Stedman and Boris Christa.14 Correspondence between the Russian Consul and the Queensland Police show that police were aware that Russians entering the state should hold exit and identity documents; only those Russians who left Russia legally should have correct papers. Rumours of Russian escapees – criminal or political – disembarking in Queensland and slipping past lax federal customs caused anxiety in state circles. The lack of documents held by Russian immigrants continued to be ongoing issue for some years.

In 1912 and 1913 concerns were raised by the Queensland government about Asiatic Russians, especially those without passports. Correspondence flowed between State and federal agencies. For Queensland, ‘the main thing [wa]s to shut them out’.15 Queensland Premier Digby Denham, telegraphed the Commonwealth government in May 1912 about the arrival of undesirable Russian subjects via Japanese mail steamers. The telegram requested that federal customs officers ‘make thorough examination physically and otherwise’ of Russian subjects arriving in the port of Brisbane.16 Malcolm Shepherd, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, replied that customs staff would arrange with quarantine authorities ‘for careful investigations … with a view to preventing admission of any Russian subjects coming under prohibition of Immigration Act’.17 He indicated that he would like to be furnished with details of any unsatisfactory experience of Russian immigrants. Premier Denham also invited Premier James McGowen of New South Wales ‘to

15 Chief Secretary’s Office, Brisbane to Prime Minister, 18 August 1913, 15/11795, series A1/1, NAA.
16 Telegram, Premier of Queensland to M.L. Shepherd, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, forwarded to Prime Minister's Department, 22 May, 1912, Immigrants, Undesirable Russians, 1912/1378, series A2, NAA.
17 Telegram, M.L. Shepherd, Secretary, Department of External Affairs to Premier of Queensland, copy to Prime Minister's Department, 22 May 1912, 1912/1378, series A2, NAA.
cooperate … in this matter by also insisting that such Russian immigrants seeking to land in New South Wales will be refused admission unless they have passports’.18

In July 1913 Under Secretary McDermott of the Chief Secretary’s Office in Queensland wrote to the Commissioner of Police requesting that the police ‘visit every steamer arriving from eastern Asiatic ports … to prevent any Russian immigrant on board thereof, who has no passport, from landing in Queensland’.19 However, this stop-gap approach by the state authorities was complicated by federal advice – the Commonwealth Immigration Act did not support the Queensland government’s effort to prevent Russians without passports from landing. This multi-agency and jurisdictional problem encompassed the Queensland State Police, Water Police, Chief Secretary’s Department as well as the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department and Customs and Excise Office. The resulting decision to continue to allow Russians to enter Queensland without additional scrutiny prompted the Police Commissioner in 1913 to send a state-wide memo stating that ‘the police should, so far as possible, keep quietly in touch with these people’.20 This directive consolidated early checks on Russian immigrants and careful report writing by members of the CIB into a sustained state-wide effort. The reports combined quantitative analysis of the number of immigrants landing as well as comments about the type of immigrants arriving.21

Detective Sergeant P. O’Hara specialised in local Russian affairs and maintained close contact with the Russians he investigated in Brisbane. Based on a year’s worth of investigations, in February 1913 he reported to his superior Inspector O’Sullivan that ‘about 75% of those alleged immigrants are of the criminal class, whilst a few only are political offenders. … On arrival in this country, they all represent themselves as politicals’.22 His report also alludes to gangs and victimisation within the fledgling Russian community. The report reflects the anxiety of the time that Queensland had little control over the arrival of European passengers and was unwittingly letting in foreign criminals. In O’Hara’s eyes, failure to produce identity papers was an indication of unlawful behaviour, namely illegally leaving the Russian empire and falsely representing oneself in Australia. However, some Russians arriving in Australia were political exiles who had by necessity fled homelands without securing official permission to do so. Advice from the federal government to Premier Digby Denham reflected this view advising that the Commonwealth was ‘unable to see its way to exclude, under the provisions of the Immigration Act 1901–1912, Russians who are of pure European race,

18 D. Denham, Premier of Queensland, Brisbane to Premier of New South Wales, 11 July 1912, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA.
19 P.J. McDermott, Under Secretary, Chief Secretary’s Office, Brisbane to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane 17 July 1913, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA. See also Russians 1913–1954, 318868, series 16865; and Russians 1913–1954, 317879, series A16865, QSA.
20 Memorandum, Major Cahill Commissioner, Office of Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 23 July 1913, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
21 See O’Hara’s covering report and the attached lists, Russian Immigrants who have arrived in Queensland, including those who arrived by the S.S. Inaba Maru, on the 24 May Ultimo, 30 June 1913, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
22 Copy of Report Relative to Russians arriving in Queensland as immigrants, P. O’Hara, Detective Sergeant, Criminal Investigation Branch, Queensland Police to The Officer in Charge, CIB, Brisbane, 13 February 1913, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA.
merely on the ground of their not being possessed of passports’. Similarly Prime Minister Joseph Cook also indicated to Premier Denham later that year:

It is not considered that the possession of a passport is an absolute indication of suitability, nor likewise that non-possession justifies prohibition, as it has been ascertained from enquiry that, whereas it is an easy matter for a criminal Russian to become the holder of a passport which does not rightfully belong to him, the non-possession may indicate nothing more than that the person was a political offender, who under the different conditions of Australian life might prove a desirable immigrant.

During a visit to Queensland in August 1913, Mr Peters of Customs responded to Atlee Hunt, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, on the situation of Russians without passports in Queensland. He indicated that he had experienced difficulty in obtaining more information from McDermott of the Chief Secretary’s Office and that the Senior Inspector of Police ‘said he did not know much about the matter and could not give me any information’. More seriously however, information provided by the Chief Secretary's Office to the Commissioner of Police, Challinor, was not supported by the independent interviews Peters conducted with Railway Department employees and members of the Russian community. Peters reported he was not able to verify O’Hara’s estimate that 75% of Russians arriving from the East were of the criminal class; indeed Peters’s sources indicated a figure of not more than 10%. Upon visiting the landing of the S.S. Eastern (one of vessels journeying to Brisbane from Asia) and observing how Quarantine, Customs and State Police officers dealt with a Russian man who failed to produce a passport, he concluded:

It seems a pity that the State acted so precipitately in this matter. If they had told us officially that they intended to take such steps from a certain date, the legal points could no doubt have been dealt with by the two Governments before any trouble arose. I also feel that if it had been pointed out to the shipping companies that there was an objection to the admission of Russians without passports and that there was also a possibility of their being rejected, they would have advised their agents not to book passages for such persons, particularly as the proportion is so small.

It was reported that customs officers would target third class and steerage Russian passengers and ask for passports. If they failed to produce a passport, their case would be reported to the local police or the passenger would not be allowed to land. Federal Labor senator for the seat of Oxley in Queensland, Henry Turley, made representations to the Department of External Affairs for the

23 Joseph Cook, Prime Minister to Premier of Queensland, Brisbane, 27 November 1913, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA.
24 Joseph Cook, Prime Minister to Premier of Queensland, Brisbane, 27 November 1913, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA.
25 This is likely to be Albert Robert Peters who joined Customs Department Brisbane in 1899 before transferring to the then Department of External Affairs. Peters became the Assistant Secretary (Admin) of the Department of Interior in 1943, and Acting Secretary from 1945 until he retired in 1946. See Who's Who in Australia.
26 Peters, Customs House, Brisbane to Atlee Hunt, Department of External Affairs, Melbourne, 9 August 1913, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA.
27 See Confidential Circular, Atlee Hunt, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, to Collector of Customs, All States, 7 May 1913, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA. This was also the case for Chinese passengers; the situation led to much protest in the 1920s onwards.
practice to be stopped in 1915. In June that year, Prime Minister Andrew Fisher argued for the discontinuance of customs officers reporting to the police Russian immigrants from eastern ports who did not have passports on the grounds that ‘this practice was instituted in connection with representations made by your predecessor’. The new Premier T.J. Ryan agreed. It is likely that the Russian Club was keenly following this issue of travel documentation. Indeed, the Russian newspaper *Isvestiia* reported that Russian Consul General d’Abaza was keen for an internal reporting system for Russian immigrants in Australia.

State systems for reporting on foreigners such as the Russian immigrants working in Queensland were replaced by the regulations set out by the *War Precautions Act*. The War Precautions Regulations 1915 declared the possession of false passports or letters of safe conduct an offence. Aliens entering and exiting the Commonwealth were now required to have passports and it was an offence for aliens residing in Australia to pass under assumed names. A year later the War Precautions (Passports) Regulations 1916 tightened the definition of identity documents:

‘Passport’ means a passport issued or renewed not more than two years previously by, or on behalf of, the Government of the country of which the person to whom it relates is a subject or citizen, and which is still in force, or some other document satisfactorily establishing the nationality and identity of the person to whom it relates, to which passport or document there is attached a photograph of the person to whom it relates.

These new regulations created problems for Russians who had entered Australia with scant documentation when they tried to leave Australia to return to Russia after the 1917 revolutions. An impossible situation had developed whereby Russians with superseded Imperial papers were refused departure. Additionally, any new papers which had been issued by Soviet consul Simonoff were not recognised. Russian immigrants without the necessary documents were literally caught in red tape.

**First reports on the formation of a Russian Club**

The information state authorities collected on Russians in Brisbane can be put under two umbrellas: immigration and crime. The two areas were closely interlinked in the popular discourse of the time. Against this backdrop of alleged criminal misconduct and immigration irregularities, the formation of the Russian Club in early 1911 was brought to the attention of the Queensland state

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28 See response to Senator Turley, Parliament House, Melbourne from Department of External Affairs, 18 June 1915, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA.

29 Andrew Fisher, Prime Minister, Melbourne to Premier of Queensland, Brisbane, 23 June 1915, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA. For Ryan’s reply, see T.J. Ryan, Premier, Chief Secretary’s Office, Brisbane to Prime Minister of Commonwealth, Melbourne, 5 July 1915, 1915/442, series A2, NAA.


31 See War Precautions (Passports) Regulations 1916 – definition of passport, 66/6/18, series BP4/1, NAA for briefings from Major E.L. Piesse, Chief of the General Staff, Department of Defence to Commandant, First Military District on amendments to this definition in 1917. A useful summary of Special Defence Legislation is provided in the Official Year Books published by the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics. For changes to regulations concerning passports see pp 1038–1040 of no 11, 1901–1917 (published 1918).
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authorities in May of that year by the Russian Consul in Brisbane. Initially it appears that the Russian Consul-General A.N. d’Abaza (who was based in Melbourne) viewed the society favourably, and he invited his representative in Brisbane, Macdonald, to be the society’s patron. A few months later, Macdonald, under instructions from d’Abaza, sought the help of the Queensland Police to investigate the activities of ‘the so-called Russian society’ and the backgrounds of its leaders.\(^{32}\) This request resulted in an investigation and a lengthy report written by CIB detective P. O’Hara on the society, its member and their activities.\(^{33}\) Notes from O’Hara’s report on the Society were forwarded to Macdonald.\(^{34}\)

The report indicates that the first general meeting since the Society’s formation was held on Eight Hour Day in the Trades Hall, Brisbane. O’Hara confirms the Society’s aims of supporting newly arrived Russian emigrants, but notes that ‘the handling of the society, however, does not appear to be of a very energetic nature, and there seems to be little cohesion among the members’. According to O’Hara, the Club had no fixed address for meetings and only £20 in the bank, and had already lost its secretary due to insufficient remuneration of £3/10/– per month.\(^{35}\) Nevertheless, the fledgling club was accumulating books in Russian and kept records of its 70 paid members, most of whom were labourers or agricultural workers. A high proportion of members resided outside Brisbane. Of more importance to the Queensland Police, however, was the character of its membership and any affiliations the club might have with other groups. O’Hara specifically noted that the society was not affiliated with groups in Queensland or any other state. His concluding remarks – that ‘a number of the members of this Society, who reside in Brisbane, are known to me, and so far as I can ascertain, they are of good repute’ – appear to have satisfied the inquiry at the time and the file was closed.

The next appearance of the Russian Society in Queensland Police files concerned the participation of members in the 1912 General Strike. This strike was one of the few large-scale industrial actions against the government of Queensland since the major strikes of the 1890s. By the time the Russian Club was established in 1911, the Queensland labour movement had been involved in a series of protests that aimed to attack conservative politics. The success of the strikers in achieving this goal varied, but what is certain is that these strikes forged a formidable legacy of industrial action on which the Labor Party drew support. From 1890 to the end of World War I several events stand out in Queensland’s radical history: the Jondaryan Strike and the Brisbane Bootmakers’ Strike

\(^{32}\) MacDonald, Imperial Russian Consulate, Mary Street to Chief Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 23 May 1911, 86529, series 14812, QSA.

\(^{33}\) B.W. Macdonald to Queensland Police Commissioner, 23 May 1911 and Report by P. O’Hara on the Russian Society, 12 June 1911, 86529, series 14812, QSA.

\(^{34}\) Untitled report from Secretary to Macdonald, and Criminal Investigation Branch report by P. O’Hara, 12 June 1911, 86529, series 14812, QSA.

\(^{35}\) The precarious nature of the group’s finances persisted. In the last week of January 1919 the RWA received a demand for payment of £7/3/– rent owing for the past 11 weeks from solicitors representing landlord Miss Bowles of the Atlas Hotel, South Brisbane. See Bergin and Caine, Solicitors, Brisbane to Alexander Sossenko, Secretary, Russian Association, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 24 January 1919, QF2948.
1889–1890, the Maritime Strike 1890, the Pastoral Strikes 1891 and 1894, the Sugar Strike 1911, the Tramway and General Strike 1912, the North Queensland Railway Strike 1917, and the Townsville Meatworkers' Strike 1919. The 1911 strike was limited to legitimate union matters like wages and conditions in line with the moderate tactics of a wider movement committed to parliamentary participation. In contrast, the 1912 strike gave voice to hardline unionism. Perhaps harking back to the radicalism of the 1890s, the 1912 General Strike represented the struggle between a wide section of the labour movement and the might of civil authorities and big business. In 1912 the labour movement was militant, disillusioned, and able to persuade workers to join with strike committee vouchers redeemable for food. However, this organisation was short lived and the eventual collapse of the general strike showed ‘to many that the militants’ strategy was hollow, since the requisite working-class solidarity was not achieved’.36

Queensland Police staff Sergeant O'Hara and Sub-Inspector O'Sullivan filed at least five reports on Russians and their involvement in the General Strike of 1912. Besides communicating key observations about the growing political nature of the Russian Club, these reports also revealed that, at this early stage in the Club’s life, the Queensland Police were already using a regular informant or agent.37 Disparaging comments on individual morality, even to the extent of insinuating that the Russian activists were a threat, are detectable in the police reports. In his background checks on the Russian committee leaders,38 Inspector O’Sullivan included comments that Sergeyev was a labourer, socialist and escapee from Russia who was ‘residing … with a married woman whose husband is in the hospital’. The husband in hospital – almost an afterthought at the end of the sentence – subtly communicated that radicals like Sergeyev targeted the vulnerable who were unprotected from untoward influence.

Group involvement in the General Strike of 1912 was an excellent opportunity for the Russian group to promote itself within the wider labour movement. A Russian strike committee was formed to collect contributions which were funneled into the main strike fund. Many Russians volunteered their skills to organise and plan activities. Nicholas Dorf, who was working as a tramdriver at the time, was elected to the official strike committee and Sergeyev represented the Russian Club in its negotiations with Trades Hall. However, O'Hara’s interview with Mr Manowitch39 reveals that ‘a number of Russians [were] becoming restless’ and concerned by rumours that the Queensland

37 While O’Hara refers to ‘my informer’, O’Sullivan noted in his 26 February 1912 report that ‘the permanent services of an agent may be dispensed with, so that he may be at liberty to resume his employment, but still keep in touch with the other Russians and receive remuneration for any services rendered’.
38 Inspector O’Sullivan, Criminal Investigation Branch to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 5 January 1914, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
39 It is likely that Manowitch was providing information to O'Hara, but I cannot confirm whether or not he was a registered agent, or whether this Manowitch is the same Russian orthodox priest from 1912.
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‘government was intending to take action with view to deporting undesirables to Russia’. The dissatisfaction of Russians and workers in general with the progression of the strike was not purely political; many workers and their families endured financial hardship to support the unions despite being provided with food vouchers. It is also likely that some workers were obliged to go out on strike.

From O’Hara’s report of 25 February it can be concluded that this was the situation for some Russians who now found themselves in difficult circumstances with minimal assistance from their unions. Tired with the lack of ongoing support from the Strike Committee, Russians were becoming frustrated with the General Strike and some were starting to return to work. It was in the interests of the Queensland Police to report that strikers were tiring and returning to their lawful employment. Events at the Russian Club detailed the following week support the view that Russians were struggling to maintain their strike effort. The Russian Club, represented by Sergeyev, had sought information from the Strike Committee at Trades Hall on the continuation of the strike. Drawing on Manowitch’s account of Sergeyev’s report back to the Russian Club at a meeting on 26 February, it is quite likely that Sergeyev had asked about the return to work as he had been ‘advised that no one should return to work until advised to do so, by the Strike Committee’.

During the 1912 General Strike, the Russian Consul in Brisbane helped the Queensland authorities to identify striking Russian workers. Witworth, the clerk of the Russian Consul, identified striking Russians who were following a course of conduct that might lead to their deportation. Witworth’s warning about deportation as a consequence of strike action clearly struck a chord with many in the Russian community as later reports note the insecurity of Russian strikers, several of whom were rumoured to have travelled across the border to New South Wales or to be contemplating the journey to Japan ‘where they expect greater security from interference by the Russian government’.

Sergeyev’s involvement with the Strike Committee at Trades Hall was of critical importance to the Russian Club’s political coming of age and his ascent to its leadership. Through his work in February, Sergeyev was involved with the Strike Committee’s move to form a group of various union representatives to continue political propaganda until the elections. On 27 February 1912, the Acting Secretary of the Amalgamated Workers’ Association (AWA) informed a large meeting of Russian Club members that the Strike was over and workers could return to their jobs. Despite Anderson’s claim that ‘the assistance of the Russians was required to educate the labor people in

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40 P. O’Hara, Further Information in Connection with the Russian Society, 21 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
41 P. O’Hara, Russian Society and the Strike, 25 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
42 P. O’Hara, Russian Society and their Connection with the Strike, 28 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
43 M. O’Sullivan, Re Russians connected with the Strike, 26 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
44 O’Hara, 25 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
45 The Amalgamated Workers Association was absorbed by the Australian Workers Union in 1913.
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Socialistic Doctrine’, O’Hara’s informant pointed out that Sergeyev commented ‘on what he termed the sheepishness and tameness of the strikers during the Strike’.46 Sergeyev was disillusioned with the way in which the action fizzled out after the initial mass call to action. Sergeyev’s militancy was further confirmed when he was reported to say that strikers in Russia are ‘all equally as well prepared and armed as the Police’.47 Nonetheless, recognition of the Russians’ support and action in the General Strike by the Strike Committee and wider labour movement helped galvanise calls from within the Russian Club to politicise the Association. O’Hara’s informant named ‘Sergeaff, Mazurin, Mendrin, Gulewich, Manowitch and Boldvin’ as the committee members (or agitators?) behind the unionisation of Russian Club.48

The committee leaders of the Russian society attracted the continued interest of the Queensland Police. The Russians’ activities attracted attention for two key reasons: they were aliens and they were involved in the radical fringe of the labour movement. A 1912 file shows that the Queensland Police forwarded information to the Attorney General’s Department for prosecution of an unregistered Russian newspaper *Echo Australia*.49 In 1914 Inspector O’Sullivan filed a report on background checks conducted on the committee leaders, Sergeyev, Rosalieff, Dorf, Pikunoff and Bolotinsky.50 All were identified as labouring workers and prominent socialists, and Sergeyev and Rosalieff were identified as escapees from Russia. On 26 July 1913, a three page, handwritten circular was issued by the Union of Russian Emigrants to Russian communities throughout Queensland, signed by committee members ‘T. Sergaeff, V. Pikunoff, N. Dorf, N. Rosalieff and J. Bolotinsky’. It proposed the building of a permanent home for the Russian society in Brisbane, to further the club’s role in supporting newly arrived immigrants. The circular even went so far as to suggest the establishment of a bureau to help with accommodation, employment and settlement. The circular also urged Russians not to ‘be frightened Comrades, that we are trying to do the impossible, but remember that if we all work together, hand in hand with energy, we will be able to carry the matter through’.51 This proposal was of concern to the Queensland Police. O’Hara noted that it was a joint venture with a branch of the Australian Socialistic League. His investigations suggest that ‘reliable information goes to show that the building is, in reality to be used as a Socialistic headquarters and possibly gambling den’ rather than a support centre for immigrants.52

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46 O’Hara, 25 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
47 O’Hara, 28 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
48 O’Hara, reports of 25 and 28 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA. There is no analysis in these reports of whether Gulewich and Manowitch are the same as the Gulavich (named in the Kechelly allegations) or the Manowitch (the unorthodox priest) investigated by the Queensland Police in 1911. It is likely that the connection of these individuals to the new Russian association was a source of concern for the Queensland Police.
49 Unfortunately it seems likely that the original contents of this case were filed elsewhere at a later date and only the annotated file cover for 964M remains, 86548, series 14812, QSA.
50 Inspector O’Sullivan, Criminal Investigation Branch to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 5 January 1914, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
51 Rough transcript of Russian circular Power in Unity, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
52 Report relative to circular written in the Russian Language, in connection with the proposed erection of a Socialist Hall, Detective P O’Hara, 18 November 1913, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
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While the prediction of a gambling den may have a projection of other social concerns onto the Russian proposal, the prediction of a socialist headquarters turned out to be accurate.

The establishment of a permanent base for the Russian community in Brisbane raised the question of what the term “headquarters” meant for the Australian authorities and the Russian club they were watching. While the Russian committee saw the headquarters as a place of energy where their community could come together to socialise, debate, learn, keep in contact with home and engage in the philosophical and political ideas of the era, the Queensland Police (and later military intelligence) viewed the headquarters as a place where undesirables would congregate with other disloyalists and lead others astray. O’Hara ends his report with a caution: ‘I certainly do not think that it would be desirable or in the interest of the Russian immigrants that they should be thrown on the mercy of those interested in this movement.’ It was the potential success of propaganda activities that was a real cause for concern. The existence of these activities gave rise to the danger of vulnerable or easily influenced sections of society being swayed by the perceived foreign malcontents. The authorities perceived association with radicals of any kind as evidence of sympathies for their cause. O’Hara’s suspicions of the potency of propaganda tools were confirmed by the success of the RWA’s newspapers. In 1915 the RWA proclaimed that its newspaper ‘helps us to form not only a clear and definite plan of action and a sense of class consciousness but also a broader understanding of the needs of the Australian worker’. This was seen as an important step in recruiting ‘new members from all the corners of our newly adopted country’.

The radical nature of the RWA and the Russian group’s participation in the 1912 General Strike confirmed long-standing suspicions in Queensland society about Russian immigrants. Their activities seemed to confirm and even escalate rumours that increasing numbers of Russians in Brisbane were political refugees. Queensland Police intelligence concluded that ‘several Russian agitators, who were accustomed to the revolutionary methods carried on in Russia, were found to be advocating similar drastic measures here’ during the critical 1912 General Strike. The foreign nature of the Russians’ politics contributed to the reflexive xenophobia in the wider conservative community when the activities of non-British immigrants were perceived to be challenging British cultural hegemony. This distrust was, on occasion, merged with other anxieties, such as community concerns about disruptions caused by industrial action or ongoing criminal activity. It was only a matter of time before anxious police memos were transformed into expressions of a formal

53 O’Hara was concerned generally with ‘card playing for money … carried on amongst the Russians’. These comments were not acknowledged by his colleagues in their responses to his reports. See item 317879, series 16865, QSA.
54 Report relative to circular written in the Russian Language, in connection with the proposed erection of a Socialist Hall, Detective P O’Hara, 18 November 1913, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
55 Izvestia 86 (12 August 1915). Summary in box 22 Russian language newspapers, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.
56 Peters, Customs House, Brisbane to Atlee Hunt, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 9 August 1913, 1915/11795, series A1, NAA.
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intelligence gathering machine ‘securing the public safety and the defence of the Commonwealth’.

The catalyst for this shift was the advent of the Great War.

Surveillance of the Russian community under War Precautions Regulations

The reports submitted by the six military districts to the Deputy Chief Censor’s (DCC) office in Melbourne reveal how the mechanics of mass cable and mail interception grew to meet the demands of the War Precautions Act and War Precautions Regulations. With a focus on intercepts relating to Russians in Brisbane, this section aims to map key themes in the censors’ reports to the end of 1917. A quantitative overview of relevant censors’ reports is provided in table 3.1. The rationale behind this chronological focus is to capture administrative trends as well as emerging themes. For example, in 1917 new QF prefixed censors’ reports from the First Military District in Brisbane were introduced. These reports largely concentrated on the correspondence of the IWW and other radical political groups. The QF reports are a rich source of detailed commentary on radical groups and personalities from 1917 to the end of wartime censorship in 1919. The correspondence, meetings and activities of the RWA were increasingly covered by the QF reports.

Also pertinent to the RWA and its links with Russians in other states, MF prefixed censors’ reports were introduced in the 3MD in Melbourne during 1917. Like its Queensland counterpart, the MF reports tracked the correspondence of radical left-wing groups. Another factor contributing to a change in or strengthening of surveillance was the establishment of the Commonwealth Police and the Special Intelligence Bureau.

Table 3.1: First Military District, Queensland by report type 1915–1917

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report type</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Reports logged</th>
<th>Reports related to RWA</th>
<th>International post</th>
<th>Domestic post</th>
<th>Russian language items</th>
<th>Subscriptions to media and activities</th>
<th>Items dealing with money</th>
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<td>198</td>
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First Military District censors’ reports at the beginning of the war contained only the bare details of intercepted cables and mail, and concentrate primarily (as is to be expected at the outset of war) on German issues. These reports were submitted to headquarters under the title District 1 for the week ending 14 November 1914. This short, partly handwritten file simply records the date, sender and addressee of intercepted correspondence along with a brief (typically one line) summary. A fortnight later, the format had been tightened to form the QU prefixed reports, first submitted for the week ending 29 November 1914. Like their predecessor, the early QU reports focused mainly

57 Section 4(1), War Precautions Act 1914.
on the German community. The first appearance of Russian correspondence in the Brisbane censors’ reports is in the Q prefixed reports submitted for the week ending 12 June 1915. Replacing the QU prefix, the Q reports were a key reporting tool of the First Military District and continued until the dismantling of wartime censorship in late 1919. It is quite likely that the more detailed and politically comprehensive Q reports were a result of the government’s consolidation of its wartime regulations through successive amendments to the *War Precautions Act*. This analysis does not solely rely on the censors’ reports to complete the story of the Russian Workers’ Association during World War I, but the censors’ reports are important tools to understand the process by which the wartime government censored the Association’s correspondence and suppressed members’ political activities.

From the Q reports in 1915 and 1916 it is possible to gauge that the censors’ work broadened in its scope but narrowed in its ability to pinpoint connections between individuals and groups. The First Military District submitted reports on 1,300 items of postal correspondence between the weeks ending 12 June 1915 and 30 December 1916. Examination of these records indicates that 122 of these intercepted documents were directly related to the affairs of Russians in Queensland on the following grounds: the items were addressed to or from a Russian personality or address, they were written in the Russian language, or they related to the publication of or subscription to a Russian organisation. This number excludes Russian language correspondence of a purely business nature or between Russian correspondents unrelated to the Russian community in South Brisbane. The increased familiarity of the censors with the personalities, addresses, organisations and issues related to Russians in Brisbane is evident even in the first thousand reports. The watch lists of names and addresses used by the censors were gradually expanded and updated to respond to the censorship task. Even changes within the Russian Workers Association, such as formal correspondence by the association and the use of its PO Box 10, South Brisbane address, enhanced the scope of the censors’ work.

The first Q reports, covering the second half of 1915, contain summaries of 198 intercepts. Eleven were either from or to Russians in Queensland and 3 of these were directly addressed to or from the Russian Association, South Brisbane. In addition to this number, the reports reveal that a noticeable proportion of intercepted correspondence came from the South Brisbane post office. Censors’ comments focused on the international correspondence of Russians in Brisbane particularly with political organisations. The intercepts document that Russians in Queensland had

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58 The files document the unfolding administrative processes of censorship. Interestingly the QU prefixes have been handwritten on each item after the report had been compiled; hence QU1 has been allocated to a letter dated 3 June 1915 whereas QU193 to a letter dated 2 December 1914. These documents are held in series BP4/2 and MP95/1, NAA.

59 I was not able to locate watch lists of names and addresses from this period of censorship, but the existence of substantial lists produced towards the end of the war confirms the likelihood that earlier lists of names and addresses were used by censorship staff. Additionally, Ainsworth’s diaries (Vols 1–3, series BP230/3, NAA) from his time in the Special Investigation Bureau note regular indexing of common lists used by the Censors’ Office and the Intelligence Section General Staff, First Military District.
standing correspondence with groups and individuals in Switzerland and the United States (the two primary centres of exiled Russian activism). All 11 intercepts were international mail; 7 were in Russian and 2 in French. Queensland Russians were subscribing to the well-known Russian political publications *Novy Mir* and *Golos Truda* in New York and also to Geneva based organisations such as the Kracow Society for Political Prisoners in Russia, Ukrainian Society, Russian Library and Russian Club. Nine intercepts were related to subscriptions, 4 to money orders and 1 was a discussion paper on *Golos Truda* from a Russian group in Manchuria. The subscriptions included requests by Russians in Queensland for technical books as well as language texts. The Swiss-based Russian groups included in these intercepts were directly linked with the international radical diaspora and were well-known for distributing political propaganda to displaced Russians around the world.

The censors’ comments in Q reports in 1915 picked up on foreign language items, particularly those of a political nature. It is likely at this stage of the war that the censors were still in the initial phase of compiling comprehensive lists of names, addresses, prohibited publications and ideas to be intercepted, rather than the detailed discussion of the persons and ideas being intercepted as are characteristic of later wartime censorship. This is evident in the censors’ comments on correspondence involving Krakow Society for Political Prisoners in Russia in 1915 in which the censor simply noted that the ‘Kracow union is anti-Russian in sentiment with pro-German inclinations; moreover Krakow or Cracow is in enemy territory’. Similarly, a censor justified the holding of pamphlets on grounds that Geneva was ‘the head quarters of Russian revolutionary society’, the nature of which was not explored. In fact the RWA had a longstanding relationship with the Krakow Society and its newspaper *Isvestia* regularly published appeals for increased financial help on behalf of the Society. The focus of the censors’ analysis was on any identifiable links with Germany rather than connecting the organisation with a potential radical threat in Australia. This said, a receipt for monies received by the Krakow Society for Political Prisoners in Russia addressed to the Russian Association in Brisbane was clearly noted in the censors’ comment to this intercept. The censors were on the lookout for any evasion of the WPR. Foreign pamphlets sent to Brisbane attracted attention if they were not addressed to the Censors’ Office for censorship. The potential evasion of the WPR was often considered more important than the content of the publication that passed without comment in the reports. For instance, the crux of the censor’s comment on Russian and French language pamphlets sent from the *Société des Abrainiens de Geneve* to Mr Harchenko in Brisbane is that ‘these pamphlets had passed through GPO Sydney and are evidently not being censored as they were not addressed to this office for

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60 For instance, 10 parcels of technical books were being sent by *Novy Mir*, New York to W. Yudoeff, Cairns, 9 December 1915, Q128.
61 This society was known by a variety of names including Cracow Society for Aid of Political Prisoners and Cracow Union of Assistance for Political Prisoners. The records of this organisation are held by the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI).
62 Censor’s notes, week ending 11 September 1915, Q57; and week ending 7 November 1915, Q94.
63 See for instance *Isvestia* 86 (12 August 1915). Summary in box 22 Russian language newspapers, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.
64 Censor’s notes, week ending 7 August 1915, Q33.
Staffing issues might have contributed to this oversight. The censors’ reports indicate a shortage of language specialists, necessitating that a great many foreign language items were held for translation and submitted with the weekly submissions to HQ. Some letters were delayed for several months before a decision could be reached on their status.

While it can not be concluded that the censors initially overlooked letters between Russians in Australia, the censors’ reports in later years do feature a substantially higher proportion of domestic correspondence. There could be a twofold explanation for this absence of letters between Russians in the early intercepts. First, the primary focus of postal censorship in the early years was to target correspondence with the enemy: Germany and its territories. Gradually as Australian censorship became more sophisticated through increased national coordination – and thus responsive to the domestic home front – intercepts targeted the disloyal and disgruntled at home as well as those colluding with the enemy overseas. Second, as the international correspondence of Russians was gradually strangled by wartime regulations, the home front environment became more focused on foreign disloyalists. It is also likely that Russians throughout the Commonwealth began to turn to the diaspora in Australia for information as links with their overseas counterparts were strangled by censorship and wartime conditions.

During 1916 the number of items reported escalated, as did the level of detail recorded. Entries increasingly included key quotations from original correspondence in a numbered, dot-point format and the censors’ notes section expanded to include the beginnings of a cross-referencing system and commentary on the sender and addressee and their affiliations. As in 1915, most intercepted correspondence was international with only 2 of the total 111 Russian related reports being domestic mail items. This could indicate that the censors were focusing their attentions on international mail and cables as the enemy within the home front had not overtaken the threat of the enemy abroad at this early stage of the war. Indeed an analysis of the vast quantity of domestic letters featured in the censors’ reports from 1917 to 1919 supports this interpretation. Fifty-four intercepts of the total 111 intercepts in the later years were from or addressed to the RWA or its South Brisbane post office box. Ninety-six of the intercepts were Russian, with Polish, Finnish, French and Yiddish also being identified by the censors. The war censors’ offices were still understaffed and lacking appropriately skilled translators and, as in 1915, censors noted that originals were kept until translation could be arranged.

Fifty-one intercepts during the 1916 period show that Russians in Queensland continued to seek publications and 15 sent money orders to confirm subscriptions to international newspapers and

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65 Censors’ notes week ending 10 July 1915, Q13.
66 For instance, Q94, Q112 and Q128. These items were intercepted in November and December 1915 and were not released until January 1916.
67 While most intercepts were released between one and three months, Q316 was held for inspection in the week ending 10 July 1916. The item was L. Vechorek of Brisbane’s subscription (money order 14 shillings) to Novy Mir in New York. A decision was finally made on 5 November 1918 to return the item to its sender.
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journals despite the restrictions placed on this activity by the War Precautions Regulations. The journals include: *Novy Mir* (New York), *Rabochaya Rech* (Chicago), *Solidarity* (Chicago), *En Avant* (Geneva), *Golos Truda* (New York), *Free Word* (New York), *Russians Life* (Detroit), and *Journal de Debat* (Paris). *L’Ukraine et la Guerre*, *Haydamaka* (Knights of Ukraine, New Jersey), *Strahdneeks* (Lettish, Boston), *Pracia* (Brazil) and the anarchist *Social Democrat* (Bern) were also listed. Additionally, some Queensland Russians were corresponding with the Russian Consultation Bureau in Detroit and renowned editor of *Novy Mir*, Max Maisel. The continued subscription to prohibited publications – even after intercepts were repeatedly returned to sender – contributed the label of disloyal being applied to Russians.

Russians in Queensland were not only receiving newspapers from abroad: they were actively promoting their own publications to other groups. Editions of *Isvestia* and later *Workers’ Life* were being sent around Australia through the postal system. It is likely that domestic distribution was bolstered with “safe hand” delivery person to person. The RWA analysed the developing war in the pages of its newspapers calling upon ‘the worker to resist the hypnotic call of the exponents of “defend your mother”’ as well as exploring the fate of Germans in Australia and the economic impact of the war on the economic situation on the home front. A scathing critique of the new legislation passed by the Commonwealth predictably concluded that:

> The military, narrow nationalistic internal politics of the Federal government with its war time laws, patriotic jingoism and mindless expenditure of public money have led to a significant deterioration of personal liberty and a decline of standard of living amongst the Australian workers.68

International correspondence to and from *Workers’ Life* is present in the 1916 censors’ reports.69 Perhaps in response to reports on *Workers’ Life*, the First Military District Censor submitted information ‘re Russian Association and its paper *The Workers Life*’ to the Deputy Chief Censor in Melbourne to be passed to Russian Consul-General d’Abaza.70 In December 1916, the First Military District Censor’s Office intercepted a Russian language book published in Brisbane being sent to *Golos Truda*. Unfortunately the subject matter of the book was not recorded, but the Brisbane censor did note that it was ‘addressed to an undesirable Russian-American paper’.71 A similar comment was made by the Deputy Chief Censor when the First Military District asked for advice on a £20 contribution to the Russian Political Prisoner’s Relief Committee: ‘it is not

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68 See for instance *Ivestia* 59 (4 February 1915), 64 (11 March 1915), 72 (6 May 1915), 76 (3 June 1915), 104 (16 December 1915) and 110 (3 February 1916). Summaries in box 22 Russian language newspapers, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library.

69 *Workers’ Life*, Russian Weekly, Brisbane to Leo Deutch, New York, 29 June 1916, Q384; Mr Polansky, Geneve to *Workers’ Life*, South Brisbane, 15 June 1916, Q498; *Workers’ Life*, Russian Weekly, Brisbane to Bibiloteque Russe, Geneve, 31 August 1916, Q558; *Strobodnaye Slovo*, New York to A. Klark, South Brisbane, 31 August 1916 (censor noted ‘PO Box in address Russian Association of *Workers’ Life*’) Q559; Thomas Katz, Chicago to *Workers’ Life*, South Brisbane, 2 August 1916, Q560; *Russians Life*, Detroit to *Workers’ Life*, Brisbane, 5 August 1916, Q561; and *Workers’ Life*, Russian Association, Brisbane to Mr Polansky, Geneve, 18 September 1916, Q647.

70 See censors’ notes on Censor, Brisbane to Deputy Chief Censor, Melbourne, 16 March 1916, Q224.

71 John Drokhoff, Brisbane to *Golos Truda*, New York, 13 December 1916, Q1002.
considered desirable that this remittance shall be allowed to go forward”. Connections between Russians and other disloyal groups started to be noted. Correspondence between B. Bohranger of Chicago and J. Zaremba of Cairns was held and enclosed with the weekly report. The censor's comment on this item noted that the item was 'bearing the imprint of the IWW'.

Links between the scourge of the Left, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the RWA were increasingly observed in the coming years, further reinforcing the official view of disloyal Russians.

Archival records show that 1,600 Q reports were logged during 1917 and 24 of these are directly relevant to the RWA. Eight are items addressed to or from the RWA, 11 are Russian language items with 8 relating publications or subscriptions. As in previous years, a greater number of international items were intercepted – 17 international versus 7 domestic. At first glance the selection of 1.5% of reports seems minimal. The small number of intercepts in the Q reports can be explained by the establishment of the QF reports, which focused on left-wing sedition associated with the IWW movement. The scope of the censors' dragnet extended from trade unions and ALP officials through to groups such as RWA. Of the approximately 460 intercepts recorded in the QF reports, around 10% were directly relevant to the RWA (in total 45). Sixteen are items addressed to or from the RWA, 27 are in Russian and 17 relate to publications and subscriptions. A major trend in 1917 is the rapid decline in international mail (5 items) of the RWA being intercepted by the censors and the rise in domestic correspondence (40 items) being censored. This can be explained in two ways. First, the impact of the War Precautions Regulations limited international mail to and from enemy areas and second, the censors began to tap into the rich domestic network being established by the RWA. It could be the case that the volume of domestic correspondence also increased in 1917 as Russians and others in the labour movement discussed the February and October Revolutions.

It is likely that the First Military District office continued to be under resourced to deal with the range and volume of foreign language correspondence being intercepted. Original letters, as in previous years, were still enclosed with the weekly reports and submitted to the Deputy Chief Censor for interpretation. The Deputy Chief Censor's decision on items submitted for translation is not always recorded on the initial Q entry, but for several items intercepted in the first few months of 1917 a decision was made by HQ on the status of the item within a few weeks. A considerable change in the format and detail of the censors' reports is detectable from Q1900, or the report of the week ending 5 May 1917. Entries began to include longer extracts, full street addresses and expanded censors’ notes. Deputy Chief Censor's decisions on withheld mail were now routinely recorded as well as background on the correspondents. This background information was drawn from censors' notes and reports from military intelligence. A rise in Russian language

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72 It is worth noting that while the Deputy Chief Censor directed that Gray's letter and documents should be returned to him, the bank draft continued to be held at the Deputy Chief Censor's office in Melbourne. See Gray, Russian Association, Brisbane to M.J. Silberstein, Lausanne, 17 October 1916, Q743.

73 Censors' notes, week ending 28 October 1916, Q752.
correspondence being received by the Railway workshops in Ipswich can be detected in 1917.74 This is a side trend that becomes notable when a breakaway group based in Brisbane is brought to the censors’ attention later in 1918. Intercepted domestic correspondence to and from the Russian Association shows that the organisation was in regular contact with Ipswich and Port Darwin.75 At this stage the censors’ reports do not give a translation of original items, but administrative summaries indicate that most letters were released. A key distinction between the Q and QF reports is the higher percentage of copies of letters and in some cases original items held by the censors for QF intercepts.

The First Military District had Staff Offices in Cairns, Townsville and Darwin and staff on Thursday Island. This surveillance network covered the entire state and employed the most staff of any MD during the Great War. Captain S.S. Wills was based in Townsville. His area covered the northern districts around Townsville, Selwyn, Ayr, Cloncurry, Dobbin, Dolomite and Mount Cuthbert. From February 1918, he replaced Lieutenant E. Barker as the Darwin Censor. It is likely that the Censors Office and military intelligence shared staff in regional areas. In Darwin, Mr Geraghty, the Subcollector Customs, also served as the Assistant Censor. Thursday Island, a meeting place in the multicultural north, was also the most outlying Australian port. The Censor on Thursday Island, Lieutenant Meredith of the Royal Australian Garrison Artillery (RAGA), like censors in major cities, had a dual reporting responsibility, to the Deputy Censor in Brisbane as well as to Major Wearn, RAGA, the Officer in Charge, Thursday Island Defence Port. Wearn then submitted information to military intelligence.

An example of how regional censors balanced the implementation of the War Precautions Regulations with the constraints of war conditions is the 1917 interception of the Japanese trading vessel the *S.S. Nikko Maru* that plied the waters between Australia and Japan. The ship also took passengers journeying from Australia to Russia. Lieutenant Meredith demonstrated his diligence to his job a search of the *S.S. Nikko Maru* on 3 June 1917, when the ship was in port at Thursday Island.76 Meredith reported that he seized eight publications and three letters from Russian passenger Frank Madiursky. This material was forwarded to the Censor’s Office in Brisbane by Major Wearn, presumably for detailed analysis.77 Meredith’s itemised list reveals that the publications were not selected because they were on the prohibited list, but rather because they were left-wing political items or in a foreign language. Likewise, the letters dealt with radical politics or were in Russian. Carriers of foreign language items (destined for hand-to-hand delivery in Russia) were assumed to be ‘evading censorship’. Books such as *The Cog in the Machine of Sabotage*

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74 Seattle to George Popoff, Railway Workshops, Ipswich, 17 November 1916 (intercepted week ending 6 January 1917), Q1063.
75 See Unknown, Ipswich to John Grey, Russian Association, Brisbane, 22 January 1917, Q1211; and John Grey, Russian Association, Brisbane to R. Shesgpleff, Port Darwin, 24 January 1917, Q1212.
76 G.P. Meredith, Lieutenant RAGA, Censor Thursday Island, to Officer in Charge, Thursday Island Defence Port, 6 June 1917, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
77 G. Wearn, Major RAGA, Thursday Island Defended Port to Intelligence Officer, First Military District, No 227 of 1917, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
and a letter from Tom Barker (one of the IWW Twelve later deported to Chile) were seized. Interestingly, Meredith did not seize all items: other ‘certain items of an advanced socialist nature were sealed and handed to the Captain of the Ship with a note to the Censor, Hong Kong for action’. Meredith’s judgement reflected the resources of regional offices. It could be the case that Meredith felt that the advanced items aboard the *S.S. Nikko Maru* would reach Hong Kong before his despatch to the Brisbane censor would arrive. Given that Madiursky ‘was leaving the country and a prosecution would have meant considerable expense and perhaps diplomatic difficulties with the present Russian regime’, Meredith allowed him to proceed to Hong Kong despite his liability under the War Precautions Regulations. It also seems likely that Meredith felt that Madiursky was little more than a carrier and did not warrant the effort it would take to prosecute him under the wartime regulations. As it was the literature and letters were easily seized and their damage to the home front had already been minimised.

Despite the prevalence of postal censorship, Australian censors were still coming across mail that attempted to evade regulations. Censors intercepted several letters addressed to the *Workers Life* and also money orders and postage stamps in the name of the Russian Association. This is evidence that the Russian Association was flouting the regulations concerning the publication of material under the War Precautions Regulations. Additionally, V. Taranoff, a member of the RWA, was sent a letter enclosing news clippings from Harbin. What interested the censors was that the ‘envelope does not bear any Russian censorship marks’. RWA members were also sending mail overseas under the cover of correspondence to publications. The censors intercepted a registered packet addressed to the Parisian *Journal des débats* that contained letters from Peter Utkin to different addresses hidden inside a legitimate manuscript for publication. It may have also been the case that unknown names were selected to receive correspondence for others. The censors appear alerted to this possibility commenting that one addressee, G.J. Grin, ‘receives [a] large number of letters in Russian’ care of his *Workers Life* address.

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78 See Markox [sic], 139 Elgin Street, Carlton, Melbourne to Russian Association, Stanley Street, Box 10, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 12 September 1917, QF275; Bercusin Pupcanob [sic], Bulli Hospital to *Workers’ Life*, PO Box 10, Brisbane, intercepted week ending 17 September 1917, QF292; Ivan Arboozza, Broken Hill to Mr Simonoff, *Workers’ Life*, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, Brisbane, intercepted week ending 17 September 1917, QF293; V. Mapyeyak [sic], 7 Patterson Place, South Melbourne to *Workers’ Life*, Russian Weekly, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, Brisbane, intercepted week ending 17 September 1917, QF294; J. Elfimopp, Trekalana, PO Duchess to *Workers’ Life*, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, Brisbane, intercepted week ending 30 September 1917, QF325; J. Zaboeff, PO Duchess via Townsville to *Workers’ Life*, Russian Weekly, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 30 September 1917, QF326; Innisfall, Russian Association, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 4 October 1917, QF343; and A. Resanoff, 23 Kent Street, Sydney to *Workers’ Life*, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 9 October 1917, QF356.

79 Unknown, Harbin to V. Taranoff, Poste Restante, GPO Brisbane, intercepted week ending 6 January 1917, Q1062.

80 Censors’ notes, week ending 6 January 1917, Q1062.


82 Unknown, Victoria to G.J. Grin, *Workers Life*, Brisbane, 24 April 1917, Q2207.
It became increasingly difficult for group resources such as the RWA Library to fulfil their subscriptions to international periodicals and new books. As Australian censorship became more precise, all correspondence related to publications on the prohibited list was simply held. Under Deputy Chief Censor’s order, money orders to renew subscriptions were to be returned to sender. It is likely that groups realised that organisational correspondence was more easily targeted than that of individuals and began to send their mail from a range of unknown individuals. For instance, considering the low salaries of Russian workers in outlying areas, it seems likely that the £8 subscription to *Golos Truda* sent by Blinkoff of Townsville represented the subscription of the local chapter of the Russian Association and not just Blinkoff’s personal effort.

It was not just Russians who tried to continue their international subscriptions to political publications in the face of the War Precautions Regulations. Member of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, Geoffrey Barber, never received his subscription offer from *The Masses* because it was held by the Deputy Chief Censor on the grounds that it was a prohibited paper. Barber’s subscription as a Member of Parliament almost certainly would have added to the image of collective disloyalty of the regime in Queensland in the eyes of the federal bureaucracy. Likewise, the censor held correspondence between the mouthpiece of the mainstream labour movement, *The Worker*, and the *St Louis Labor* on the grounds that the *St Louis* was a ‘newspaper of an undesirable character’. The way in which the First Military District office dealt with this case gives some clues about the relationship between the District offices and the DCC in Melbourne. The First Military District had submitted the *St Louis Labor* to the DCC with the suggestion that ‘this paper is not on [the] prohibited list but might be considered worth a place thereon’. The DCC could also request sample copies of new publications such as the *Evolution and Revolution* booklet that replaced the September 1917 edition of the *International Socialist Review*; intercepted en route to *The Worker*. By routinely intercepting and recording details of left-wing publications, the censors’ records mapped out links between authors, publishing companies, newspapers, editors and subscribers. Routine analyses of the intercepts were undertaken by the censors, but more detailed assessments were undertaken by the end users, namely military intelligence or the Special Intelligence Bureau.

Links between publications, the German ‘enemy’ and international ‘support’ groups were starting to be noted. The censors marked correspondence in the lead up to the abortive 1917 International Socialist Conference in Stockholm as emanating from German sources:

83 N. Blinkoff, Townsville to *Golos Truda*, New York, 22 April 1917, Q1865.
84 Max Eastman, Editor, *The Masses* to Geoffrey R. Barber, Parliament House, Brisbane, 23 April 1917, Q2023. See also *The Masses*, New York to Geoffery, R. Barber, Parliament House, Brisbane, 17 July 1917, Q2331; and *The Masses*, New York to Geoffery, R. Barber, Parliament House, Brisbane, 13 August 1917, Q2332.
85 *St Louis Labor*, St Louis, USA to *The Worker*, Brisbane, 7 April 1917, Q1968.
86 For example censors’ notes, week ending 24 November 1917, Q2495 reveal that publisher Charles H. Kerr and Company of Chicago used the *International Socialist Review* to promote Mark Fisher's book *Evolution and Revolution* to interested readers.
It would seem . . . that the Ukrainians are being used by the enemy as a stalking horse in connection with the Stockholm conference. Several books and documents . . . in connection with the propaganda among the Ukrainian subjects of Russia, have come under notice and have been stopped. That the propaganda has had its effect, is seen from the present condition of Russia.87

This is one of the clearest indicators that the censors were aware of the potential persuasive power of radical propaganda on the masses. The widespread enthusiasm for political change in Russia is expressed clearly in several items of intercepted correspondence. As to be expected the RWA was supportive of the abdication of the autocratic monarch Nicholas II. Peter Utkin, secretary of the Russian Association, sent a cable to Kerensky expressing the group’s congratulations to their ‘long suffering Motherland on deliverance from shackles of slavery. Long live Russian Republic’.88 Even the Brisbane branch of the Russian tallow export business, the Popoff Brothers, received the news in exclamatory cable from their Harbin office ‘Russian Imperial Duma former government arrested. Appointed new ministers. Emperor abdicated throne will be Michael. Everywhere joy. Congratulates you rejuvenated Fatherland [sic]’.89 Over the next few months, as the economic impact of the change of government was felt across Russia, the frequency of cables to and from the Popoff office in Brisbane rose to nearly twice daily.90 Additionally, Russian language correspondence began to arrive to several correspondents in Brisbane from the Relief Society for Political Exiles in Siberia based in New York.91 Yet the implications for the Russian Association in Australia – as part of the coming worldwide revolution – were never far from the forefront of their action. Utkin’s cable, concerned with local affairs, reported to Moscow that activities of Consul General d’Abaza were contradicting the spirit of new regime. After the February Revolution, the position of d’Abaza’s representation in Australia became increasingly tenuous. Anxious comments regarding d’Abaza’s future in Australia were present in the correspondence between consular staff Bogosloevsky and Abramovitch.92

In January 1917 an additional set of censors’ reports began to be produced by the First Military District. The first set of these reports was classified special and secret, and simply entitled ‘IWW Letters’. Memoranda from First Military District Censor Captain J.J. Stable show that the Deputy Chief Censor required district censors to forward each report in quadruplicate to HQ in Melbourne and provide their local Intelligence Section with a separate copy.93 The first overt indication that

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87 Censors’ notes, week ending 8 December 1917, Q2544.
88 Peter Utkin, Secretary, Russian Association to Kerensky, Duma, Petrograd, 23 March 1917, Q1652.
89 Popoffs, Harbin to Popoffs, Brisbane 19 March 1917, Q1643.
90 This observation is based on a cursory examination of the large number of cables in the months after the February Revolution in the Q reports.
91 Relief Society for Political Exiles in Siberia, New York to Mr Hankevich, Brisbane, 1 January 1917, Q1331; and Relief Society for Political Exiles in Siberia, New York to E. Klark, South Brisbane, 13 February 1917, Q1385.
92 See Bogosloevsky, Melbourne to Abramovitch Jomas (Thomas Abramovitch), Brisbane, 1 October 1917, Q2378.
93 Memoranda 5372–5373, 16 February 1917 to Deputy Chief Censor, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne and Intelligence Officer, Victoria Barracks, Brisbane, respectively. Copies of such memoranda between the District Censors, Deputy Chief Censor and Intelligence Sections can be found in series BP4/2 and MP95/1, NAA.
the correspondence and activities of the RWA were being specifically targeted by the authorities looking for evidence of unlawful activities under the War Precautions Regulations is noted in the censor’s notes to Q2048.\textsuperscript{94} This item, between John Gray and Popoff in Russia, later proved to be innocuous and it was released. At the time of interception, however, the censor noted that the ‘writer is, or was, secretary of Russian Association, South Brisbane, and has been under suspicion for some time, so far without anything very definite coming to light’. He went on to note that the item was submitted for ‘treatment if considered necessary’. Tensions within the Brisbane RWA began to be noted by the censors. The first concrete signs of impending ruptures within the association were noted in Simonoff’s urgent telegrams on 9 October 1917 to Melbourne and Bundaberg groups indicating troubles and requesting financial support. Over the next two years telegrams by Simonoff in which he requested money became quite regular, but in 1917 the censors noted ‘this appears to indicate trouble in the local Russian Association’. Surprisingly the censors also wrote that ‘nothing is known … concerning Simonoff’ but the censor regarded the RWA ‘with a good deal of suspicion’.\textsuperscript{95} 

During this period Simonoff, in his role as RWA secretary, was in regular correspondence with individuals and groups in North Queensland and Darwin as well as the Russian groups in Sydney and Melbourne. Close monitoring of correspondence allowed censors to map not only events and publications but, perhaps more importantly, the personalities of the radical left. Besides Simonoff, two of the key players in the Brisbane scene were Bykoff (alias Resanoff) and Zuzenko (also known as Soosenko or Angel). Two early intercepts between the RWA and Bykoff and Zuzenko were recorded in October 1917. Bykoff’s letter from his Sydney address to \textit{Workers’ Life} was released without note at the time.\textsuperscript{96} However, the critical role Zuzenko was to play in the political future of the group was heralded at the outset by Simonoff’s urgent telegram to Ingham indicating that he would be going to Melbourne and that Zuzenko was to arrange financial support and to ‘wire answer immediately’.\textsuperscript{97} 

While the censors’ suspicions of the Russians in Queensland were merely heightened by the correspondence in the general Q reports, they were confirmed through the correspondence captured in QF reports, which focused on the IWW and radical labour activities. At this stage the censors’ notes to each item were still relatively short compared to the reports of 1918 and 1919, but the selection of items to be recorded is revealing in itself. The analysis focuses on the extensive links between the IWW and Russians around Australia. The first letter to be reported in QF is from prohibited IWW paper \textit{Direct Action} based in Sydney to a Russian, Petroff, who lived in Mourilyan. This item indicated to the censors that even in remote towns in rural Queensland the demand for

\textsuperscript{94} John Gray, Wynnum South to Mr Popoff, Russia, 11 June 1917, Q2048.
\textsuperscript{95} Simonoff, South Brisbane to Petruchenia, 23 Station Street, North Melbourne, Q2400; and Simonoff, South Brisbane to Lotkin, c/- E. Faulkner, Burnett Heads, Bundaberg, 9 October 1917, Q2401.
\textsuperscript{96} A. Resanoff, 23 Kent Street, Sydney to the \textit{Workers’ Life}, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 9 October 1917, QF356.
\textsuperscript{97} Simonoff, Brisbane to Sovsenks (Zuzenko), PO Ingham, 13 October 1917, QF362.
radical literature was high: the standing order was for 1 dozen of each edition of the paper.\textsuperscript{98} The second QF letter, also to Petroff, was accompanied by a note from the Townsville censor stating that ‘Petroff appears to be a prime mover in the North’.\textsuperscript{99} In the first 4 months 13 of 100 intercepts were written to or from Russians in North Queensland. These letters primarily concern OBU activities and subscriptions to \textit{Direct Action} but they included several mentions of support for the IWW Twelve.\textsuperscript{100} It is evident from the letters intercepted between January and April 1917 that Petroff was heavily involved in distributing IWW literature in North Queensland, even to the extent that subscription receipts and accounts were sent to him from F. Brown, the secretary of the IWW in Sydney. Russians from Babinda appeared to be sending their subscriptions via Petroff who was also in touch with the distributor of the prohibited \textit{Golos Truda}.\textsuperscript{101} Additionally, Petroff kept other Russians informed of the state of play concerning the IWW, alerting them that:

\begin{quote}
A law is said to be proposed in Parliament declaring the IWW an illegal organisation and providing two years gaol for members as well as deportation for aliens. If this becomes a fact, then Australia will be ‘like little mother Russia or worse’.\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

He also was involved with the Defence and Release Committee effort for imprisoned IWW activists that included a circular printed by the \textit{Daily Standard}.\textsuperscript{103}

By June 1917 the censors’ QF notes were becoming more detailed and indicate that the authorities were quickly establishing strong links between the IWW and the Russian Association. Short lists of members or groups can be found throughout the files. It is likely that these smaller lists were lists compiled by the agencies to keep a grasp on the burgeoning number of targets. Over the years they were enhanced and became the basis of larger documents, such as the Summary of Communism.\textsuperscript{104} Censors also relied on watch lists of names and addresses. Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane – the official address of the RWA – was shared amongst several like-minded groups, such as the IWW. It is clear that correspondents were aware of the censorship process, some even openly indicating that ‘the official address is Box 10 Stanley Street PO, but I get it quicker if you send them to my private address’.\textsuperscript{105}

For the censors, the first piece of the puzzle linking the RWA to the IWW was the high subscription rate of Russians across the country to various publications of the communist-anarchist press. Subscription to these papers certainly confirmed the left-leaning political stance of many

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{98} F. Brown, \textit{Direct Action}, Sussex Street, Sydney to P. Petroff, Mourielyan, 5 January 1917, QF1.
\item \textsuperscript{99} Unknown, Babinda to P. Petroff, South Johnstone PO, North Queensland, 11 January 1917, QF2.
\item \textsuperscript{100} See for example, Tom Barker, Industrial Workers of the World Local No 2, 403 Sussex Street, Sydney to F.W.P. Petroff, South Johnstone, Queensland, 14 November 1916 (intercepted week ending 27 January 1917), QF21.
\item \textsuperscript{101} V. Yudaeff, Babinda to P. Petroff, South Johnstone PO, North Queensland, 11 January 1917, QF8, translated QF10A(1).
\item \textsuperscript{102} P. Petroff, South Johnstone to W. Komaroff, PO Duchess, North Queensland, 17 January 1917, QF9, translated QF10A(2).
\item \textsuperscript{103} Tom, Rockhampton to P. Petroff, PO Innisfail, intercepted week ending 27 February 1917, QF50.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Summary of Communism, 111 and 112, series A6122, NAA.
\item \textsuperscript{105} P. Stalker, 211 Wharf Street, Brisbane, 15 September 1917, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
\end{itemize}
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Russians in Australia during the Great War. Nevertheless, in hindsight, it is possible to see that these newspapers were less censored than the mainstream press and therefore potentially attracted more “discerning” readers. Subscription to them should not necessarily be taken to equate with a blanket acceptance of the issues they promoted. The most conclusive link between the RWA and IWW/OBU movement was the sharing of accommodation next to the Stanley Street post office in South Brisbane and the scheduling of joint activities. The Box 10, PO South Brisbane address of the RWA was also used for official and personal mail by IWW leaders such as Gordon Brown. Additionally, broad references were increasingly being made in the intercepted correspondence to meetings held in ‘the rooms over the bridge’: these rooms were none other than the Russian Association’s rooms in the Hardgrave Buildings, South Brisbane.

The use of the RWA post box and the Russian Rooms does not indicate that Brown or other radical leaders were necessarily aligned with the Russian cause, but rather that the PO Box 10 South Brisbane address was well known enough through the central and eastern states of Australia that correspondents felt that any mail sent there would be forwarded to the addressee. The offer to the IWW to use the RWA’s premises and mail box also could be interpreted as a strategic move on the part of the RWA. Several RWA leaders were in favour of forging stronger ties with the wider labour movement, but more particularly with groups that shared some of the ideological premises of the Bolsheviks. The IWW was an obvious candidate. Not only did the movement have an international outlook on political change and promoted direct action, but it had a broad following amongst single working men in Queensland including many Russians in North Queensland. When the Trades Hall distanced itself from the IWW by preventing the group from holding meetings on its premises, the RWA saw an opportunity to strengthen its ties with the IWW and expand its potential membership base at the same time. The censors were quick to pick up on these small details in their overall picture of the links between the RWA and the outlawed political group: ‘the Association is sympathetic with the IWW whose headquarters in Brisbane are in a room in the Russian Association’s quarters’. Mentions of “the rooms over the bridge” in intercepted letters were routinely identified as not only references to the IWW but also to the RWA.

Evidence that the censors documented Russian agreement with the IWW stance can be found in selected intelligence reports. For instance, the interplay between the IWW speaker Gordon Brown and members of the RWA regarding his lecture on the “Immorality of Morality” on 7 October

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106 See for instance Jim Q. (Quinton), PO Box 56, Toowoomba to Gordon Brown, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 16 September 1917, QF298; Tes, Sydney to Gordon Brown, Box 10, South Brisbane, 27 October 1917, QF394; Jim Q. (Quinton), Toowoomba to Gordon Brown, Box 10, South Brisbane, 31 December 1917, QF485; and Unknown to Gordon Brown, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 30 December 1917, QF486.

107 See Ted, 151 Brunswick Street, Valley, Brisbane to D. Foley, Imperial Hotel, Cloncurry, 18 September 1917, QF310. IWW activist Harry Barcan, PO Box 56, PO Toowoomba addressed mail to the Russian Workers Association, Hardgrave Buildings, South Brisbane, 30 September 1917, QF350.

108 Censors’ notes, week ending 16 October 1917, QF362. See also censors’ notes, week ending 3 September 1917, QF251.
1917 was recorded. It was noted that many of the audience were Russian and that Brown explicitly appealed to members of the Russian Association. The censor identified this appeal to the Russians as ‘part of a system which the IWW and Peace Alliance are adopting to gain converts’. Perhaps even more concerning to the censors was the supportive letter that Russian audience member, V. Pikunoff, published in the *Daily Standard* openly expounding that ‘there should be nothing immoral in any actions taken against the capitalist class, unless they were detrimental to the progress of the labour movement’. Social events and lectures continued to reinforce the disloyal nature of the system between the IWW, the RWA and the Peace Alliance. IWW activist Harry Barcan socialised with all groups and his correspondence demonstrates the regular contact that was taking place across the left-wing political spectrum. He recalled leaving a pair of boots – borrowed for a Russian Ball – with the IWW when he could not find any Russians and later requested photographs of the river picnic held for Peace Alliance leader Miss Thorpe from a Russian photographer. The censor concluded that ‘the association of the Peace Alliance with Harry Barcan (anti-conscriptionist and IWW sympathiser) and the Russian headquarters emphasises the unsavoury nature of the Alliance’.

The Russian Association’s support of the IWW appeared to be galvanised by the plight of the IWW Twelve. During his secretaryship, Peter Simonoff presented a resolution on the matter on behalf of the RWA to the Brisbane Industrial Council. In the intercept report, the censor selected a set of key sentences to record the depth of the RWA’s disloyalty:

> we Russian workers … are disgusted by the action of the Government and protest against the introduction of the brutal system … and against arrests of our fellow workers simply [because] they happened to be the best defenders of the working class … We admire the solidarity of our fellow workers in New South Wales and are willing to support them together with our fellow workers in Queensland. [sic]

For the authorities, these statements overtly confirmed the Queensland Russians’ willingness to defend the solidarity of workers across state lines into New South Wales.

One of the more scandalous activities that took place in Brisbane, despite the legal implications for participants under the federal *Unlawful Associations Act*, was the drawing of a Workers’ Art Union in support of the wives and children of the IWW Twelve imprisoned in Sydney awaiting trial. The *Daily Standard* promoted this Art Union and publicised the refusal of Trades Hall to hold its
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drawing.¹¹⁵ The conservative *Brisbane Courier* justifiably explored how such an activity was allowed to take place by the government authorities.¹¹⁶ Not surprisingly, considering the far-reaching campaign to support the IWW Twelve, ticket holders for the Workers’ Art Union came from all over Australia and seemed to belie the impact of the *Unlawful Associations Act* on the IWW.¹¹⁷ The RWA were also involved at an international level in the financial support of the IWW. In late 1917 the General Defence Committee of the IWW, based in Chicago, sent the *Workers’ Life* an Industrial Freedom Certificate, ‘a memento of a contributor’s donation to the defence fund’.¹¹⁸ Along with the Freedom Certificate the package contained an additional appeal for funds, accounts of the maltreatment of IWW members in the United States, extracts from *The Public* as well as an updated subscription list. The censor’s notes document the careful selection of key quotations that clearly support the holding of this mail item on the grounds that ‘these and similar statements would be encouraging to IWW in the Commonwealth’. The absence of comment by the censors on the links between the RWA and the IWW points to the established nature of the relationship between the two groups: it was well enough known to no longer warrant comment.

By mid-1917 federal authorities perceived disloyal activity in Queensland to be widespread and critical enough throughout the state for Brisbane-based censor Captain J.J. Stable to conduct a two week fact finding mission for the Deputy Chief Censor on the IWW in the northern cities of Cairns and Townsville and surrounding locales.¹¹⁹ Stable investigated Cairns and travelled through the nearby sugar centres including Babinda, Gordonvale, Mossman, South Johnstone and Innisfail. His investigations focused on the suppression of open IWW propaganda. In his conclusion to the Cairns section of his report Stable made strong note that ‘the propaganda [outside Cairns] is actively carried on especially by and amongst the Russian workmen. … [and] it is having its effect amongst the young unmarried and more irresponsible Australian workmen’. Further south, and much to his dismay, Stable confirmed that ‘Townsville is the headquarters of the IWW in the North Queensland and the number of their members and sympathisers is increasing rapidly’ [sic]. He explicitly concluded that ‘the arrival in Townsville during the past month of over 200 Russians from Darwin and the North has not tended to improve matters’. In the following months the Russian link was explored in detailed censors’ notes to IWW correspondence. For example, the conflict between the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and IWW in Cloncurry over membership and industrial action was discussed including specific mention of the role of ‘a Russian named Broff, who organised the Russians with the IWW propaganda’.¹²⁰ As the conflict in Cloncurry reached the

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¹¹⁵ *Daily Standard*, 6 and 10 July 1917.
¹¹⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 10 July 1917.
¹¹⁷ See the list of winners sent by the Censor, Brisbane to Censor, Sydney attached to QF reports for the week ending 11 July 1917.
¹¹⁸ General Defence Committee, Industrial Workers of the World, 1001 Madison Street, Chicago to *Workers’ Life*, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, Q474.
¹¹⁹ See Stable’s report from 3 to 16 August 1917 to Deputy Chief Censor, week ending 27 August 1917, QF209.
¹²⁰ Censors’ notes, week ending 24 September 1917, QF312. For specific details see report in the *Cloncurry Advocate* (4 August 1917).
Chapter 3: Early intelligence on the Russian community

shopfloor, IWW men lost their jobs. The Russians – en masse presumably – went on strike with the IWW men.

Intelligence gathered through the intercepts began to be compiled into detailed reports that were forwarded from the Censors’ Office to military intelligence as well as to the Deputy Chief Censor. These reports were briefs which informed the departments on emerging issues or developments. For example, it was identified across intercepts that IWW adherents from across the country intended to gather in Brisbane at the end of 1917, prior to the Referendum (presumably the second Conscription Referendum). This information was subsequently compiled and analysed in a 6 page report filed under QF453. This executive summary of intercepted information also referred to the arrival of persons of note in the labour movement in Brisbane and suggested that it was ‘necessary to employ someone who would get into touch with this crowd and learn…what their schemes are’. To this end, covert information was ‘supplied by the Secret Service officer…“X”’.121 A collaborative interagency approach was taken by the Censor, District Commandant First Military District and Commonwealth Police Commissioner.122 While the events and activities detailed in Reports QF453 and QF454 certainly demonstrate that left-wing politics in Queensland, including the sitting State Labor Government, were determined to ward off any federal government conscription, reference to Russian involvement is conspicuous by its absence. This silence indicates two things: first that Russian involvement was at such a grassroots level that it did not seek the attention of “X’s” investigations, and second that the RWA was marginal within the mainstream labour movement.

Conclusion
This chapter has examined pre-war Queensland state government and police reports on the Russian community. Two major themes are present in the intelligence gathered by the Queensland Police: the impact of immigration and the link to crime. These themes are also prevalent in early correspondence between the Queensland and Commonwealth governments on how to deal with Russian immigrants. The establishment of mass postal censorship under the War Precautions Act from 1914 saw a marked increase in the amount of information collected on Russian activities in Brisbane.

The intelligence collected through censorship formed the basis for detailed profiling of the RWA and its members. Pre-war concerns about the Russian community which linked immigration with crime developed and transformed during the war. Military intelligence used the censors’ reports to identify and assess the enemy within, specifically to pinpoint individuals whose activities breached the War Precautions Regulations. Wartime intelligence increasingly connected Russian activism to the wider spectrum of disloyalty on the home front. Chapter 4 continues this examination assessing

121 Censors’ notes, week ending 14 December 1917, QF453.
122 See censors’ notes, week ending 23 December 1917, QF454.
how intelligence collected by censors on the RWA fed into the surveillance work of the Special Intelligence Bureau and the Commonwealth Police, and how this information was used as critical evidence for military intelligence prosecutions.
CHAPTER 4

MAPPING CASES FOR SUPPRESSION

Introduction
By 1918 the official reporting structures for postal censorship in Australia were well-established. The previous two years of home front surveillance had produced rich and fruitful observations on the RWA. This chapter focuses on censors’ observations of the RWA, selected from several thousand censors’ reports. It begins with a quantitative analysis of this body of evidence to illustrate what factors were common across the subset of roughly 600 reports from this final period of wartime censorship. Second, the international links censors identified between the bubble of Russianness in Brisbane and the wider Russian revolutionary movement are charted. This section also traces how Australian authorities responded to information on conditions in Russia. The third and fourth sections detail the events and personalities that had the most influence on the development of the RWA: the appointment of Simonoff as Soviet consul, tensions as the organisation splintered, and leadership renewal under Zuzenko. Last, the chapter documents the impact of the Red Flag events on the RWA, and the subsequent legal proceedings, through the lens of Russian correspondents. Significantly, the letters Russians sent to each other at this time were useful for helping authorities to map out cases for suppression.

The censorship network
By 1918 the national censorship network was a sophisticated tool of the state that enabled intelligence agencies to accurately target the correspondence of individuals and groups of interest. Not only were censors able to track persons of interest for the Department of Defence, they were starting to compile intelligence reports that suggested new leads for military intelligence to pursue. Correspondence with and between members of the Russian community in Brisbane was regularly being intercepted in several military districts. Each of these districts was in turn producing multiple reports about this correspondence.

A quantitative overview of relevant censors’ reports is provided in tables 4.1 to 4.3. I did not find a directory of the various report types in the National Archives of Australia, or in other records produced by the censors. However, my brief survey of each report type highlights which report types were more likely to contain intercepts relevant to the RWA. This was based on the number of relevant intercepts found and the extent of the accompanying censors’ notes. I also used the cross-
Chapter 4: Mapping cases for suppression

referencing in the censors’ notes to better pinpoint report types. This chapter draws on the Q and QF reports established in previous years by the First Military District in Queensland as well as the new QS reports that commenced from April 1918. The RE reports of the Second Military District in New South Wales as well as the MF reports of the Third Military District in Victoria also frequently recorded intercepts related to the Russian Workers Association. The QF and MF types in particular contain an overwhelming number of reports on the correspondence and intelligence gathered on the activities of Russians in Brisbane and Melbourne. As in chapter 3 intercepts were deemed relevant to understanding the RWA if they were either addressed to or from the RWA directly or an identified member; the content of the letter concerned the RWA or an identified member; or the letter was a subscription for a publication of the RWA or an identified member (such as Simonoff).

Table 4.1: First Military District, Queensland by report type 1918–1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report type</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Reports logged</th>
<th>Reports related to RWA</th>
<th>International post</th>
<th>Domestic post</th>
<th>Russian language items</th>
<th>Subscriptions to media and activities</th>
<th>Items dealing with money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QS</td>
<td>1918–1919</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QF</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QF</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2161</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1MD</td>
<td>1918–1919</td>
<td>6286</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Second Military District, New South Wales by report type 1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report type</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Reports logged</th>
<th>Reports related to RWA</th>
<th>International post</th>
<th>Domestic post</th>
<th>Russian language items</th>
<th>Subscriptions to media and activities</th>
<th>Items dealing with money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2MD</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Third Military District, Victoria by report type 1918–1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report type</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Reports logged</th>
<th>Reports related to RWA</th>
<th>International post</th>
<th>Domestic post</th>
<th>Russian language items</th>
<th>Subscriptions to media and activities</th>
<th>Items dealing with money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MF</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MF</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2950</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MD</td>
<td>1918–1919</td>
<td>4950</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The QG reports commencing in June 1918 were examined, but no relevant intercepts were identified.
2 Inspection of the RE and MF reports in earlier years did not reveal enough relevant intercepts to warrant a thorough survey. However, I identified and included intercepts from 1918 to the conclusion of censorship in 1919.
Unlike earlier censorship in the first years of the war, the reports were no longer simply identifying individuals and organisations to be targeted for subscribing to disloyal publications, or for activities such as the working relationship between the RWA and the IWW. Censors were now also providing some level of analysis and displaying some knowledge about each case. Reporting trends in the QF reports towards the end of 1917 can be seen in intercepts logged between 1918 and 1919. Censors were intercepting correspondence and drawing on related intelligence reports (some reports were even logged by censorship staff who acted as agents) to compile a comprehensive analysis of the personalities and organisations which were a threat to the Commonwealth: a sector labelled as disloyal and disaffected by government agencies. The content of the censors’ notes provides an unprecedented insight into the activities of individuals and organisations. Government agencies were increasingly making use of this information to assess the population and to ready themselves against the rising tide of communism. This is evident in the use of the censors’ reports to inform master lists of the disloyal and disaffected as well as the intelligence summaries that fed into post-war policies, such as the extension of the powers of the *War Precautions Act* until 1928 and the enactment of the *Aliens Registration Act* after the cessation of hostilities in 1920. Additionally, the balance between international and domestic correspondence between Russians began to change as censors increasingly stopped mail from reaching Russia.

The Q reports cover approximately 1,200 intercepts for 1918. Twenty three of the reports directly related to the Russians in Brisbane. Eight letters were in Russian and 12 were sent to or from the RWA. Thirteen were international post, 6 domestic and 2 are not clear if they were international or domestic. Money orders and publications still have a presence with 6 intercepts relating to publications and 6 involving money. It is clear that correspondence between Russians who had returned to Russia and those who remained in Australia had increased. In these letters writers describe living conditions in Russia and often include requests for money. A change in the style of the Q reports is detectable from the week ending 16 March 1918. The censors’ notes developed into a longer commentary on the sender and addressee as well as the issues covered in the letter. Additionally more detailed excerpts from the original letters are given. Similar in style to the Q reports the new QS reports covered 429 intercepts from 6 April 1918 through to the end of reporting on 28 June 1919. Seven of these are directly relevant to Russians in Brisbane. All 7 letters are from Russians who had once lived in Brisbane and were now in Russia. Two of the correspondents – John Clark and Tom Sergeyev (Artem) – had been instrumental in establishing the RWA in Brisbane.

The most significant censors’ reports – the QF reports – covered approximately 2,200 intercepts in 1918. Around 10%, or 221 intercepts, were highly relevant to the RWA. One hundred and twenty-nine were addressed to or from the RWA and 144 were in Russian. This increased number of foreign language texts placed additional work on the First Military District as censors relied on
translators to produce accurate and timely translations. Letters were primarily sent to addresses in Australia: 137 domestic letters but only 33 international. A significant number of intercepts related to publications (79), of which 10 were money for subscriptions. Following the trend across reports, 1918 saw an explosion in the quantity of the censors’ notes in the QF reports. This reflected the increased funding to expand the censorship network, indicating that the government recognised the importance of monitoring disloyalty of groups. Censorship staff in Brisbane swelled to include interpreters and more assistant censors.

After the First Military District (Q, QF and QS) reports, the Third Military District’s MF reports were the richest sources of intercepts on the RWA. Thirty-nine of the approximately 2,000 intercepts recorded for 1918 in this report series were relevant to the Brisbane Russian community. All relevant MF reports were domestic correspondence with 11 reports being either addressed to or from the RWA. Only 6 intercepts were noted by the censors as being in Russian. This could indicate that not all foreign language texts were noted by the censors or that some Russians corresponded in English. Over 30% of the intercepts concerned RWA publications (12). From the Second Military District, 13 key intercepts were selected from their RE reports on grounds of their relevance to the Russian association or its members in Brisbane. Four were addressed to or from the RWA with 7 in Russian. Similar to trends in the QF and MF reports, intercepts were mainly domestic (10 in total) with only 3 international. Three intercepts were related to publications and a money transfer. The RE reports cover Russian issues but their coverage is primarily focused on the Sydney population and its relations with groups in Melbourne and, to a much lesser extent, Brisbane. However, correspondence between Sydney and Brisbane Russians was consistently picked up in the QF reports.

The intercepts included in the QF reports increased in importance during the first half of 1919. Approximately 2,161 items were reported and 15% (320 items) related to the story of the RWA. One hundred and sixty-six of these items were written in Russian and 105 were addressed to the RWA. Of these 320 items, 215 discussed the situation of the RWA or Russians in Brisbane. Again, domestic correspondence far outweighed international postings, with 283 items intercepted within Australia and only 37 from international mail. Almost a third of the intercepts (118) were connected to publications, with 40 of these containing information concerning subscriptions or payments.

Around 296 intercepts were reported in the Q reports in 1919, but only 2 of these were directly relevant to the RWA. A considerable number of intercepts once included in the Q reports were

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3 In 1918 the First Military District Censor’s Office employed 4 interpreters. See Salary Registers, Vols 2A, 3 and 5, series BP147/1, NAA.
4 An increase in positions at the First Military District Censor’s Office is recorded in the 1918 Salary Registers, Vols 2A–4, series BP147/1, NAA. In addition to more press and assistant censors, the Office employed 3 support staff (vol 4) and 6 officers on loan from the Postmaster-General’s Department (vols 2A–3).
now instead reported in the QF reports, particularly mail items that appeared to relate specifically to left-wing activities. Of the two items intercepted relating to the RWA, both were domestic mail, one was written in Russian to *Workers’ Life* and the other a commentary by an Irish Catholic priest in Brisbane on the Red Flag events. The style of reportage in the Q intercepts became more detailed in 1919 as letters and articles were increasingly included in full. The censors’ comments became more detailed also (several pages long), and they were now written in paragraphs with greater analysis of background information, including the writer’s or addressee’s situation. The censors’ comments also now referred to intelligence sources such as the General Black List, MI5 Black List or MI8 instructions.

During 1919, approximately 2,950 MF intercepts were logged until censorship ceased on 28 June. Twenty-four of these directly related to the Russians in Brisbane. Fifteen letters were in Russian, 12 were addressed either to or from the RWA and 13 had content concerning the RWA. Twenty-two were domestic post and 2 were international items. As in 1918, money orders and publications still maintained a presence – 11 intercepts related to publications and 4 involved money. Correspondence between those who had returned to Russia and those who remained in Australia increased. By the end of March 1919 the MF reports were becoming shorter whereas the QF reports were comparatively far more detailed and lengthy. Additionally, Russian letters in the MF reports were increasingly grouped together. This pattern suggests that Third Military District Censor’s Office employed a Russian translator only sporadically.

A distribution list was enclosed with the First Military District reports for the week ending 30 March 1918, which shows that the reports were produced in quadruplicate by the Censor at GPO Brisbane. Two copies were forwarded to the Intelligence Officer HQ First Military District and the Deputy Chief Censor Victoria Barracks Melbourne and a copy to Captain Ainsworth, Special Intelligence Bureau in Preston House. While most weekly intelligence reports were signed by Censor Stable, the compiler often signed and dated the side of the report. Internal memoranda from the Censor’s Office to Captain Ainsworth throughout 1918 for all Q prefixed reports indicate that Ainsworth received weekly copies of the reports. His diaries reveal that he maintained detailed (and time consuming) indexes to these reports. For example, Ainsworth assessed Mendrin, the Russian man working for the Popoff Brothers export business who flirted with being an informant: ‘Representative of Popoff Bros in Brisbane. Was connected with the Russian Secret Service. An intriguer of the first water. Very shifty and unreliable’. Unfortunately only the remnants of one of Ainsworth’s card indexes remains.

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5 See for instance the memoranda included with the reports submitted for the week ending 10 August 1918.
6 See name index cards relating to individuals suspected of disloyalty, series BP230/2, NAA. The QG reports for 1918 do not feature regular RWA correspondence. However, they do shed light on the story of Mendrin. The censors were aware that Mendrin was a Russian of dubious background who represented the Popoff Brothers in Brisbane. Mendrin presented himself in a curious light. On occasions he indicated that he was anxious to interact with the RWA but generally gave the impression that he was in the pay of the Russian
Chapter 4: Mapping cases for suppression

The maintenance of accurate lists of names and addresses was a coordinated effort involving all agencies and if one military district came across an item of interest to another military district, the item would be forwarded to the other office for processing. This was the case for the letter from Emily Bocskovsky, Hungary to N. Bocskovsky in Brisbane. The item was initially opened in Sydney by a Second Military District censor who forwarded it to the First Military District. A cursory examination prompted the censor to note ‘there is no record in this office of the name of the addressee, and the Queensland Post Office Directory 1916–17 does not give it’. After further investigation in Brisbane it was suggested that the name on Q2750 had been mistaken for Bogoslovsky, an identity of interest in the Russian community in Melbourne reported under Q2378. Brisbane surmised that the listing for Bogoslovsky may have been ‘mutilated in transmission’. Nevertheless, cross-referencing across the various military districts kept all censors’ offices abreast of party factions and developments. For instance, the Sydney censor picked up ‘the amalgamation of the [United Federation of Labour] UFL and the Russian Association in Brisbane’ from a May Day 1918 circular celebrating the unification of the Russian group in Sydney with the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

Despite the increased number of staff listed on the First Military District pay registers, censors’ offices around the country were struggling to translate the range and volume of letters crossing its desk in-house. This is reflected in comments in a letter revealing correspondents to be aware of the censorship process and the possibility of held or missing letters: ‘It is possible that our Censor has intercepted his letters because they are written in a strange language, and I feel sure that even though Censors are all great men still some of them cannot speak Russian fluently’. In another example, a sketchy entry for a Russian language letter from Mendrin to the Popoff Brothers was hastily sent off in the report for the week ending 27 July 1918 with the following note: ‘Means at secret police, although it was never established whether he was indeed an Okhrana man or not. Members of the RWA concluded that Mendrin was ‘a well-known tsarist agent provocateur, acting in this capacity as recently as the current revolution’ (Document 9, Our Unswerving Loyalty: A documentary survey of relations between the Communist Party of Australia and Moscow 1920–1940, edited by David W. Lovell and Kevin Windle (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2008), 85. Document 9, translated by Windle, is Simonov to ECCI concerning an ‘All-Australian Socialist Organisation’, 8 April 1921. In Russian, manuscript and typescript copies (RGASPI 495–94–6). Australian authorities recorded Mendrin as being very unreliable despite his status as a naturalised British subject who contributed to the Württemburg Red Cross, Germany. Mendrin’s claims of being a political agent for the Russians overwhelmed any legitimate business he conducted whilst in Australia. See the censors’ notes to week ending 10 June 1918, QG5; week ending 15 July 1918, QG61; and week ending 29 July 1918, QG104. Mendrin’s naturalisation was revoked and he and his wife Maria left Australia for Shanghai in 1922, before moving to Harbin in 1927. Maria reported that Mendrin ‘disappeared in mysterious circumstances’. Letter, Mrs Maria Mendrin, c/o Little Sisters of the Poor, Market Street, Randwick to Secretary, Department of Immigration, Canberra, 20 January 1960. To follow the story of the Mendrins after they left Australia see Maria Mendrin’s immigration file 1960/30488, series A446, NAA.

7 Emily Bocskovsky, Hungary to N. Bocskovsky, Brisbane, 11 June 1917 (intercepted week ending 2 February 1918), Q2750.
8 Censor’s notes, week ending 30 April 1919, RE815.
9 W.S. McGolderick, Dara, Brisbane to A.D. Popoff, Harbin, 9 April 1918, QS18. The Popoff Brothers continued to do business with their Brisbane contacts during the troubles of World War I and the Civil War in Russia.
disposal of Censor Brisbane are not quite equal to a full translation’.\textsuperscript{10} The notes accompanying the Q reports indicate that most foreign language letters were held awaiting translation.\textsuperscript{11}

The flipside of holding letters for translations – and ultimately delaying their delivery – was the increased risk of evasion of censorship through the use of carriers. The censors were aware of this trend. For instance, a Second Military District censor intercepted a note from the Flinders of Cronulla to a friend in Vladivostock indicating that a ‘small parcel’ would be carried by a mutual friend with ‘letters which will probably reach you sooner for escaping the censor’.\textsuperscript{12} The procedure for suspected censorship evasion is detailed in the censor’s notes to RE1025:

\textbullet{} ‘the attempt to evade censorship was telephoned immediately to ISGS who in turn wired Brisbane’,

\textbullet{} the suspected passenger ship ‘could be intercepted at Brisbane’,

\textbullet{} a ‘special watch will have to be kept on the Forsyths’, and

\textbullet{} ‘the attempt to evade customs dues has also been brought under notes of Customs’.

International links

The links between the Russian community in Australia and their comrades who had returned home can be gleaned from intercepted correspondence. These letters were an important source of news on revolutionary events and included personal perspectives on the conditions of everyday life in Russia and Australia. The QS reports include one of the very few intercepts from Sergeyev (Artem). The transcript of his New Year’s letter to Minnie Sergeyev\textsuperscript{13} gives a stark account of the everyday life of the returned Bolshevik:

\begin{quote}
It is only 18th December, snow, frost, cold and endless shooting; shots everywhere. We have war here right at our home. Just today I had two revolver mouths close to my brain-basket. … We armed workers all over. We fight against our capitalist class, not with the strike but with bullets and shells. We put all industries under workers control; we rob the landlords of their land and pass it to the farmers without any money. In the big towns we abolished private ownership on the big houses. We are taking over all the banks and capitalists cannot get one penny for all his mortgages, shares, war loans, etc. Our crowd started on social revolution and is determined to go on with it. We are trying to refuse capital\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Censor’s notes, week ending 29 July 1918, QG104.

\textsuperscript{11} The eight intercepts in Russian directly related to the RWA in 1918 were all held in January and February pending translation (Q2643, Q2650, Q2652, Q2653, Q2674, Q2697, Q2699 and Q2750). Most of these appear to have been submitted with the Q report to the Deputy Chief Censor for translation and a decision by the Deputy Chief Censor’s office regarding whether to release or suppress the original.

\textsuperscript{12} Lil, Dot and Vera, Marina, Flinders Road, Cronulla to Mrs Dal Hatchkoff (?), c/o J. Forsyth, Box 45, GPO, Vladivostock, 3 July 1918, RE1025.

\textsuperscript{13} It is likely that Minnie Seregaft was Sergeyev’s partner when he lived in Australia. See police reports in Russians 1913–1954, 318868, series 16865, QSA that mention Sergeyev living with a woman. Additionally references to Sergeyev’s wife can be found in Bill Sutton’s research papers, copies of which are held in box 7, Poole-Fried Collection, UQFL336, Fryer Library. Sutton advertised in the \textit{Queensland Guardian} (21 September 1966) for information on Sergeyev. A letter from Marusia Nester (nee Stepanoff), 11 Warwick St, Stanmore NSW to Bill Sutton, 30/10/1966 states that Sergeyev had a wife and step-daughter in Brisbane. Sutton also cites Vladimir Nasedkin – who travelled and worked with Sergeyev and Zuzenko – was introduced to Sergeyev’s wife Mina in Brisbane. Nasedkin’s published memoirs contain references to Russians associated with the RWA. See the English edition \textit{Fifteen Years a World Wanderer} (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965).
vote, we soon refuse him break ticket also. … Life is nothing here. I was appointed Minister for Trade and Industries here, but I did not take any notice of it yet. … Although for our province I acted so many months as Prime Minister or President. … The strikers here are undoubtedly IWW. … Now capitalists go on strike and we are strike breakers, scab organisers; because it is workers rule now. … Certainly as far as efficiency goes we are very bad rulers.14

This excerpt confirms the militancy of the worker movement in Russia that Sergeyev spoke of during his involvement in the 1912 General Strike in Brisbane (see chapter 3). Interestingly, while the censors submitted the letter to the Deputy Chief Censor, it was not accompanied by any analysis of Sergeyev or his involvement in the 1912 General Strike or leadership of the Russian Association.

A few months later Sergeyev wrote again to his Australian family, this time to his daughter Lily Sergeyev.15 For the censors, Sergeyev confirmed for the censors ‘the tendencies of a number of Russians in Queensland’ in his comments on the abolition of the ‘beastly creature’ of the boss and the jailing of the capitalists and their supporters. In this letter Sergeyev also gave the impression that he understood just how much work the Bolsheviks needed to do to establish themselves in a ‘new society with no poor, homeless, hungry people’. Balancing Sergeyev’s portrayal of the Bolsheviks’ noble vision is his description of the methods being used to achieve these goals: the ‘life and death struggle’, and the ‘fight by means of speeches, guns, rifles, bayonets’. At this stage in his career he had been elected to the Russian Parliament and he was quite aware that if they failed, they would be jailed when the status quo was restored.

Sergeyev’s letter indicates that the core group of Russian radicals who started the Russian Club in Brisbane kept in contact. He writes: ‘Tell Boldieff etc. tell Morzenco that I elected to Uchreditelnoya Sabranya to the Parliament’ [sic]. (It may be the case that Boldieff refers to Boldvin, and Morzenco to Mazurin who, along with Sergeyev and a few others, were reported by early Queensland police informers to be the committee members behind the unionisation of the Russian Club in 1912.16) While the First Military District censors did not cross-reference this letter with Sergeyev’s previous correspondence, they did comment on the fact that the Russian censors passed Sergeyev’s letter despite its details of political machinations. Sergeyev did not have the same privilege with Australian censors, who held his letter. Lily and the other Russians he greets in his letter were delayed the news of his rise within the Soviet political system.

Sergeyev was not the only returned Russian to attempt to keep his friends in Australia personally updated. John Clark left Brisbane to work for the revolution in Irkutsk. Several of his letters were intercepted in the QS reports. In a letter from early 1918, Clark wrote to the editor of the Daily

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14 Tom, Russia to Minnie Sergeaff, Coopers Plains, Brisbane, 1 January 1918, QS12.
15 Tom Sergeaff, Russia to Lily Sergeaff, Coopers Plains, intercepted week ending 2 March 1918, Q2851.
16 P. O’Hara, reports of 25 and 28 February 1912, 318868, series 16865, QSA.
Chapter 4: Mapping cases for suppression

Standard, John V. McDonald, from the battle in Russia.\textsuperscript{17} His passionate letter portrayed the Bolsheviks in a politically strong position in Russia although children were starving in Siberia as a result of the Allied intervention. Despite his protestations that he could not give McDonald a solid report because he was on the front line, Clark’s paraphrased letter was nearly two pages long in the intercepts. The censor did not indicate whether he released the letter but, considering the detail with which he paraphrased Clarke, it is likely that the original letter was not held with the censors’ report. Reading past the political staging, the key point of Clarke’s letter was to link the social revolution in Russia with the anti-conscription movement and workers’ strikes in Australia. He positioned the happenings in Russia as the spark that ‘will light the international fire, which will destroy capitalism’. This was exactly the sentiment that concerned Australian authorities – the Russian social experiment had the strong potential to threaten the longevity of Australia’s war effort. Calls by exiled Russians for Australia to be the next country to ‘have courage and sense enough to end the war’ were taken seriously by the censors.

Two more letters from Clarke were intercepted and held in the QS reports in 1918. Both were addressed to Vera (Phira) Briner who was instructed by Clarke in the letters to pass the accompanying newspapers and reports to the \textit{Daily Standard}.\textsuperscript{18} Clarke has sent recent editions of \textit{Pravda} as well as transcripts of sittings of the Central Executive Committee. He wrote that these texts ‘will put very clearly the situation in Russia’ and it is likely that Clarke expected McDonald at the \textit{Daily Standard} to publish them. Unsurprisingly the censors held Clarke’s subsequent letters and all the enclosures as ‘harmful matter’. Clarke’s correspondence shows that some members of the RWA who left to participate in the Russian experiment continued to contact their comrades in Brisbane to post back useful documents to help those in Australia progress on the right political path. Such evidence alarmed the Australian authorities and also gave weight to the British stance that the radical Russian diaspora should not be allowed to inject fresh recruits into the Soviet Union via return immigration.\textsuperscript{19}

Stories from the front line in Russia that presented the Bolshevik regime in a positive light filtered into Brisbane from these reports. W. Gray wrote to his friend Miss Lutwyche of his father’s success in being appointed to the Executive Committee and serving as the Chief Commissioner for the Trans-Baikal.\textsuperscript{20} He wrote of the ‘approaching New Year [that] promise[d] to bring peace and happiness upon this little planet of cure’ and told of the hard work in ‘exciting circumstances’. But these thoughts were sobered by Gray’s references to ‘this terrible and most cruel of wars’ and the

\textsuperscript{17} John P. Clarke, Russia to McDonald, Editor of the \textit{Daily Standard}, Brisbane, 18 February 1918, QS19.
\textsuperscript{18} John Clarke, PO Box 151, Irkutsk, Russia to Miss Phira Briner, c/o G. Rothman, 12 Salisbury Chambers, George Street, Brisbane, 25 February 1918, QS42; and J.P. Clarke, Irkutsk, Russia to Miss Vera Briner, c/o G. Rothman, 12 Salisbury Chambers, George Street, Brisbane, intercepted week ending 20 April 1918, QS43.
\textsuperscript{20} W. Gray, Chita, Russia via Japan to Miss D.R. Lutwyche, State School, Kingaroy, Queensland, 16 December 1917 (intercepted week ending 16 March 1918), Q2897.
‘battle against the hunger and bitter ignorance’. News on how returned comrades were faring was often forwarded to newspapers to be published. Norman Freeberg, an editor of the Worker, published news from a letter from Peter Utkin to Simonoff:21 Utkin was informed from his position as a prominent member of the movement in Vladivostock that Taranoff (Skvirsky) had joined the Social Revolutionaries (dubbed ‘the opposition camp’) and that Alimoff was now an interpreter in Harbin. The most notable RWA member was Sergeyev. He had ‘gone farther than anyone else, being Prime Minister of some Don area, Member of the Constituent Assembly and Chief of the Ukrainian Rada, and evidently the Leader of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, against the Germans’. Undoubtedly the story of Sergeyev’s meteoric rise would have inspired Russians in Australia to return home to participate in the struggle. Knowing their importance, these updates from returned Australian Russians involved in the Russian revolutionary movement were often forwarded directly to Major Harold E. Jones, the Assistant Director (Director from 1919) of the Special Intelligence Bureau as well as to the military intelligence command in Melbourne via First Military District Commandant Irving.

Around 1918 the censors also began to come across an increasing number of letters from Russia from writers who were not in support of the unfolding revolution. Gradually the censors built up knowledge on the link between anti-Bolshevik correspondents. These letters were all released but detailed notes and often direct copies were made, helping censors to compile an unofficial guide to events in Russia. For the most part the pro-Bolshevik letters glossed over these aspects or at least contextualised them within the wider dictatorship of the proletariat. For those not inspired with revolutionary zeal the letters depicted serious hardship. But regardless of ideology, all intercepted letters from Russia covered at least a barely concealed reference to the violence and difficulty of life.

The story of John Maruschak and his letters to his brother in Siberia, for instance, clearly illustrate the estrangement of some Russians in Australia from the revolutionary turmoil in Russia. In early 1919, Maruschak, an active member of the Melbourne Russian community, sold his farm and his house in Australia and was waiting for the passport issue to be resolved so that he could return to Russia. At this time most Russians and left-wing supporters in Australia were rightly suspicious of the sensational tales of revolutionary madness being reported in the conservative press, and Maruschak was perplexed by the reports in his brother’s letters. Maruschak dismissed his brother’s concerns about the revolution saying that ‘every revolutionist must make victims and this cannot be avoided’. He also chided his brother for wanting to leave Russia and come to Australia, arguing that by the time his brother arrived the revolutionary conditions may be over.22

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21 Norman E. Freeberg, Brisbane to P. Simonoff, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 11 June 1918, MF1185.
22 John Maruschak, 7 Patterson Place, South Melbourne to E.E. Maruschak, Sotizskaya Colony, Shkotovo Primorsk Oblast, Vladivostok, 6 January 1919, MF2501.
Another Russian who was journeying back to Vladivostock via Japan wrote to a friend in Melbourne of what he had heard and read in documents received from Russians who had escaped the Bolshevik revolution. Tomas wrote that he had ‘met people … who … tell about horrors that far surpass all the reports published by the Herald’. He went on to describe in detail news of hardship and exploitation in the Bolshevik territories, ending his letter simply with an apology if his news upsets, but said he must tell the truth.23

Many Russians in Australia received similar cautions from friends and relatives in Russia that ‘the people who are anxious to leave Australia for Russia … will be very sorry they left Australia. … [do not] think of Russia any more’.24 In one such letter, Brovkoff admitted that he ‘was a big fool for going in such a time to Russia’.25 In another example, John and Paul Gray, two land-owning farmers in Queensland, and their families returned to Russia shortly after the February Revolution. As circumstances deteriorated, Paul managed to return to Wallumbilla and awaited John’s return. Their correspondence charts the deteriorating conditions and John’s anxiety to make the return journey.26

Letters were sent from Vania Zuzenko to Zuzenko, addressing him as ‘brother Sania’ with news of Vania’s disturbing experiences in Vladivostock and his decision to flee via Japan to Odessa.27 Voitenkoff, also a RWA member, received letters with dismal news of happenings at home. In July 1919 he received a letter dated April from a friend lamenting that ‘I don’t know if we will ever meet again [due to the] terrible slaughter … going on all over the town’.28 One of the Harbin Popoffs described Russia as ‘crushed and ill’ and awaiting the Allies assistance.29 To a Brisbane friend, the same Popoff warned that he was ‘living in Harbin because it is impossible to go to Russia, they would arrest me immediately as not being a Bolshevik and not recognising Lenine, Trotzky and all their politics’ [sic].30 The correspondence clearly shows that the material and political conditions of life for many Russians in Russia during this time were unbearable. Such news would have been difficult to hear for militant Russians in Australia who wanted to return to the mother country. In a

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23 T. Tomas, Kaida Hotel, Nagasaki, Japan to Mrs Zacharin, 1 Redford Street, Melbourne, 12 April 1919, MF2789.
24 T. Graypavitch, Harbin to M. Grisman, Brisbane, 27 November 1918 (intercepted week ending 1 February 1919), QF2970.
25 D. Brovkoff, Russian Active Army to G. Merson, Brook Street, South Brisbane, 10 September 1918. This letter was intercepted in the week of 3 May 1919 and was stamped ‘part of a mail captured by the Germans and delayed’.
26 For an example of correspondence that highlights John’s attitude to the changes in Russia, see John (Gray), Vladivostock to Paul Gray, Wallumbilla, 14 April 1919, QF4363. Refer also to Paul Gray, King Street, East Brisbane to Miron Ulicen Shaher [sic], Vladivostok, intercepted week ending 26 March 1919, QF3553; John (Gray), The American Red Cross, Vladivostock to Paul Gray, GPO Brisbane, 7 March 1919, QF3830; John (Gray), Vladivostock to Paul Gray, GPO Brisbane, 14 March 1919, QF4094; and John Gray, Vladivostock to Paul Gray, GPO Brisbane, 12 May 1919, QF4645.
27 Vania, SS Tomsk, Simonosec Bay, on the way to Kobe to A. Zuzenko, Russian Association, Box 10, South Brisbane, 14 April 1919, QF3767; and Vania Zuzenko, Suez Canal to A. Zuzenko, Russian Association, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 4 May 1919, QF4147.
28 A. Lasareff, Krasnojarsk, Siberia to Mick Voitenkoff, PO Rockhampton, 4 April 1919, QF4517.
29 H. Popoff, Harbin to Rev Fr Mr Goldericke, Dara, Brisbane, 7 March 1918, QS11.
30 H. Popoff, Harbin to J. Thorpe, NZ Insurance Buildings, Brisbane, 7 March 1918, QS10.
lighter moment, violence in Russia was wryly described by one Vladivostock-based correspondent who commented that ‘to the category of higher class belong all those who are in possession of [an] extra pair of underwear’.31

The fate of relatives back in Russia was on the mind of many Russians in Brisbane. Censors frequently came up against determined family members who persisted, often with the support of local bank staff, in sending remittances to Russia in the hope that it would help ‘relatives who are practically starving’.32 Occasionally the censorship machinery demonstrated empathy towards the plight of Russians separated from their families. In October 1918 Peter Modrak – identified by the censor as ‘a Russian Bolshevik and a graduate of Brisbane university’ with a sizeable intercept record – attempted to send money and news of his life in Brisbane to occupied territory via a Polish relief fund based in Switzerland. The letter and money draft were forwarded to the Attorney-General’s Department and to the Deputy Chief Censor who ordered the release of the letter and money draft on the grounds that the ‘writer is sending £10 for his parents in Poland’.33

The censors were careful to note details of life in Russia from these intercepts. Gradually news of the turmoil at home filtered through to Russians in Australia who began to petition the federal government, politicians and Australian officials to support the entry of Russians desirous of immigrating to Australia.34 The fact that the Commonwealth government was receiving petitions to allow Russians in Australia to leave for Russia at the same time as it was receiving petitions to allow others to enter Australia highlights the confusion surrounding revolutionary Russia. Knowing what was actually going on in Russia became all the more important for the censors and military intelligence.

The first consul
The correspondence that most clearly reveals official links between the revolutionary vanguard in Russia and the bubble of Bolshevism in Brisbane is the flurry of cables and letters in February 1918 between Brisbane and London censors regarding the appointment of a Soviet consul in Australia. The London censor contacted the Brisbane censor on 17 February to check ‘to whom would be delivered telegram addressed to post office Box Ten South Brisbane’. The cable from the centre of the British war effort was correctly interpreted by the Brisbane censor as ‘a precaution … when

31 P. Polonsky, Vladivostock to Jacob Polonsky, Brisbane, 22 May 1919, QF4748. Polonsky also described the violence against intellectuals and members of religious orders. The censor’s notes state that the censor was tempted to comply with the RWA request for comrades to forward all news received from Russia to the Association (see Soviet, Brisbane to Peter Kriulin (Kreslin), Victoria Street, Cairns, 6 August 1919, QF4747).
32 See the case of South Brisbane jeweller David Blumberg in Rebecca, Brisbane to Behrman, Russia, 12 April 1918, Q39.
33 See two letters from Peter Modrak, 98 Bradley Street, Spring Hill, Brisbane to Comité général de secours pour les victimes de la guerre en Pologne, Vevey, Suisse, intercepted week ending 5 October 1918, Q3580; and intercepted week ending 26 October 1918, Q3619.
34 See the case outlined in Drachuk, PO stamp Sydney to E. Lane, Daily Standard, Brisbane, 29 April 1919, QF4037.
dealing with communication’ and immediately responded confirming the address of the headquarters of the RWA.35 Two days later, the London response to this information was sent. Even taking into account slower communication speeds and the pressures of war, the 2-day delay on behalf of the London censor indicates apprehension and inaction at the very least on the part of the British government. The cable from Litvinoff, London representative of the new Soviet regime, appointed Simonoff as consul in Australia and indicated ‘British foreign office advised’.36 For the Brisbane censor and his counterparts in the other military districts, this appointment triggered the realisation that they were not just dealing with a group of disloyal aliens consorting with IWW activists. The RWA were dangerous in their own right through layers of connections with the Soviet regime in Russia and the radical diaspora. Over the coming days cables appreciative of Litvinoff’s decision to appoint Simonoff were sent by Chairman Boldireff and Secretary Rosenberg representing the views of the Brisbane Russian community.37

The history of the Soviet Union’s unrecognised first consul to Australia has been explored by Eric Fried, Kevin Windle and Stuart Macintryre.38 The following section will focus on exploring the personalities and events surrounding Simonoff as consul as told through the censorship reports. Simonoff himself thought the reason for his appointment was so he would ‘have a freer hand to agitate and spread revolutionary ideas among the English’.39 His appointment as consul in Australia boosted his profile not only in the eyes of the censors but also amidst wider left-wing circles. Outside the Russian community Simonoff did receive a level of support and ideological admiration. For example, Ernest Lane (who published under the pseudonym Jack Cade in the Daily Standard) described Simonoff’s contribution to the Peace Conference in Sydney in glowing terms, concluding that ‘the more you get to know him the bigger a mind he seems’.40 Simonoff’s most significant frustrations were that he was not recognised by the Commonwealth of Australia and, as a result, he was prevented from communicating with his appointer Litvinoff and the Soviet government under the War Precautions Regulations. Ironically, the refusal of the Australian government to recognise Simonoff rallied local support around the beleaguered consul. Labour dailies from this time feature numerous pieces from Russians and left-wing personalities in support of Simonoff. Yakor Gunn

35 Censor, London to Censor, Brisbane, 17 February 1918, Q2835; and Censor, Brisbane to Censor, London, 17 February 1918, Q2836.
36 Litvinoff, London to PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 19 February 1918, Q2839.
37 See for example, Chairman Boldireff and Secretary Rosenberg to Litvinoff, Russian Ambassador, London, 20 February 1918, Q2840. It is likely that Boldireff in this intercept is the same Boldieff greeted in Sergeyev’s letter to his daughter Lily (Tom Sergaeff, Russia to Lily Sergaeff, Coopers Plains, intercepted week ending 2 March 1918, Q2851).
39 See censor’s notes to week ending 23 February 1918, Q2839. This quotation is taken from a letter sent from Simonoff in February 1918 to Volkovsky, PO Box 115, Haymarket, Sydney.
40 ‘Travel Gossip: With the Russians’, Worker (6 June 1918), 7.
Chapter 4: Mapping cases for suppression

registered the protest of the Russian Association in Sydney in the *Worker* and interviews with Simonoff highlighted his elevated status.41

Simonoff’s new role increased his liaison with the three key nodes of the Russian community in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne as well as mainstream labour politics. Despite his infamy, he was shackled by a lack of finances as much as he was by the Australian authorities. In the days after his appointment Simonoff contacted Litvinoff indicating that he had ‘no finances to carry consular operations’ and for Litvinoff to ‘meet kindly some necessary sum’.42 In addition to a severe lack of funds Simonoff was also located in Brisbane, well outside the seat of government shared by other consular representatives in Melbourne. Macintyre observes that Simonoff was ‘impatient to establish an Australian communist party’43 and the new consul soon moved to the southern capitals (possibly at his own expense) and toiled to no avail to have his position recognised by the Australian government. In Sydney, the ‘chronically conspiratorial’ Simonoff established an impressive base for operations in Rawson Place, near the Central Railway Station.44 In Melbourne he engaged in the agitation he so freely boasted of in his early correspondence. Despite the difficulties and opposition, Simonoff did receive support from sectors of the Russian community in Australia. A Branch of the Socialist Revolutionary Labor Party was formed in Selwyn, in north Queensland, and attempted to raise money to fund Simonoff in his role as Soviet consul.45

Simonoff’s feeling that economic hardship was crippling his political efforts became a sustained theme in his letters. His financial survival appeared to be as much reliant on the charity of other Russians as his journalistic ability. He became increasingly oblivious to the financial strains of his fellow Russians as the war period dragged on and industrial relations deteriorated.46 In mid 1919, for instance, he chided the Melbourne Russian Association for its lack of subscriptions to a new newspaper he proposed to raise in order to support the revolution, or more accurately to eke out a living.47 In July 1918, Melbourne-based Simonoff wrote to his Sydney comrades that while he is resolved to return to Russia, financial constraints keep him in Australia.48 Simonoff’s plaintive cries of fiscal barriers to leaving Australia became so frequent in his letters that any plans for his

42 Simonoff, Brisbane to Litvinoff, Russian Ambassador, London, 20 February 1918, Q2841.
45 F. Adamovitch, Selwyn, North Queensland to P. Simonoff, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 23 May 1918, MF1179. Interestingly there is no intercept of a letter from staunch Bolshevik Simonoff refusing financial support from a group of Socialist Revolutionaries.
46 Intercepted correspondence shows that Simonoff keenly felt his poor finances in his new role as consul. As Macintyre notes, Simonoff’s perspective was not always shared by his fellow workers: ‘Those who had known him when he was always down on his uppers found him suspiciously flush with funds; one compatriot remarked with astonishment that he now drank in saloon bars’ (*The Reds*, 20).
47 Peter Simonoff, Sydney to A. Stepanoff, Russian Workers Association, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 22 August 1919, MF2930.
48 P. Simonoff, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne to Russian Association, Box 115, Haymarket, Sydney, 23 July 1918, RE1092.
departure began to elicit increasing scepticism from his colleagues as well as the censors. For example, in response to his July 1918 plans the Second Military District censor:

Noted as of interest in recording approximate date of Simonoff’s departure, if he is really going. At times one can scarcely help thinking that his application for [a] passport was not sincere, that he really expected it to be refused, and that he then hoped to pose as a martyr in order to have greater influence in propagating his revolutionary ideas here.49

Over the coming months many instances of Simonoff planning his return to Russia can be identified in his letters.50 The fact that many of Simonoff’s Russian comrades – some experiencing far greater financial stress and with fewer political connections than he – were able to return to Russia, lends greater strength to the censor’s analysis. Interestingly, articles in the *Worker* and *Daily Standard* in mid 1918 indicate that Simonoff had obtained a passport, passage to return to Russia and assistance from the Japanese Consul but bowed to the overwhelming demands of the Russian Association to remain and represent their community.51

In his official role as consul Simonoff dealt with the case of John Burtovich, an IWW prisoner in the State Penitentiary at Long Bay in Sydney who continued to be held beyond his sentence of 3 months hard labour which expired on 17 January 1918. Burtovich appealed to Simonoff in Melbourne to defend his human rights and to help him either be released from prison or be deported to Russia.52 His letters are recorded as being held and one original is still held on file.53 The Censor Sydney felt that it was ‘doubtful policy whether Simonoff should be allowed to receive such matter … which he may apply to evil ends’ and passed it on to the Censor Melbourne to deal with the Burtovich case in an appropriate manner. Simonoff also dealt with the case of Paul Mirkin who requested a visit from the new Soviet consul in Melbourne Gaol.54 The diplomatic effect of any action taken by Simonoff in these cases was shaped by the conditions Australian authorities placed on his communications and movement.

49 Censor’s notes, week ending 22 July 1918, RE1092.
50 See for example, P. Simonoff, Box 10, South Brisbane to M. Nitianin [sic], Box 115, Haymarket, Sydney, 18 September 1918, RE1313; R.S. Ross, Socialist Party of Victoria, Melbourne to Vida Goldstein, Guild Hall, Melbourne, 24 July 1918, MF1425; R.S. Ross, Melbourne to Arch. Stewart, Trades Hall, Melbourne, 26 July 1918, MF1467; Vance Marshall, SDL (Socialist Democratic League) of New South Wales, 43 Wentworth Avenue, Sydney to Luke Jones, 184 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, 27 July 1918, MF1468; *Labor Call* of 7 August 1918, proof submitted 3 August 1918, MF1492; J. Cherbakoff, 379 Little Collins Street, Melbourne to H.D. Cherbakoff, Station Kesova Gora, William Pavloff, Tver Government, Central Russia, 7 August 1918, MF1524.
51 *Worker* (8 August 1918), 10; *Worker* (15 August 1918), 10; ‘Should Simonoff Go?’, *Daily Standard* (13 August 1918), 5.
52 J. Burtovich, State Penitentiary to P. Simonoff, c/o P. Laidler, Bourke Street, Melbourne, 30 April 1918, RE817 and John Burtovich, State Penitentiary to Russian General Consulate for Australia, Melbourne, 21, 30 and 31 May, RE903.
53 See interdepartmental correspondence and Burtovich’s original letter held in 168/1/7, series MP95/1.
54 Paul Mirkin, HM Gaol, Melbourne to P. Simonoff, Russian Library, 361 Little Collins Street, readdressed to 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 10 June 1918, MF1180.
One of Simonoff’s biggest publishing achievements during his time as Soviet consul was his book *What is Russia*.

Published in 1919, Simonoff wrote the book as an ‘answer’ to the conservative analysis of events in Russia with the purpose ‘not to make money out of it, but to propagate knowledge about Russia’. It is likely that this book was initially entitled *All about Russia and the Revolution* but was reworked and retitled to get over the hurdles of censorship.

Letters from left-wing personalities to Simonoff reveal that he was engaged in a political dialogue with a broad spectrum outside the RWA. George Reeve, for instance, wrote to Simonoff in May 1918 discussing ideological points as well as recommending political literature. In particular, Reeve refers to a ‘series of lectures on Siberian Jails in Sydney about 7 or 8 years ago’ by Simonoff. Betsy Matthias, editor of *Solidarity*, expressed an interest in an article by Simonoff on the Russian revolutionary press from the 1850s. In May 1918, Simonoff also submitted a manuscript on *Socialism is Coming* to the editor of the *Australian Worker*. Simonoff demonstrated great confidence in his ability and took his role as not just the Soviet Consul but as one of the leading socialist journalists in Australia quite seriously. Perhaps in recognition of these growing responsibilities, he mentioned as an aside in a letter to Ross that he had recently purchased a typewriter to speed up his work and to become a ‘modern journalist’.

In 1918 Simonoff was engaged in political correspondence with Madeline Cottier about the Russian Revolution and how it was represented in Australian dailies. Two intercepts by the Third Military District censor indicate the regard with which the censors viewed the nature of his dealings with an Australian woman who had a brother serving in France. A sense of moral panic can be detected in the censor’s notes to Cottier’s letter to Simonoff:

However she met Simonoff it is abundantly clear that he has written to her in a strain well calculated to test her loyalty to the breaking point. … Simonoff has been a danger to the community all along and the present case is one which if probed to the bottom, might well result in his being placed under proper restraint.

This is supported with notes following Simonoff’s reply to Cottier:

[He] has got her to the mortal condition necessary to make her a socialist propagandist. … Simonoff, if allowed to continue, will undo all the good done by loyalists who have worked and are working whole-heartedly for the empire.

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55 Peter Simonoff, *What is Russia?* (Sydney: The Workers Trade Union Print, 1919).
56 P Simonoff, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne to Russian Association, Box 115 Haymarket, Sydney 23 July 1918, RE1092. See also W.E. Hinch, Moreton Printing Company, 372 Ann Street, Brisbane to Peter Simonoff, Loran, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 29 July 1918, MF1488.
57 See intelligence report on Simonoff’s manuscript *All About Russia and the Revolution* and its discussion by 3MD censors in censor’s notes, week ending 18 September 1918, MF1834.
58 George G. Reeve, 99 Wells Street, Newtown, Sydney to P. Simonoff, Loran, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 7 May 1918, MF901.
59 W. Francis Ahern, *Australian Worker*, St Andrews Place, Sydney to Peter Simonoff, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 22 May 1918, series MP1049.
60 P. Simonoff, PO Box 10, South Brisbane to R. Ross, Melbourne, 13 August 1918, MF1577.
61 Censor’s notes, week ending 8 July 1918, MF1280. See corresponding letter from Madeline Cottier, St Paul’s Road, Sorrento to P. Simonoff, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 5 July 1918, MF1280.
62 Censor’s notes, week ending 11 July 1918, MF1319. See corresponding letter from P. Simonoff, Loran, 350 St Kilda Road, Melbourne to Madeline Cottier, St Paul’s Road, Sorrento, 11 July 1918, MF1319.
The censors described Simonoff’s correspondence as harmful ‘venom’ that needed to be contained so that it would not infect members of the wider Australian community. In addition to the danger Simonoff posed to the home front, censors worried that vulnerable women such as Cottier might be used by foreign agitators as intermediaries to communicate disloyal propaganda to their husbands and brothers – the frontline troops. When read next to Simonoff’s correspondence with others, there is little that is remarkable in the letters between Simonoff and Cottier, and the language of the censors’ notes was part and parcel of the intelligence view of the time. What is unique about these examples is that the Third Military District censor devoted seven pages to analysis of these letters; most intercepts received no more than a page or two of censors’ notes. These notes were written in the months leading up to the prosecution of Simonoff under the *War Precautions Act* and show the official thinking that contributed to the case against Simonoff.

It is clear Simonoff represented, for the authorities, an example of the prototype Bolshevik agitator, ‘arch-rebel’ of the Left.63 Despite the censors’ sensationalisation of most things associated with Russians or left-wing politics, they were often quite perceptive in their interpretation of Simonoff’s leadership despite ‘imag[ining] anything while he is loose’.64 For example, when Simonoff claimed to a friend in Sydney that ‘you will probably read in the papers about my doings’ the censor’s comments were sceptical: ‘is it simply swelled head or is he up to fresh mischief?’65 Ultimately Simonoff was perceived as a dangerous agitator: he ‘is not and never will be a Pacificist, … what he is, [is] a dangerous and violent revolutionary, subtly concealing, or trying to conceal his real hope and object – Bolshevism under a guise of peace and goodwill to men’.66 Adding to official concern regarding Simonoff’s activities were expressions of his intention to work with other discontented groups, in particular suggestions that he intended to make contact with Irish groups.67 Collaboration between Russians was to be expected, but even worse, other aliens (such as Irish IWW-ites) were ‘consorting with Russian undesirables’.68 Particularly worrying for the authorities was Simonoff’s influence on other extremist groups that were seen to be duped by Simonoff into doing ‘the dirty and disloyal work’.69 Links between Russians and Irish or Germans were interpreted as a sign that disloyalty was increasing on the home front. It was feared that ‘the threatened influx to Australia of enemy and other undesirable aliens [wa]s already taking shape’.70

No longer a refugee from a repressive system, the Russian activist was typecast as ‘a pretty kind of mad dog to let loose on the community’.71

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63 Censor’s notes, week ending October 1918, MF1967.
64 Censor’s notes, week ending 23 September 1918, RE1313.
65 P. Simonoff, Box 10, South Brisbane to M. Nitianin, Box 115, Haymarket, Sydney, 23 September 1918, RE1313.
66 Censor’s notes, week ending 5 August 1918, MF1490.
67 P. Simonoff, South Brisbane to Geraldine, Melbourne, 14 August 1918, MF1578.
68 Censor’s notes, week ending 8 July 1918, RE1017.
69 Censor’s notes, week ending 11 September 1918, MF1740.
70 Censor’s notes, week ending 18 June 1919, QF4343.
71 Censor’s notes, week ending 29 July 1918, RE1099.
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Gradually the interpretation of Simonoff’s work by the censors included more and more emotive references to his ‘self-assurance’ ‘carry[ing] out duties entrusted to him by the Bolsheviks government in Russia’: the “fermentation” of revolution, ‘evil activity’, and the ‘arrogance and dictatorial tone’ with which Simonoff engaged in propaganda.72 A key issue that had called Simonoff to action was the allied intervention in Russia. In August 1918 Simonoff was reported to be spiritedly addressing rallies in the Brisbane and Sydney Domain areas as well as publishing pieces stridently against the “capitalist intervention” in a range of left-wing newspapers such as the *Industrial Congress* and *Labor Call*.73 These are instances of Simonoff’s work that directly contravened the War Precautions Regulations. Letters, draft articles, reports of his public addresses as well as notes on his future plans to engage in public propaganda were meticulously collected by the censors and forwarded to the Deputy Chief Censor with analysis on how these examples further demonstrated the case against Simonoff. The censors increasingly called for legal action – ‘to keep him under restraint’ – to stifle Simonoff from continuing the subversive, revolutionary work of the Soviet regime.74 In the lead up to Simonoff’s arrest the censors’ notes highlight that ‘there is no more dangerous person at large than Simonoff’.75 It is very likely that Australian censors had hoped that the federal government in Australia would follow Britain’s lead in its dealings with Litvinoff and intern Simonoff to ‘so eradicate at least one pest from that stricken community in the North’.76

Simonoff himself appeared to be very much aware of the official and community opposition to his appointment. He indicated in a letter to the Russian Association in Melbourne that pressure was being put on Irving, the military commandant in Brisbane, to intern him and that his articles for the local RWA paper were regularly suppressed.77 Additionally, he was aware of surveillance by a range of ‘government sleuths, who for the past 6 years have been most concerned about my health and therefore watch my every step, though highly unsuccessfully, or not always successfully.’78 Simonoff frequently lamented to colleagues up and down the east coast of Australia about how intolerable things were for him (but that he could not leave yet due to support from the Russian community and his displeasure with the ‘too exiding [sic] kindness’ of the Japanese consul79), combined with the looming pressure of being interned, appeared to galvanise Simonoff into viewing his work as almost indispensable. Simonoff informed his Melbourne comrades that the RWA was facing ‘a new organisation … composed of returned soliders and hooligans, who

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72 For examples see censors’ notes, week ending 20 August 1918, MF1577, MF1578 and MF1582.
73 Two letters from P. Simonoff, PO Box 10, South Brisbane to R. Ross, Melbourne, 13 August 1918, MF1577; and 16 August 1918, MF1582.
74 See for example censor’s notes, week ending 28 August 1918, MF1676.
75 Censor’s notes, week ending 11 September 1918, MF1740.
76 Censor’s notes, week ending 11 September 1918, MF1741.
77 P. Simonoff, Brisbane to Russian Association, Little Collins Street, Melbourne, 5 September 1918, MF1740A.
79 See Simonoff’s comments in P. Simonoff, PO Box 10, South Brisbane to R.S. Ross, Melbourne, 13 August 1918, MF1577; P. Simonoff, PO Box 10, South Brisbane to R.S. Ross, Exhibition Street, Melbourne, 22 August 1918, MF1676; P. Simonoff, South Brisbane to Geraldine, Melbourne, 14 August 1918, MF1578; and P. Simonoff, PO Box 10, South Brisbane to P. Laidler, c/o Andrades, Melbourne, 4 August 1918, MF1740.
threaten openly to smash the Russian Workers Union …but let them try it’. Simonoff’s bravado aside, the RWA were attracting loyalist attention that would soon have serious consequences for the wider Russian community in Brisbane. A lack of sympathy on the part of the authorities is clear when the censor responded: ‘Possibly the returned soldiers who, thank God, are not all hooligans, may yet take the law into their own hands’.80 This censor’s comment is colluding in extra-lawful activity, if not encouraging it. Comments like this were part of the routine censorship process and, in this case, I could not find evidence that this opinion was included elsewhere. However, there are cases where censors’ comments were selected for inclusion as evidence by HQ in documents such as the prosecution of Red Flag rioters and the post-war Summary of Communism.81 This was one way censors’ comments influenced the process of policy formation.

In late September 1918 Simonoff was served a notice by Brigadier General Irving prohibiting him under the War Precautions Regulations from addressing or taking part in meetings where subjects pertaining to the war are discussed. Unsurprisingly Simonoff petitioned Acting Prime Minister Watt on the grounds that his official duties as Soviet consul required him to address public gatherings. In a letter to left-wing figure R.S. Ross, Simonoff detailed his plans to petition the consuls of other governments such as the Netherlands to garner support for his cause.82 Censors were amazed that despite the War Precautions Regulations order served against Simonoff, he continued to travel at will up and down the east coast of Australia.83 The interaction between Simonoff and the wider labour movement was closely monitored by authorities. One censor exclaimed that he found it ‘almost incredible that the workers in Australia should permit themselves to be influenced and led by this unspeakable Russian.’84

Simonoff struggled, but ultimately failed, to be recognised by the Australian government. In July 1918 he struck an unusual political arrangement with the Hon. Mick Considine, Member of the House of Representatives at the time, for Considine to act in his place as honorary acting consul. Simonoff claimed that this arrangement ensured that Russians in Australia would not be left without consular representation upon his departure (or imprisonment). This agreement was widely covered in the labour press85 and was unsurprisingly hailed as a farce by the federal government and conservative forces. It is difficult to see how Considine’s credibility could not fail to be compromised by being simultaneously an elected member in the Australian parliament and the

80 P Simonoff, Brisbane to Russian Association, Melbourne, 5 September 1918, MF1740A.
81 Censor’s comments for QF3998, week ending 7 May 1919, for instance, were included in the File on Russians, Russian Association, Soviet or Souse in Brisbane; relating to meetings, demonstrations, deportations, prosecutions, 66/4/3660, series BP4/1, NAA. See also the Summary of Communism, 111, series A6122, NAA.
82 Peter (Simonoff), Brisbane to R.S. Ross, Melbourne, 4 October 1918, MF1968. See also ‘Simonoff’s Demand: Appeal to England’, Knowledge and Unity (23 March 1919), 1.
83 See Peter Simonoff, Sydney to Secretary, ASP (Australian Socialist Party), Victoria Street, Melbourne, 21 October 1918, MF2064.
84 Censor’s notes, week ending 26 October 1918, MF2036.
consular representative of a hostile nation. In hindsight it may be the case that the acting
arrangements set out by Simonoff were in fact a publicity seeking exercise to gain a higher profile in
political circles and with the general public in an attempt to be recognised by the Australian
government.

Simonoff’s skill as an eloquent commentator on the happenings in Russia began to pay dividends
for him. The censors’ reports record that an increasing tide of requests for information from the
Australian media was flowing his way. In February 1918 S.H. Prior, editor of *The Bulletin*,
approached Simonoff for a piece on the Bolshevik case. Interestingly, Prior’s reason for
requesting the article was to balance the daily papers’ representation of the Bolsheviks as ‘mere
thieves and murderers’. The censors’ suspicion that Simonoff’s article might turn out to be ‘similar
to the Bolshevik propaganda literature’, along with Prior’s disloyal background, make the details
provided by the censor interesting. While acknowledging that ‘possibly Prior’s only object is to
secure copy interesting to readers’, the censor drew a long bow to link Prior with Germans by
highlighting Prior’s shareholdings in a firm associated with a German businessman Von Raben.
These suspicions of colluding with aliens were further compounded by other intercepted
correspondence in which the editor of *The Bulletin* was rumoured to be supporting the move against
the suppression order banning the publication of the RWA’s *Workers’ Life*.87

Censorship comprehensively recorded Simonoff’s correspondence with Russians, left-wing
sympathisers and official letters with the Australian government. Simonoff was interpreted by the
censors as ‘posing as a sufferer whose dignity has been outraged’, with his protests ‘only written for
the public eye’.88 In late 1918 the RWA, on the occasion of Simonoff’s arrest, issued a resolution in
his defence. It was a standard resolution that slammed the capitalist system and glorified the Soviet
regime. Yet one paragraph was an ominous threat on the developments in Australia:

> In the past methods of violence have created negative results and compelled
> movements to go underground and continue their work illegally, responding to
> force by force. Violence always has only increased the forces, strengthened the
> ranks, and created a desire for revenge.89

Simonoff lost his appeal in March 1919 against the charges filed under the *War Precautions Act*, and
his 6 month sentence was upheld.

Simonoff’s position as unrecognised Soviet consul was untenable. In a letter to Zuzenko, Simonoff
confided that surely ‘there is no case on record of anyone of them [diplomatic representatives] having
been subjected to the same indignities and persecution that I have suffered at the hands of

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87 See Boorman and Boorman, 72B King Street Sydney to Editor, *Workers Life*, Stanley Street, Brisbane, 24
January 1918, Q2749.
88 Censor’s notes, week ending 21 January 1919, MF2494.
89 Fanny Rosenberg and Michael Wishnevsky, ‘Simonoff’s Arrest: Protest from Russian Workers’, *Worker* (21
November 1918), 19.
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the federal authorities of the Commonwealth. Simonoff refuted the Australian government’s insistence that his ‘status is one of a private citizen’ and in turn accused the federal government of violating international diplomatic customs and usages. Angered by the situation he found himself in, it seems Simonoff also became increasingly removed from the propaganda and publishing work of the RWA throughout 1919. The fact that Simonoff wrote scathing criticism of editions of Knowledge and Unity did not assist him in gaining support for his cause in Brisbane.

Perhaps as a result of his detention Simonoff was surprisingly quiet during the Red Flag events. He continued to write articles and short books which he forwarded to R.S. Ross in the hope of getting them published. Upon his release from detention in July 1919 Simonoff again expressed concern about how to support himself and floated the idea with Norman Freeberg of the Worker and others in the left-wing publishing industry of establishing a monthly newspaper. After his conviction, he had more opportunity to receive funding from appeals to the Russian community as he was ‘considered to be a martyr to the cause’. But by August 1919 he wrote in despair that he had a great problem of ‘what to do’ as he would not be able to find a boss if he went to look for one: ‘and yet something must be done for existence and I am damned if I know what I am going to do’. Simonoff also informed the Sydney and Melbourne Russian Clubs of his plight, outlining his financial turmoil and his desire to establish a socialist magazine so he could support himself. One censor even went so far as to put Simonoff’s fixation on financial support down to him being ‘a confirmed money grabber’.

Simonoff’s persistent determination was viewed by censors as a marker of a dangerous militant who not only undermined the Australian government, but openly promoted the hostile ideology of another country. His arrest and detention in 1919 was seen as having ‘a good effect upon the Bolsheviki in Queensland’: ‘the agitator has been dealt with, [and the] ... wings of Knowledge and Unity have been clipped. Nevertheless, the censors were certain that these measures were merely

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90 P. Simonoff, Sydney to Mr Archangel, PO Box 10, Brisbane, 20 January 1919. Angel and Archangel are aliases of Zuzenko.
91 Simonoff wrote many letters to the government. For a copy of one such letter see Peter Simonoff, 22 Sir John Young Crescent, Lower Domain, Sydney to Secretary, Trades and Labor Council, Trades Hall, Brisbane 25 February 1919, QF3410.
92 For his comments on edition 33 see P. Simonoff, Sydney to Russian Library, PO Box 33, South Brisbane, 24 August 1919, QF4826. On the general lack of confidence in Simonoff and his publishing endeavours by the Russian community see censor’s notes, week ending 27 August 1919, QF4810; for tensions between Simonoff and the RWA see A. Simons (P. Simonoff), 115 Goulburn Street, Sydney to Russian Library, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 20 August 1919, QF4812; and Peter Simonoff, Sydney to Russian Library, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, PO stamped 21 August 1919, QF4813.
93 Censor’s notes, week ending 30 July 1919, QF4742.
95 Peter Simonoff, Sydney to A. Stepanoff, Russian Workers Association, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 22 August 1919, MF2930. See Federoff (for the soviet), PO Box 115 Haymarket, Sydney to Stepanoff, ASP Hall, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 31 August 1919, MF2947 as well.
96 Censor’s notes, week ending 20 August 1919, MF2912.
checks and that perpetual vigilance on their behalf to assist the military authorities was required as ‘the Russian will not be satisfied unless he has made a bold attempt to revolutionise existing conditions’. The censors’ interpretation of Simonoff’s correspondence and political activities under the War Precautions Regulations was shaped by ongoing concerns such as threats to the home front from the disloyal. On the whole, it must be concluded that their interpretations were largely accurate and they produced intelligence that contributed to successful convictions. The image of the arch-rebel was reflected in post-war ideas about communists and their loyalty to Comintern in a security environment where ‘combating Bolshevism governed its world view’. There is some evidence, however, that censors detected that Simonoff was more of ‘an incompetent adventurer’ in comparison to someone like Zuzenko who was seen to be better able to write to the masses, gather widespread support, and coordinate the organisation of groups around the Commonwealth.

Tensions in the community and renewal under Zuzenko’s leadership

Opposition to the appointment of Simonoff as Russian consul did not come just from conservative sections of Australian society; it also came from the Russian community itself. Letters to the editor and articles appeared regularly in the *Worker* and the *Daily Standard* outlining various criticisms of Simonoff and his unsuitability for the position of political and ideological leader of Russians in Australia. In a letter to Comintern in 1920, Zuzenko characterised Simonoff’s leadership as Simonoff ‘dreaming perhaps of becoming an official of Soviet Russia, who would sit in an office issuing passports to departing Russians … and nothing more’. Soon after his appointment as consul, Simonoff gave an interview to the *Daily Standard* in which he provided a limited analysis of the role of the Bolsheviks in Russian revolutionary history. Damagingly, he also referred to those Russians in Australia who were not Bolsheviks as ‘a few boneheads and scoundrels’. These comments understandably drew criticism from both Russians who did not support the new regime as well as those who did. A cutting of Simonoff’s comments in the *Daily Standard* article was published by N. Constantinoff, a Russian resident in South Brisbane. In his rebuttal of Simonoff’s rosy account of the Russian revolutionary movement, Constantinoff attacked Simonoff’s apparent lack of time ‘in the Czar’s prison, or in the cold “taiga” of Siberia’. Simonoff’s escape from Russia and his contribution to politics in Russia were brought into question. What was made poignantly clear from Constantinoff’s writing is that Simonoff, despite

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97 Censor’s notes, week ending 1 January 1919, QF2701.
his superior English language skills, was considered ahistorical and ideologically blinkered in his understanding of the happenings in Russia by some in the Russian community.

Whereas hardline Bolsheviks in the RWA such as Sergeyev possessed a skill for negotiation that helped them to promote Bolshevism and engage with other political perspectives of the time, Simonoff could be described as being less of a peacemaker. On 13 February 1918 some disagreements between Simonoff and those in the RWA who opposed his appointment came to the surface at an RWA meeting. Accounts of this meeting published in the *Daily Standard* reinforce the conflicting responses to Simonoff. It is unclear whether the meeting erupted into a riot against Simonoff’s “Red Guard” or ended with the ejection of a handful of disorderly dissenters. The meeting ended when the police were called to Alliance Hall in Woolloongabba to deal with the noisy demonstration.

Political infighting from those opposed to Simonoff continued to affect the RWA throughout 1918. Postal censorship indicates that Simonoff’s personality and his newfound confidence as Soviet Consul contributed to the disillusionment of many Brisbane Russians with his representation of their interests. As Viswanath and Arora observe in their work on ethnic groups in the United States, increased group size is ‘likely to bring in increasing complexity within the ethnic community’, adding to its heterogeneity. Additionally, the more secure a community is, the less likely it feels the need to maintain a united front on all issues. The Russian community in Australia, and in Queensland, was far from secure. The dominance of Bolshevism in the RWA resulted in a muting of other views both within the Association and its press. It is clear that Simonoff’s nomination by the Soviet government did not have the desired effect of creating a united community. A sensible analysis of this situation can be found in the comments of a First Military District censor:

> There is still a fairly strong opposition against Simonoff and he devotes considerable space in trying to explain it, showing that it irritates him. Against the Bolsheviki in Australia there is the same bitterness that existed before the revolution – little factions plotting and scheming for power and capable of doing anything to acquire that power. The harmony which extreme socialism was supposed to bring is further away than ever.

Comments like these show that censors were producing intelligence based on analysis and not just on prejudice or preconception. A brief challenge to Simonoff’s hegemonic control over the RWA leadership was demonstrated in 1918 with the emergence of the breakaway Russian Group of Workers, led by Herman Bykoff, alias Aleksandr Resanoff. Zuzenko later explained that the breakaway was because of a rift ‘between the Bolshevik members (mostly workers) and the Mensheviks (intellectuals and profiteering shopkeepers)’. It is important to note that this splinter...
group with its alternative vision for the Russian club was short lived. The dominance, and validity, of the RWA were swiftly reasserted.

Elected leaders of the new Russian Group of Workers attempted to counteract Simonoff’s leadership and his strong criticism of their group through press releases and representations to Sydney and Melbourne Russian clubs. Tom Pikunoff published a lengthy explanation of the group’s aims and motivation for forming in the *Daily Standard*. Pikunoff observed that the appointment of Simonoff as consul uncovered ‘the backwardness of some ... and showed [the] critical progress of others.‘\(^{107}\) While Pikunoff wrote in quite general terms on the political situation in Russia, he made a scathing assessment of Simonoff as a man with ‘intellectual baggage’ who could not occupy the position of educating the masses due to a complete lack of ‘knowledge, talent, or stable and definite principles’. Pikunoff cleverly maintained support for the Soviet regime by absolving any blame for their appointment of Simonoff due to the fact that these characteristics were not known to the Bolshevik hierarchy. He argued that Litvinoff had little knowledge of conditions in Australia and that his choice of Simonoff was a mistake. Opposition like this towards Simonoff was not just evident in press releases and correspondence between the various Russian clubs. Individual members also took it upon themselves to express their protests in the press. For example, Brisbane Russian J. Loginoff wrote a scathing review of Simonoff both on personal grounds, and as a Bolshevik, which he published as a letter in the *Daily Standard*.\(^{108}\) Simonoff was also chastised for not doing his duty to promote Bolshevism and to defend the rights of Russians in Australia.\(^{109}\)

In July 1918, the Russian Group of Workers wrote to Secretary Shcherbakoff of the Russian Association in Melbourne asking him to read their petition at the next meeting.\(^{110}\) In particular the Group sought answers to two questions:

- What names did Simonoff (from the opposition) call us during your colonial extraordinary meetings?
- Whom does he consider as ‘policemen and gendarmes’ who ran away and have changed themselves in Australia into extreme radicals?

The letter from Resanoff (Bykoff) goes on to outline the points on which Simonoff’s political persecution of the Russian Group of Workers was based: mostly accusations of harbouring those who had once worked for the tsarist regime and ideological plurality.

After the October Revolution the RWA unsurprisingly began to align itself with the Bolshevik regime with Simonoff as the appointed representative of the new order. The RWA leadership followed through with this political alignment by promoting criticism of other groups such as

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108 Loginoff’s letter was published in March 1919. See censor’s notes, week ending 19 March 1919, QF3411.
109 See Simonoff’s defence of his actions in his response to accusation from Russian Association, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 21 March 1919, QF3517.
110 A. Resanoff, Secretary, Russian Group of Workers, 139 Storby Street, Brisbane to Secretary Shcherbakoff, Russian Association, Melbourne, 13 July 1918, RE1091.
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syndicalists, anarchists and socialist revolutionaries. This trend was resisted by splinter groups like Bykoff’s Russian Group, which (on the surface at least) attempted to represent ideas across the left-wing political spectrum, and publicised these perspectives in the *Ninth Wave*, a Russian language newspaper. Bykoff specifically mentions that ‘the anarchists played not an inconsiderable part in the fight of the Soviets with the republic of Kerensky’. Klushin, also a key player in the new Russian Group, projected the group as a collective to which ‘belongs anyone, monarchist as well as anarchist, as long as he is a good man’.111 This was a cutting comparison for the new group to make between itself and the parent RWA because the RWA had been established as a Russian Club for all emigrants. Reservations were expressed by censors about the ‘non-political’ nature of Bykoff’s new group, whose activities they described as ‘bewildering’.112 This intelligence collected on the development of the Russian Group was primarily drawn from censors’ comments on mail intercepts. Surviving intelligence collected by the Commonwealth Police and military intelligence in cooperation with the Queensland Police focused more on evidence of members’ unlawful activities.113 In describing the group as non-political the censors misjudged the Russian Group of Workers. The group was in fact overtly political, as it aimed to attract members from a broad political spectrum, particularly those who were sidelined by the Bolshevik core in the RWA.

The Russian Group of Workers was short-lived due to a crippling lack of funds.114 Additionally Simonoff had energetically campaigned against any opposition to his leadership. This in itself shows that the existence of the Russian Group of Workers was taken seriously by Simonoff and other RWA stalwarts such as Nicholas Lagutin. After his departure from Brisbane, Russians kept Simonoff informed of tensions within the RWA. Frank Offseck wrote to Simonoff in March 1918 warning him of growing dissension in Brisbane and increasing membership of the Ipswich branch of the RWA.115 Offseck urged Simonoff to revive the old RWA paper, perhaps as a point of unity for Russians in Queensland.

Prior to being appointed as Consul by Litvinoff, Simonoff had a direct hand in the RWA’s newspaper publishing. Under his direction RWA papers attracted a large membership and strove to

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111 N. Lagutin, Secretary, Russian Association, Brisbane to Russian Association, Haymarket, Sydney, 16 July 1918, RE1073. These egalitarian values were also outlined by Pikunoff in the *Daily Standard* (27 June 1918), 6.
112 Censor’s notes, week ending 15 July 1918, RE1073.
113 See intelligence collected by the Commonwealth Police, military intelligence (in conjunction with the Queensland Police) and the Censor’s Office against Bykoff in The Red Flag – incidents regarding the flying of same at the Brisbane Trades Hall, in Trade Union processions, and by various individuals at various places in Queensland, 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA.
114 Resanoff notes in RE1091 that the Russian Group of Workers ‘does not possess the means to send a delegate’ to Melbourne to inquire into (and presumably refute) Simonoff’s allegations. A. Resanoff, Secretary, Russian Group of Workers, 139 Storby Street, Brisbane to Secretary Shcherbakoff, Russian Association, Melbourne, 13 July 1918, RE1091.
115 Offseck noted that the Ipswich membership had increased twofold from 12 to 24. Frank Offseck, Railway Workshops, Ipswich, Queensland to P. Simonoff, Melbourne, 20 March 1918, MF711. Offseck was a willing supporter of the RWA publishing enterprise, even to the extent of learning to operate lino in Russian to help with the printing. For details see W.H. Hinch, Moreton Printing Company, 372 Ann Street, Brisbane to P. Simonoff, Loran, St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 1 July 1918, MF1287.
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include original writings, albeit by a small pool of writers. Simonoff coaxed Lagutin into the editorship of the RWA paper in the period after his appointment as Consul. Simonoff’s desire for ongoing control over the RWA and its newspapers, in addition to his new role in Melbourne, was clear. His comments on the breakaway Resanoff group were almost as scathing as his assessment of Lagutin’s editions of *Knowledge and Unity*:

I read in your paper your letter to the readers. I also read every page of that number, and frankly speaking I am astounded. What devil made you print all that rubbish? You have gone back to the old tactics of the editorial of *Workers’ Life* before I took it on.... Get to know about everything and impart something of your knowledge to your readers. Don’t try to give them more than you know yourself.116

For Simonoff the situation was clear: poor editorial choices had resulted in a drop in journalistic integrity and quality. Despite Simonoff’s disgust, Lagutin continued to liaise with W.H. Hinch of the Moreton Printing Company to publish a Russian paper on a regular monthly basis.117 However, Lagutin included too many translations of other papers’ articles in this monthly paper to attract widespread support within the Russian community in Queensland according to Simonoff.

Differences of personality and approaches to work with other Russians, such as the new leader Zuzenko, as well as others the paper depended on, such as Peter Landie (who had secured work at the Moreton Printing Company), furthered isolated Lagutin. It was at this time, in mid 1918, that Bykoff’s Russian Group attempted to launch their paper and to engage in more genuine political debate. In addition to taking members away from the RWA, the Russian Group also diverted much needed funds. The effects of this can be seen in a letter to the Sydney Russians, where Lagutin asks for a special fund raising meeting to be held with the purpose of sourcing the funds necessary to publish *Knowledge and Unity*. He attributes the paper’s shaky finances to ‘a new group of Russian workmen’ that have stopped attending RWA meetings ‘during which they used to argue, quarrel and make a lot of noise’.118 Simonoff also commented on the new group’s boisterous character, noting upon his return to Brisbane from a sojourn to Sydney and Melbourne that ‘the opposition had discredited itself entirely … by their own foolishness’.119

Zuzenko first appears in the censors’ reports as an organiser working with a small number of striking Russians in Halifax, north Queensland, in mid December 1917.120 His telegram states ‘I

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116 P. Simonoff, Melbourne to N. Lagutin, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 18 July 1918, QF1469.
117 For more details see W.H. Hinch, Moreton Printing Company, 372 Ann Street, Brisbane to P. Simonoff, Loran, St Kilda Road, Melbourne, 1 July 1918, MF1287.
118 N. Lagutin, Secretary, Russian Association, Brisbane to Russian Association, Haymarket, Sydney, 16 July 1918, RE1073. Russian Clubs around the country were cash strapped and were not in a position to support any new publishing ventures. One censor later commented that ‘the pecuniary resources of the Russian Associations … are apparently insignificant. Its members do not appear to be able to command more than a few pounds, and the methods of their disposal always seem to lead to internal disputes’. See censor’s notes, week ending 31 August 1919, MF2947.
119 P. Simonoff, Box 10, South Brisbane to M. Nitianin, Box 115, Haymarket, Sydney, 23 September 1918, RE1313.
120 According to Zuzenko’s report to Comintern on his activities in Australia, he had been ‘travelling all over Australia, from Port Pirie and Adelaide, to the Far North’ since 1912. He states that he was organising
wire you 7 pounds 10 shillings we 36 men send 2 protests resolutions telegraphic to Prime Minister Ryan and Minister for Defence Melbourne original resolution send by the post reply paid'.

Zuzenko soon gained the confidence of Russians in Brisbane. Alex Lenin, for instance, mentioned to Betsy Matthias (the editor of Solidarity) that Zuzenko now had the subscription lists and for her to ‘trust him. I could not find a better man on this occasion’. Zuzenko did manage to revitalize the RWA paper Knowledge and Unity. However, as indicated by Simonoff, the regime of the censors was proving difficult as most original writing on political subjects was either cut or entirely rejected.

Described by left-wing personality Monty Miller as ‘a man of education and strong natural powers’, Zuzenko brought new energy and considerable enterprise to the splintering Russian Association. In a letter on how to revive the ailing Melbourne association Zuzenko reported that the regulations of the RWA – ‘being only useless superfluous rubbish’ – were done away with and extraordinary activity was now taking place. Zuzenko specified that the RWA ‘threw aside also [adherence to] the War Precautions Act (the Regulations) which only took up much precious time and drove away many people’. His willingness to work outside the Regulations illustrated for the censors his ‘contempt for and defiance of the authorities’. Insight on the changes to the RWA under Zuzenko is given by an Ipswich member who stated that the Brisbane club underwent a financial crash that necessitated the shared publication of Knowledge and Unity and that Zuzenko’s paid position as secretary was superseded by the unpaid nine member executive.

In addition to sending copies of Knowledge and Unity to Russians in interstate and regional branches to sell, the Brisbane group also distributed copies of the Soviet Constitution and photos of Lenin.

In early 1919 the censors came across ‘the first direct evidence… of the presence of a Russian Soviet in Australia’. Stamped from the Russian Association Brisbane, the short letter chided workers for the IWW as well as managing strike action. Zuzenko attributes the success of these strikes to ‘the application of Russian fighting methods’.

121 Soosenko, Halifax to Russian Association, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 2 January 1918, Q2660. The state-federal structure was no less complicated in World War I than it is today. It is quite likely that Premier Ryan’s political personality loomed larger than PM Hughes’s role in rural Queensland.

122 Alexis Lenin, 139 Stanley Street, South Brisbane to Mrs Betsy Matthias, 117 Bathurst Street, Sydney, 10 October 1918, RE1375.

123 P. Simonoff, Box 10, South Brisbane to M. Nitiainin, Box 115, Haymarket, Sydney, 23 September 1918, RE1313.


125 Monty Miller, 26 Tank Street, Brisbane to M. Stevens, OBU League, 28 Bourke Street, Melbourne, 3 February 1919, MF2568.

126 A. Zuzenko, Russian Association, Brisbane to V. Petruichenia, 3 Tennyson Street, Kensington, 4 February 1919, MF2581.

127 A. Gamanoff, c/o Zalabisby, Fitzgibbon Street, North Ipswich to T. Cherbakoff, 379 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 2 March 1919, MF2628.

128 See Boris Rosenberg’s report of his fund-raising efforts in B. Rosenberg, 29 Union Street, Pyrmont to A. Rezanoff, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 18 March 1919, QF3506.
Melbourne counterparts over overdue subscriptions. What was different about this letter was that the request came from the ‘Soviet’. Suspicion was aroused for the censor who photographed it before releasing the original. The censor’s analysis was measured and he questioned the existence of a soviet, even suggesting that it was likely to be a soviet in name alone, before stating that ‘prompt measures are necessary to break it up before its pernicious doctrines i.e. Bolshevism and its corollary army revolt encircle the workers with their tentacles’. The second part of the censor’s response is telling: the presence of a soviet was viewed in military terms as an attack on the vulnerable civilian population on the home front. Of particular concern to officials was that ‘the activity of the Russians [wa]s increasing and they [we]re endeavouring to spread their propaganda from state to state’. The question they needed to answer was: should authorities be bracing themselves for the establishment of soviets targeting workers in Sydney and Melbourne as well as in outlying regional areas? The move by the RWA to publish Knowledge and Unity in English from late 1918 and to market it throughout the eastern states certainly supported this line of thinking by the censors.

In March 1919 the RWA sent out an official circular to all branches and sympathisers. The circular had two purposes, first to outline the new arrangements for the publication of Knowledge and Unity jointly with the Queensland Socialist League, and second to reinforce the alignment of the RWA with ‘the principle of the supremacy of the power of the socialist soviet’. It focused on the abolition of regulations and a secretariat in favour of a soviet of nine persons who would make executive decisions. The circular closed with a call to action:

Comrades, organise:
Be disciplined, learn to govern yourselves. Russia wants you to take part in her soviet proletarian organisations. She wants your devotion, your readiness to fulfil your duty in the constructive work of the Soviets.

The changes proposed under Zuzenko’s leadership were not universally accepted by Russians, and members of the Sydney branch strongly questioned Zuzenko’s decision making. The Broken Hill branch deliberated over the reforms before members were persuaded by Zuzenko’s arguments. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the new Brisbane model was enthusiastically adopted by
Russians in Sydney. The censors’ perceptive analysis of the politics underpinning changes with the RWA can be summarised as follows:

- The closer alliance with the more mainstream left-wing movement was seen as an opportunity to extend the scope of the RWA in Queensland.
- By increasing the readership of Knowledge and Unity the RWA hoped to gain more ‘converts’ and support from higher level organisations such as the Industrial Council and the unions.
- Leadership changes were an attempt to keep alive an organisation that was showing signs of disintegration, particularly after the breakaway of the Russian Group of Workers.

By mid 1919 several documents produced by the RWA declared that it had adopted the tactics of direct action. In a strongly worded circular in preparation for the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution, the new RWA stated that it had ‘ceased to be a little education circle for the Russians. The present aim of the association is the revolutionary communistic propaganda amongst British workers’. This circular also outlined the organisations with which the RWA intended to cooperate in order to propagate the revolution, namely the IWW and its offshoot the OBU. The strong language and overtly violent nature of the action being promoted led the censor to comment ‘that the repressive measures taken against it [the Brisbane RWA] recently have had very little effect’. Indeed, the timing of the circular coincided with the release of the last Red Flag prisoners, including Bykoff, and it is likely that the more militant Red Flag prisoners had a hand in authoring the circular. The censor’s conclusion was that ‘any society which advocates Bolshevism, revolution, and direct action as this does is a danger and a menace to the community and should be destroyed root and branch’. The revolutionary tone of the reinvigorated RWA continued to be noted by the censors and forwarded for inclusion in military intelligence circulars to other agencies. While the RWA documents discussed here are not step-by-step guides to direct action as were produced by the IWW for example, these circulars do make frequent references to the overthrow of Australia’s parliamentary democracy and replacement by revolutionary organisations as were being developed in Russia. They also contain numerous examples of the category of information referred to in section 4(d) of the War Precautions Act and incitements to action in breach of sections 3 and 7 of the Unlawful Associations Act. The fact that the censors released these circulars after interception could be an indication that the Censor’s Office and military intelligence were interested in tracking who received the circulars and what impact they had on their recipients for future prosecutions under the Regulations.

134 See for example the accounts in B. Rosenberg, 29 Union Street, Pyrmont, Sydney to A. Rezanoff, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 18 March 1919, QF3506; and P.T. (Timms), Sydney to Rezanoff, Font Hill, Upper Melbourne Street, South Brisbane, 11 March 1919, QF3507.
135 Soviet of Russian Association, Brisbane to Russian Association, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, MF2909.
136 See censor’s notes, week ending 20 August 1919, MF2913.
The red flag events

On 23 and 24 March 1919 a period of civil unrest in Brisbane was sparked by the flying of the international workers’ flag. These events are now referred to as the Red Flag march and riots. The flag of the trade unions, the red flag had become tinged with radicalism due to its association with the Russian Revolution. 137 On 19 September, the government reacted to the use of the red flag by extending the May 1918 War Precautions Regulation 27B which prohibited the display of the Sinn Fein colours. This change prohibited the display of the red flag on the grounds that it was the flag of an enemy country. 138 The Russians who were arrested for flying red flags at the Red Flag march were arrested under Regulation 27BB. 139

On Sunday 23 March 1919 a coalition of left-wing groups including the Children’s Peace Army and the RWA marched as a procession through the streets of Brisbane ending with a Sunday afternoon rally in the Domain. They had gone through the tricky process to gain official approval for a march and the event was subject to a heavy Queensland Police presence as well as surveillance by military intelligence, Commonwealth Police and Censor’s Office. Despite an agreement with the Industrial Council that the demonstration would take place without red flags, ‘comrades Zuzenko and Reszanoff [Bykoff]... took the flags, wrapped in paper in order not to frighten the cowards and went in front’. 140 From this moment the character of the procession changed and the event was politically tied to the radical extreme. This account was written by a censor who attended the march and the following Domain meeting. His words articulate the emotion felt by those who did not support the Russian cause:

The procession ... wore the air of a conquering army. Their exultation was excusable. They had successfully carried the symbol of the Russian Red Revolution through the streets of an Australian city, contemniously brushing aside the small unarmed body of police.... They had successfully defied the provisions of the W.P.R. and contingent restrictions. 141

As Raymond Evans notes, there were several attempts by mounted and foot police to wrest the red flags from Zuzenko and Bykoff; each time the police were overwhelmed by the physically stronger Russians. 142 The flagrant display of the revolutionary symbol triggered widespread community disapproval. One Russian protester noted that ‘there were many people looking on [the demonstration] with death in their hearts’. 143

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137 It should be noted that the red flag was linked with radicalism during the French Revolution.
139 See warrants and supporting documents in 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA.
140 G. Nuholin, Hope Street, South Brisbane to Vorinin, GPO Melbourne, 22 April 1919, MF2739.
141 Intelligence report, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3513.
143 A. Gamanoff, c/o Zalabisby, Fitzgibbon Street, North Ipswich to T. Cherbakoff, 379 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 2 March 1919, MF2628.
Chapter 4: Mapping cases for suppression

By 1919 the workers’ flag – the red flag – was becoming increasingly linked to activities of a more militant nature. Specifically the red flag had become closely tied to the cause of sparking revolution rather than a push for industrial reform and workers’ rights. For instance, throughout 1919 the red flag was included in campaigns to release the jailed IWW men and later the red flag prisoners. The censors searched for references to the use of red flags to support militant causes. For example, one censor commented that ‘the red flag campaign still goes on in Brisbane’ in response to a description of women selling flags on the anniversary of the IWW Twelve. The social disorder caused by the civil unrest in Brisbane confirmed for military intelligence, SIB, Commonwealth Police and the Censor’s Office the dangers posed by foreign ideologies and their impact on the local labour movement. The Red Flag events of March 1919 were viewed as the climatic peak in radical activity in Brisbane. This period also triggered the birth of a loyalist surge to regain the home front and the ensuing suppression that was to wash over the Russian community.

Those associated with the RWA primarily attributed their involvement by joining a protest against being kept in Australia. Indeed, shortly after the Red Flag procession a circular was sent out by the Souse [Union] of Russian Workers (the handwriting was identified as Kreslin’s by the translator) that informed comrades in regional areas of their ‘successful procession-demonstration, with red flags, last Sunday’ (23 March) against their forced detention in Australia. Drafted only days after the Red Flag events, the tone of this circular is optimistic and several passages indicate that the RWA leadership anticipated that the public outcry against their actions would prompt the government to loosen travel restrictions.

On the day following the march, Monday 24 March, the President of the Brisbane District of Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia headed a deputation to Acting Premier Theodore. The Home Secretary, the Hon. John Huxham, and the Queensland Police Commissioner, Urquhart, were also present. The forerunner to the Returned and Services League (RSL), the group ‘received government recognition as the official representative of returned soldiers “in return for defending the powers that be”’. An intelligence report from the 24 March meeting was forwarded to military intelligence and Censor’s Office. The report emphasised that Theodore had assured the deputation that state prosecutions would be forthcoming for any person who had broken any state law. Later that day RSSILA meetings were held around the city that culminated in

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144 Censor’s notes, week ending 7 January 1919, MF2454.
145 Soviet of Souse [Union] of Russian Workers, Brisbane, 29 March 1919, QF3562. Copies of this circular were sent to several addressees in Sydney as well as regional New South Wales and Queensland.
146 RSSILA (later to become the Returned Services League RSL) became ‘a potent lobbying group’. As David Lovell and Kevin Windle observe some of the returned soldiers involved in the Red Flag Riots ‘went on to join the fascist New Guard movement in the 1930s in response to the Great Depression’. See Lovell and Windle, Our Unswerving Loyalty, 58.
a large mob (sources cite several thousand people) that marched from the city centre across the bridge to expel the Russians from their association rooms in South Brisbane.

The violence of the Red Flag riots has been amply covered in secondary literature, notably in *The Red Flag Riots* by Evans. It is generally thought that the violence of the riots was the result of spontaneous mob behaviour by returned soldiers and outraged right-wing conservatives, although Andrew Moore suggests that ‘the instigators of the Red Flag riots were officers of the Commonwealth Censor in Brisbane, cooperating with the Queensland police commissioner’. Archival sources document the perspective of participants and witnesses who witnessed stabbings, destruction of property and rioters using ‘revolvers like fireworks’ and ripping palings off fences and hurling them at police and fleeing Russians. At the time the conservative Right excused the appalling mob behaviour of the returned soldiers on the grounds that they were aggravated beyond reason by the audacity of the Russians and other left-wing groups that challenged civil society in Brisbane. In hindsight we can see that the triggers for the violence were multi-layered. The ‘disorganised riotous mob without a leader’ was spurred on by loyalist forces such as RSSILA who manipulated the mob mentality of the soldiers.

Police officer J. Larkin, who protected the Russian rooms on 24 March, angrily described the events in a letter to a relative in the Queensland Police. He highlighted the difficult position the police found themselves in: to ‘protect the dirty bloody Russians’ against returned soldiers. Larkin explained that the police’s proactive defence of the Russian quarters was because the Russian Rooms were in buildings owned by the Hon. P. Murphy, the father in law of the Minister for Railways, the Hon. J. Fihelly. Indeed, he stated that the police were ‘ordered to save Hon. Murphy’s buildings’ rather than to defend the Russians. The letter ended with an assessment that the efforts against the red flaggers were not in vain as ‘there isn’t a Russian in Brisbane today ... the soldiers could have lynched every bloody one of them’. It should be noted these views were not shared by all in Brisbane, and that the soldiers did not enjoy universal support. One man went so far as to describe them as ‘those brainless returned tourists’, and another correspondent exclaimed that the

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150 For an example see intelligence report, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3516.

151 Intelligence report, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3516.

152 J.H. Larkin, Police Station, South Brisbane to J.P. Larkin, Police Station, Cloncurry, 27 March 1919, QF3597.
‘Russians are having a rough time just now ... these returned soldiers seem to be doing as they like’.153

In the aftermath of the Red Flag events of March 1919, several Russians and other disloyalists were tried, jailed and deported for activities such as flying a red flag and making disloyal speeches that breached the War Precautions Regulations. The eyewitness accounts of military inquiry agents such as R. James and J.A. Tilanus were used as key evidence in the correspondence between the First Military District Commandant, Irving, and Department of Defence HQ in the cases involving Russians. James’s ‘Report on Demonstration of 24/3/19 held by returned sailors and soldiers, assisted by loyal citizens of Brisbane, as a protest against the disloyal element at present existing in and around Brisbane’ emphasised that damage to physical property was clearly the work of hooligans and not returned soldiers.154 James’s absolution of returned soldiers was part of a process that Moore describes as ‘the Right set[ting] about idealising the Diggers’.155 In his role as a military inquiry agent James also reported on RSSILA meetings he attended. It is unclear whether James was paraphrasing what was said (when he uses inverted commas) or sympathising with what was said: ‘They who had risked their lives for King and Country came back to find their places filled by a lot of dirty, greasy Russians and other Aliens’. The First Military District employed several confidential intelligence clerks during this period156 and their reports on the RWA and its members, along with those of the Commonwealth Police, Queensland Police and Censor’s Office, formed the body of evidence that enabled the government to arrest, prosecute, convict and ultimately deport RWA leaders such as Zuzenko and Bykoff.157

The responsibility for maintaining order during domestic disturbances like the Red Flag events was a tricky issue. Disparaging comments were made by federal government officers (including censors) about the perceived inaction of the state Ryan Labor government to stamp out the disloyalty of groups such as the RWA.158 The Ryan government controlled State police who were in turn used to enforce public order at the demonstrations and protests. The control of the home front was therefore the responsibility of the federal government, and the War Precautions Regulations were implemented by military intelligence with assistance from the State Police. Despite the censors’ reservations about the Ryan government, surviving archival records show that the Queensland Police played a pivotal role in the prosecution of those involved in the Red Flag events.

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153 Jack Darcy, Cressbrook, Sandy Flat to W.R. Jackson, Stafford Villa, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 25 March 1919, QF3543; and Jessie Black, Elfin Street, Brisbane to Hugh Black, Barcaldine, 30 March 1919, QF3654.
154 Report in 66/4/3660, series BP4/1, NAA.
155 Andrew, The Right Road, 25.
156 Salary Register, Volume 4, series BP147/1, NAA.
157 Two files in particular are rich sources on the Red Flag case: The Red Flag – incidents regarding the flying of same at the Brisbane Trades Hall, in Trade Union processions, and by various individuals at various places in Queensland, 66/4/2165; and File on Russians, Russian Association, Soviet or Souse in Brisbane; relating to meetings, demonstrations, deportations, prosecutions, 66/4/3660, series BP4/1, NAA.
158 See for instance intelligence report, week ending 2 April 1919, QF3600.
On 24 March Commissioner Urquhart urgently forwarded Commandant Irving a list of ‘the names and addresses of persons carrying and displaying Red Flags’. On 25 March the first in a series of warrants was issued by Commandant Irving which gave authority to the Queensland Police to prosecute those arrested in connection with the Red Flag events. Queensland Police conducted searches, seized evidence and arrested persons using this authority. Seized evidence, such as correspondence, was passed onto military intelligence who forwarded material to the Censor’s Office for interpretation and summary. Reports by military intelligence inquiry agents as well as Commonwealth Police officers were forwarded with the censor’s summary to the Queensland Police to assist the prosecution’s case. Representatives of the Crown in Brisbane, Chambers McNab and McNab, were ‘instructed to attend in Court and render the Police any legal assistance and advice they might require’. The Special Intelligence Bureau was also involved in preparing the cases against the Russians. In the days after the Red Flag disturbance, Ainsworth, Commandant Irving and military intelligence officers met with Chambers McNab and McNab. Ainsworth noted in his diary that he collected signed witness statements in April 1919 and from the first week of July Ainsworth had regular contact with 77, the agent SIB shared with military intelligence.

In early 1919 Constable H.L. Foote of the Commonwealth Police submitted 4 reports on the industrial trouble in Queensland to Sergeant Short. Reports 2 and 3 concerned the supply of rifles and ammunition by loyalist societies in Brisbane to their members. Understandably, Foote was somewhat alarmed by such worrying developments and, under instruction from his superior Sergeant Short, met with Captain Woods of military intelligence at Victoria Barracks. As discussed by Evans, Woods’s candid responses during the interview with Foote reveal where Woods’s sympathies lay. Not only did Woods clearly state that military intelligence was only concerned with disloyal societies, he continued that ‘if they [loyalists] form the Society [to supply arms and ammunition], all the more power to them’. What is interesting here is that these comments by a

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159 Names of persons carrying and displaying Red Flags in Brisbane, Constable T.M. O’Driscoll, Roma Street Station, Brisbane District submitted to Commissioner via Inspector William Ferguson, 24 March 1919, 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA.
160 A copy of the Minister’s Warrant authorising Commandant Irving to consent to the prosecution of Herman Bykoff under the War Precautions Regulations for breach of 27BB(1) was forwarded to Commissioner Urquhart by Lieut. R.D. Fisher ISGS on 25 March 1919, 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA. The evidence supporting this warrant was Constable Driscoll’s report.
161 See the analysis from J. Botton, Censor, First Military District, Censor’s Office, GPO Brisbane to Intelligence Officer, Headquarters, First Military District, 22 August 1919, 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA.
162 Chambers McNab and McNab, 50 Adelaide Street, Brisbane to Commandant, First Military District, Brisbane, 8 July 1919, 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA.
163 For example see 27–28 March and 14 July 1919, Ainsworth Diaries, Vol 3, series BP230/3, NAA.
164 See 4 April 1919, Ainsworth Diaries, Vol 3, series BP230/3, NAA.
165 The first noted meeting with the special agent is 2 July 1919, although the entry for 25 June mentions ‘saw office agent re accommodation’. Ainsworth Diaries, Vol 3, series BP230/3, NAA.
senior intelligence officer in the HQ of First Military District military intelligence were documented weeks before the Red Flag March that supposedly marked the line in the sand where loyalist anger could no longer be contained.

The mobilisation of right-wing private groups throughout Australia to fight disloyalty and the relationship of the groups with security agencies such as the SIB and Censor’s Office is explored by Moore in *The Right Road*.\(^\text{168}\) Despite the relaxed and even complicit attitudes of some officials, concern surrounding the loyalist activities of what would now be considered extreme right-wing groups can be detected in surviving records. An unidentified officer of the censorship staff in Brisbane and a RSSILA member submitted an intelligence report in 1919 which outlined some dangerous actions that were undertaken by ‘Anzacs on leave, out-of-works, alarmists and a lot of excited young men who were prepared to do anything rash and presided over by the emotional State President, Pierce Douglas’\(^\text{169}\).

The report documented the formation of a vigilance committee that met in secret apart from the main gathering to plan ‘ways and means’ to conduct a pitched battle against the Bolsheviks. Members of this secret group ‘were full of the idea of fight’ even going so far as to declare that they would steal weapons and manufacture tear gas. In the coming weeks this vigilance committee broke into several specialised sub-committees, such as an investigation bureau to gather information on the Russians and a munitions committee. After a lengthy period of inaction, membership in the secret group waned until only a core executive devoted to an anti-Bolshevik program remained. Noting the pivotal role of the Queensland Police in the defence of the Russian rooms following the Red Flag riots, the executive core planned for the inclusion of the State police in the vanguard. The militancy of this group was so strong that ‘one could not drive out of the heads of these men that there was no necessity for fight’. The Brisbane branch of RSSILA was divided into eight metropolitan districts, and district commanders participated in weekly meetings at the league’s headquarters. Pierce Douglas was quoted saying that the structure of the organisation – an alliance of smaller bodies – would allow loyalists to more effectively ‘organise so that if the Government did not give them what they wanted they would be an organised body in demanding their request’.\(^\text{170}\) Despite the radical actions of this executive core, the militancy of these activities stayed on the periphery of RSSILA. How close the censor was to these developments is undisclosed. The fact that the censor had intimate knowledge of what was discussed at the secret meetings indicates that they were present and perhaps even held executive membership. However, the tone of the report, with its strong condemnation of the militancy and alarmist nature of the secret group, points to participation as an informant.

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\(^{169}\) Intelligence report, week ending 30 April 1919, QF3891.
\(^{170}\) Intelligence report, week ending 30 April 1919, QF3891.
RSSILA issued a circular on 5 May to coincide with May Day 1919. The circular covered two main points. The first was a criticism of Bolshevism and groups such as the Russian Association that ‘work under a secret executive and are combining together to further their principles which are anti-British, anti-Empire, and anti-everything’. The second was a warning – thinly disguised as an appeal – to unionists not to engage in disloyal activities, such as flying the red flag on May Day as soldiers were marching and that ‘they were determined that no red flag should fly behind them’. The circular also covered a salient point for workers: that RSSILA would be petitioning employers to release any aliens they employed and also asking the Repatriation Department to fill these positions with Australian workers.

At the same time a small Returned Soldiers Labour League was established in Brisbane. Unlike the RSSILA, the Returned Soldiers Labour League was strongly aligned with the Ryan Labor government. Key office bearers of the group were State government officials and the group was frequently advertised in the *Daily Standard* newspaper. The influence of this group on post-war politics was minimal. However, the political sympathy of the Labor soldiers had a significant impact on the RWA. Letters from the Association in June 1919 refer to the apology made by the Labor soldiers as a turning point in relations between Russians and Australians and, poignantly for the RWA, evidence that factions were emerging in the wider community.

The impact of the Red Flag events on the RWA and its interaction with authorities was considerable. Russians themselves were aware of the meanings associated with the red flag and of collusion between RSSILA and the authorities. One Brisbane man commented that ‘the disturbance [loyalist riot] in Brisbane is most disgraceful, but understand it was a political scheme deliberately organised for electioneering purposes. This cry of Bolshevism is a cleverly concocted scheme to drag the wool of the workers down over their eyes’. Russians wrote of intimidation, physical assault and of ‘danger for the Russians on every step and every corner’. It is clear that many Russians in the Brisbane community were scared: they felt that the machinery of the state was against them. Rallies organised by RSSILA, such as the one that led to the smashing of the windows of the *Daily Standard* on 25 March, gave rise to threats by returned soldiers to target the government authorities.

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171 A copy of the circular was filed with intelligence report, week ending 21 May 1919, QF4144.
172 The group planned to receive Ryan with a torchlight guard of honour See intelligence report, week ending 18 June 1919, QF4338.
173 See for instance comments in Souse [Union] Russian Workers, Russian Library, South Brisbane to Barinoff, PO Cordalba, 16 June 1919, QF4366.
174 Leslie, 103 Cowper Street, Footscray to F. Razoomoff, c/o H. Middleton, Mein Street, Hendra, 17 May 1919, QF4173.
175 Unknown to Kalashnikoff, General Hospital, No 3, Brisbane, 24 March 1919, QF3515. Kalashnikoff participated and was injured in the Red Flag events. See also Tocareff, GPO Brisbane to Sedorkin, PO Cairns, Box 201, North Queensland, 31 March 1919, QF3667; N. and A.M., PO Woolloongabba to Mrs L. Drossoff, PO Duchess, via Cloncurry, 9 April 1919, QF3706; and A. Hodasevich, GPO Brisbane to A. Demchenko, PO Yarraman Creek, 11 April 1919, QF3732.
railway workshops in Ipswich to fish out the unnaturalised aliens there.\textsuperscript{176} In particular, the arrest of their comrades and their subsequent transfers to unknown destinations were common themes across letters by Russian correspondents. The confusion surrounding the fate of the arrested, and insecurity about the future of the Russian community, were made worse by the authorities holding letters sent to detainees.

Other victims of the Red Flag events included the families of the arrested men and those Russians who lost their jobs. Some Russians, who had experienced ‘the murders, or rapes or tearing out of tongues’ for many years in their homeland, judged the response of the soldiers not so severe.\textsuperscript{177} Nevertheless, the violence in the actions against Russians was deeply worrying for the community in general. A poem included in an intercepted letter reflects on the fate of the beleaguered Russian community (and RSSILA’s £15,000 of loyalist funds):

Yesterday received an answer from a friend,
Believe me, sorry imagining you, with your head bent
Yes! The storm was fast and furious
That till this day, that’s curious
Hope Street, High Street, Suburb
Still continue to be in hubbub
£15,000 is a lot of cash
To encourage the dirty trash
To smash the Bolsheviks, to do their best
Not to give them a moment’s rest
Money question! Or subsidy! They say
It’s hard to judge it by hearsay.\textsuperscript{178}

From April 1919 Russian correspondents in Brisbane began to refer to the “pogroms” against their community.\textsuperscript{179} This is a significant choice of word as most Russians would have been aware of the history of pogroms against Jewish communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To compare what they were experiencing in Brisbane to a pogrom illustrates the isolation and victimisation which were pervading the Russian community. There are numerous reports of

\textsuperscript{176} See intelligence report, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3518. Soldiers were also reported to be going from workplace to workplace to check if Russians were employed there. For instance see Goordie/Gurdi [sic], Brisbane to M. Lebedeff, c/o GPO Rockhampton, 6 April 1919, QF3716.

\textsuperscript{177} M.J.W. (W. Kalasnikoff, Fort Hill, South Brisbane) to S. Petroff, Ganger Stack, 315 mile regrading, Roma, 25 April 1919, QF3866.

\textsuperscript{178} Peter Landie, GPO Brisbane to F. Rasoomoff, Hope Cottage, 15 Hope Street, South Brisbane, 11 April 1919, QF3755. The original was in Russian. The censor noted that the translator was particularly anxious that it be placed on the intercept record in poetic form as ‘to paraphrase it might rob it of its import’.

\textsuperscript{179} See for example a letter from the Comrades of the Soviet of the Russian Workers, Russian Association, Brisbane to J. Maruschak, 7 Patterson Place, South Melbourne, 23 April 1919, MF2754. See also William Vanin, 408 Miles East West Railway, South Australia to A. Stepanoff, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 30 June 1919, MF2871; and Tokareff, Russian Library, PO Box 10, Brisbane to A. Stepanoff, ASP Hall, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 2 September 1919, MF2948. Letters on this theme include Goordie/Gurdi [sic], Brisbane to M. Lebedeff, c/o GPO Rockhampton, 6 April 1919, QF3716; S. Petroff, Ganger Stack, 315 miles regrading, Roma to J. Siomka, 32 Caxton Street, Paddington, Brisbane, 12 April 1919, QF3750; Peter Landie, GPO Brisbane to F. Rasoomoff, Hope Cottage, 15 Hope Street, South Brisbane, 11 April 1919, QF3755; S. Petroff, c/o Ganger Stack, 315 mile via Roma to W. Kalasnikoff, Font Hill, Upper Melbourne Street, South Melbourne, 16 April 1919, QF3792; M. Grisman, Hope Street, South Brisbane to A. Grisman, Harbin, intercepted week ending 3 May 1919, QF3906; and M. Grisman, Brisbane to Mrs G. Grisman, Harbin, Manchuria, 26 April 1919, QF3909.
Russians being physically harassed and many being dismissed from work by private businesses as well as government enterprises such as the railways and meatworks. Some Russians questioned the arrest of those detained in connection with the red flag incident, in particular Klushin who was known to have been a critic of the RWA and was thought not to have taken part in the demonstration. Additionally, the arrest of Michael Rosenberg, an inoffensive family man and the middle aged RWA librarian, was questioned. Some put Rosenberg’s arrest down to the unfortunate coincidence that his family lived in the club room.180

The arrest of Russians who were not identified radicals fuelled the atmosphere that the whole community was being targeted and that ‘no person was safe from arrest’.181 This siege mentality contributed to a rally-round-the-flag response by some sections of the Russian community who indicated that ‘before the pogrom some Russians were warm partisans of Kerensky, but after the pogrom they became at once ardent Bolsheviks’.182 An appreciation that isolating the community could contribute to its radicalisation was not reflected in the censors’ notes. Instead, the censors merely judged that ‘the Russian temperament will be a menace hitherto unrecognised here’ if tensions continued.183

Moderate sections of the Russian community expressed considerable anxiety about the position in which they now found themselves. One censor noted that ‘through all the letters runs the desire to get out of Australia; they cannot understand why they are not molested hourly – picturing what would happen – in Russia to foreigners who behave as the Russians behaved here’.184 After Zuzenko’s arrest over his role in the Red Flag march, in addition to receiving his third notice forbidding him to address public meetings, the moderate section of the RWA organised against Zuzenko ‘and blamed him for going in the wrong direction’ and removed him from its executive.185 As Russians outside of Brisbane heard the Red Flag news many expressed concern that the work of a few radicals had hurt the entire Russian community. One Russian questioned why Zuzenko and Bykoff had persisted in carrying red banners when it was clear that Bolshevism was not embraced by local workers nor accepted in Australia.186 Another Russian, exasperated by the deteriorating circumstances facing the Russian community, exclaimed ‘through the fault of some silly Russians, it

180 For elaboration on this opinion see M.J.W. (W. Kalasnikoff), Brisbane to S. Petroff, Ganger stack, 315 mile regrading, Roma, 25 April 1919, QF3866.
181 Haim Gourdi, Brisbane to M. Lebedeff, c/o GPO Rockhampton, 6 April 1919, QF3716. See also A. Hodasevich, GPO Brisbane to A. Demchenko, PO Yarraman Creek, 11 April 1919, QF3732; and P. Donetz, Tarzali via Cairns to Tocaroff, GPO Brisbane, 9 April 1919, QF3804.
182 Comrades of the Soviet of the Russian Workers, Russian Association, Brisbane to J. Maruschak, 7 Patterson Place, South Melbourne, 23 April 1919, MF2754. See also Voevodin, Brisbane to Shoupoff, Fairymead Plantation, via Bundaberg, 5 June 1919, QF4263.
183 Censor’s notes, week ending 11 June 1919, QF4263.
184 Censor’s notes, week ending 16 April 1919, QF3750.
185 Zuzenko, Brisbane to Elkin, Broken Hill, intercepted week ending 8 April 1919, QF3741.
186 S. Petroff, Ganger Stack, 315 miles regrading, Roma to J. Siomka, 32 Caxton Street, Paddington, Brisbane, 12 April 1919, QF3750.
falls on all of us, and all is closed down’. Others warned their more politically minded friends to ‘keep clear of a crowd who have nothing to lose by breaking the law’. However, on the whole, Russians, even those who were not heavily involved with the RWA, were generally supportive of the actions of the Red Flaggers. The Russian community in Brisbane formed a Release Committee to agitate for the Red Flag prisoners. At the same time it was a struggle to maintain this committee due to difference of opinion.

Also present in intercepted letters was the perspective that the Red Flaggers had acted thoughtlessly. Father McGoldrick was a Roman Catholic priest attached to the Archbishop’s residence in Brisbane, ‘Dara’. McGoldrick’s official correspondence was intercepted as well as his letters with the Popoff brothers and Mendrin. In one letter to Popoff in Harbin, McGoldrick recounted the riots in Brisbane noting that ‘the community has definitely demanded that the Bolshevik leaders should be deported’. He wrote that ‘veiled threats have reached Mendrin to the effect that the Bolshevik element from South Brisbane intends to take revenge upon him’. This is unsurprising as an intelligence report on Mendrin indicates that he published lengthy letters in the press condemning those involved in the Red Flag events and their extreme ideas. In these letters Mendrin also congratulated the returned soldiers for their actions against the Russian community in South Brisbane.

In the days and weeks after 23 and 24 March, the Queensland police with First Military District military intelligence arrested and detained persons associated with the Red Flag procession, and Russians whose deportation was recommended. The cause of the detainees was predictably taken up by Russians, left-wing supporters and civil rights groups and this is strongly reflected in the intercept reports. They argued that their detention and treatment were unjust and un-British in pamphlets, subscriptions lists and newspaper articles. Herman Bykoff, A. Gorsky and E. Berman for instance published a defence of their actions in an article in the Daily Standard entitled ‘Arrest Desired’. In their defence, Russians claimed their political beliefs had been hardened by their experiences in the tsar’s jails in Russia. Bykoff, Timms and Zuzenko had all served time in Russia

187 Unknown to Kalashnikoff, General Hospital, No 3, Brisbane, 24 March 1919, QF3515.
188 W.J. Doblyn, Toowoomba to J. Grichting, Brisbane, 2 April 1919, QF3976.
189 See A. Gorsky, Brisbane to H. Bykoff, HM Prison, Brisbane, 2 June 1919, QF4290.
190 The censors do not detail the grounds on which they intercepted McGoldrick’s correspondence. It is likely that the letters were intercepted due to their subject matter.
191 Father McGoldrick, Dara, Brisbane to A.D. Popoff, Harbin, 29 March 1919, Q4085.
192 See intelligence report, week ending 16 April 1919, QF3745.
193 For the names of persons to be investigated and prosecuted for breaching the War Precautions Regulations see 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA. For the names of Russians whose deportation was recommended see 66/4/3660.
194 See for instance an article for Stead’s Review entitled ‘Russian Deportees’, intelligence report, MF2753. See also M. Baranovsky, OBU, Sturt Street, Townsville to Industrial Solidarity, 28 Bourke Street, Melbourne, 15 August 1919, MF2929.
195 ‘Arrest Desired’, Daily Standard (1 April 1919). Bykoff was sentenced on 31 March 1919 to six months with hard labour. See also Hermann Bykoff, South Brisbane to Editor, Standard, Brisbane, stamped 29 March 1919, QF3567.
prior to escaping to Australia. Most were reportedly defiant or uncooperative in their court appearances. While those being charged demonstrated bravado in the court room – Bykoff was reported to have said that he was prepared for any punishment including death – most detainees asked simply to be deported immediately.

Russian detainees complained about the food, conditions, maltreatment and lack of tobacco. Interestingly, they did not complain of a lack of revolutionary reading – it appears that their visitors kept them well stocked. Tolstobroff, from his Boggo Road prison cell in Brisbane, even wrote that ‘the letters of Tolstoy, Marx and Co are not so entertaining to us’. Shortly after their transportation to the Darlinghurst Detention Barracks in Sydney the detainees P. Kreslin, M. Wishnewsky, M. Rosenberg, W. Markin, W. Weinberg, K. Klushin, P. Timms, P. Gailit and A. Zuzenko petitioned the Prime Minister and the Hon. Mick Considine, the federal Labor MP sympathetic to the Russian cause. Their petition was intercepted and copies sent by the detainees for publication by left-wing newspapers were held. The pencilled correspondence – they could not get ink in His Majesty’s jail – ended with a plea to consider them as part of a prisoner exchange and to ‘have some respect and sympathy towards us as realistic foretellers of coming new socialistic system, towards us as enemy in ideas’ [sic]. Another pencilled petition was made to Considine by hunger-striking prisoners held in Brisbane when they were sentenced. The May appeal asked Considine to petition acting Prime Minister Watt for the Russians to be treated as political prisoners. Considine’s response is not listed, but a response from the Chief Secretary’s Office to Mrs Leichman documents that the ‘government have decided to treat as political prisoners those recently convicted under War Precautions Act.

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196 See censor’s notes, week ending 2 April 1919, QF3567.
197 The case against Bykoff was ongoing. When he was released from his initial sentence at Boggo Road jail on 19 July, his prominence in local Russian politics was unsurpassed. After a few days of freedom, he was receiving invitations to lecture on his experiences at clubs around Brisbane. See for example G. Popoff, Workshop, Ipswich to Russian Association, Box 10, South Brisbane, 21 July 1919, QF4670. Bykoff was rearrested on 13 August by Queensland Police on charges of breaching the Regulations and transferred into the custody of military intelligence officers for transportation from Brisbane to Sydney, from where he was later deported. See Capt C.W. Wood, Intelligence Section General Staff to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 12 August 1919; Note by Wood on receipt of prisoner Bykoff from Detective J.A.D. Bookless, 13 August 1919; and telegrams coded by Capt Wood on behalf of Commandant Irving to Military Commandants, Sydney and Melbourne, 15 August 1918, 66/4/2165, series BP4/1, NAA.
198 Note that letters discussing maltreatment or poor conditions were held on the orders of the Deputy Chief Censor. An example is Boris, 67 Regent Street, Redfern, Sydney to Secretary, Industrial Council, Brisbane, 20 July 1919, QF4126.
199 S. Tolstobroff, HM Prison, Brisbane to Andrew Melcharek, PO South Brisbane, 16 May 1919, QF4109.
200 The authorities considered these detainees to be hardline activists who played significant roles in the Red Flag Events. It is likely that they were transferred to Sydney to serve their prison terms for 2 reasons: to isolate them from their support networks in Brisbane and b) in preparation for impending deportation.
201 Copies can be found in 66/4/3660, series BP4/1, NAA.
202 M. Brodsky, Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane to Considine, Federal Parliament House, Melbourne, 14 May 1919, QF4141.
203 Telegram, Under Secretary, Chief Secretary’s Office to Mrs Leichman, Cannon Street, Ipswich, discussed in censor’s notes, week ending 14 May 1919, QF4141. Leichman returned to Ipswich with the intention of finding a job again at the government railway workshops there through his strong links with the QRU. See Paul Leichman to Gorsky, Box 10, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 20 July 1919, QF4671.
Chapter 4: Mapping cases for suppression

In Brisbane, Herman Bykoff and Steve Tolstobroff complained to the Daily Standard that their request to have their eyes checked by optician W. Jackson was refused. In addition to his optometry practice, Jackson was also an influential leader in the IWW movement. In late May the Red Flag prisoners published again in the Daily Standard, this time that Steve Tolstobroff was ill with influenza. The censor noted that ‘the criminals glory in brow beating’. Considering that Tolstobroff wrote to a friend in June that he was in excellent health, had a good appetite and that all in his group were in good humour, it is likely that the Brisbane detainees fared better than their counterparts in Darlinghurst. Unlike their comrades in Sydney, the Brisbane detainees had fortnightly visitation rights and the intercept reports indicated that their mail was released. Indeed, one Russian visitor wrote that despite prison regulations that all visitors speak in English, the Russians ‘made wonderful headway’ and managed to convince a sympathetic guard to allow them to communicate in Russian. Unsurprisingly, the censors saw this as further proof of the subversive, illegal nature of Russians in Australia. The morale of the Brisbane men – ‘the little republic of thirteen’ – was kept high by the steady stream of Russian visitors and left-wing personalities who supported them. Some of these visitors, for instance the wife of Visokinsky and Jennie Scott Griffiths, smuggled out and hand delivered letters on the prisoners’ behalf. The Brisbane men were able to publish in the Daily Standard several rousing letters that, amongst complaints about conditions, spoke on issues such as the Paul Freeman case.

In comparison to their Brisbane comrades, the treatment of Zuzenko and his wife Civa by military intelligence and prison authorities in Sydney was not lenient. Zuzenko’s correspondence with Civa was intercepted and their visits were regularly delayed or cancelled. Only a few letters between the couple were released. In these letters Zuzenko outlined his transportation in irons from Brisbane to Sydney and his concerns about the couple’s future. Information on Zuzenko was smuggled out by H. Charlesworth when he visited the detainees at the Darlinghurst Detention Barracks in Sydney. The document passed to Charlesworth was a petition to the citizens signed by Michael Rosenberg, N. Wishnewsky, W. Weinberg, Peter Timms, Peter Kreslin, K. Klushin and W. Markin. In careful and emotive prose it outlined their story – and Zuzenko’s forceful

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204 Intelligence report, week ending 4 June 1919, QF4233.
206 M. Polteff, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane to S. Kozroff, PO Mackay, 1 June 1919, QF4500.
207 Tolstobroff and Bykoff often thanked ‘all the boys for their remembrance’ of them. For an example see S. Tolstobroff, HM Prison, Brisbane to A. Melcharek, PO South Brisbane, 9 June 1919. The little republic of thirteen referred to the red flag detainees and was often used as a humorous greeting in correspondence. For an example see A. Gorsky, Brisbane to H. Bykoff, HM Prison, Brisbane, 19 June 1919, QF4423.
208 F. Frookaz of Ipswich writes of receiving letters ‘sent with Mm. Visokinsky’ and being passed information from Mrs Griffith and M. Lenin in F. Frookaz, Ipswich to Stepanoff, Merivale Street, South Brisbane, 25 July 1919, QF4711.
209 Intelligence report, week ending 18 June 1919, QF4369.
210 For documentation on Zuzenko’s arrest and deportation, and Civa’s application to follow her husband, see N59/21/962, series SP43/2, NAA.
211 A. Zuzenko, Darlinghurst Detention Barracks, Intelligence Office, Sydney to Miss Z. Rosenberg, 16 Hope Street, South Brisbane, 1 April 1919, QF3679.
212 See enclosure to H. Charlesworth, Socialist Democratic League, Sydney to E. Lane, Daily Standard, Brisbane, 24 April 1919, QF3998. Refer also to documents held in 66/4/3660, series BP4/1, NAA.
deportation without Civa – from the initial arrest on the streets of Brisbane to their plight on the musty cement floors of the barracks. From Civa’s correspondence we learn that she was finally granted permission to see her husband twice a week and had gained ‘permission to accompany him wherever he goes’. Shortly after Zuzenko’s arrest Civa travelled to Sydney and stayed with Russian friends until his deportation. Her situation was made more severe because she was young, pregnant and penniless. Civa was finally given permission in May to follow Zuzenko. “Follow” literally referred to the act of leaving Australia. Civa’s journey details were as sketchy as Zuzenko’s. Several weeks after their departures, Civa’s sister Fanny wrote that ‘we heard nothing from them yet and we do not know where they are’.

Zuzenko and fellow Russian detainee Gailit were deported together on 17 April 1919. Gailit attempted to post a letter from the ship informing his comrades that he and Zuzenko had been placed on the steamer with no knowledge of their destination. Gailit compared their transfer from prison to the ship to cattle being driven to slaughter. Most disturbing was his retelling of Zuzenko and Civa’s effort to be deported together. On the day of his deportation, despite some assurances by Prime Minister Watt that Civa would be deported with Zuzenko, she was not allowed to join him. Zuzenko unsurprisingly refused to be deported without his heavily pregnant wife. Gailit wrote that Zuzenko ‘was removed by force and put on a black cart… comrades, this is purely the method of the Russian tsars’ police, if you had seen this scene when they were dealing with Zuzenko, it was just as if they were savages and not civilised beings’. Gailit and Zuzenko continued to write to their comrades in Australia about their deportation journey. Zuzenko wrote several letters to Russian clubs from Hobart aboard the transport ship Karachi that his conscience was clear as a man and an anarchist. From Bombay Gailit indicated that he expected to be landed at Port Said although he did not know what would happen to him after that. These letters were held: the censors determined that ‘nothing but harm can result in circulating… evil counsel amongst an already disaffected section’. Zuzenko and Civa were finally reunited on the White-held Black Sea coast.

213 Civa Zuzenko, 138 Burton Street, Darlinghurst to Y. Krinitsky, 16 Hope Street, Brisbane, 15 April 1919, QF3812.
214 Civa reveals her concerns about her situation in Mrs Zuzenko, Kosciusko, Hill Street, Arncliffe to Mrs J. Krinitsky, 16 Hope Street, South Brisbane, 19 April 1919.
215 Fanny (Rosenberg), GPO to Peter Landie, Moreton Printing Company, Ann Street, Brisbane, 25 July 1919, QF4408.
216 P. Gailit, on board the steamer, postmark Hobart to M. Osipoff, Box 6, PO Port Pirie readdressed to 133 Drummond Street, Carlton, Melbourne, MF2774. The Port Pirie branch of the Russian Association had closed down some weeks before. Osipoff had since relocated to Melbourne. For accounts of the closing of the business and disposal of property see W. Dubko, Port Pirie to A. Osipoff, 135 Drummond Street, Carlton, 30 April 1919, MF2772; and S. Dubko, Port Pirie to A. Stepanoff, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 23 May 1919, MF2816.
217 For example see Alexander (Zuzenko), stamped Hobart to G. Roman, PO Box 223, Cairns, 20 April 1919, QF3928; and Alexander (Zuzenko), Transport Karachi, stamped Hobart to Comrades Cairns, 20 April 1919, QF3929 (enclosed with QF3928).
218 P. Gailit, SS Bokara, Bombay to M. Osipoff, 23 Howe Crescent, Melbourne, 31 May 1919, MF2914.
219 Censor’s notes, week ending 3 May 1919, QF3929.
Another Russian detainee, Kosta Klushin, and his partner Jeannie Reid were not so fortunate. Like Civa, Reid intended to join her partner when he was deported from Australia. Reid’s determination was admirable. Not only did Reid face discrimination from the Australian government – unlike Zuzenko and Civa, Reid and Klushin were de facto partners – her family was extremely concerned about her decision to go to Russia.²²⁰ For several months Reid petitioned the Prime Minister to allow her to legally marry Klushin and to accompany him when he was deported. For bureaucrats in Melbourne, Reid’s petitions did not require action under legislation and the majority of her letters did not receive attention. The increasing desperation of Klushin and Reid’s story added a human aspect to this case. They had lived together for 4 years and considered themselves married. Unlike Klushin, Reid claimed no extreme political opinions and did not participate in the wider activities of the RWA. Her insistence on following Klushin was apparently based on her devotion to their partnership. As Klushin wrote to the Prime Minister ‘if the woman of your country dare to go in free will to the exile; if she wants to be deported to the place with unknown language and traditions, to the “revolutional Russia” then her altruism is a thousand times dearer than “any certificate”’ [sic].²²¹ Klushin and Reid’s predicament was understood by officials as ‘the story of her shame’ as an unmarried woman.²²² Unlike the other deportees’ partners who were Russian and viewed through the official lens as aliens, Reid was a British subject and her decision to live with Klushin put her in the category of a ‘fallen’ woman. Reid did not receive permission to follow Klushin.

On 22 April 1919 several remaining detainees held at Darlinghurst were informed by the Minister of Defence that they were to be deported from Australia to Odessa. One of the detainees, Peter Kreslin, stated that after his recent experiences he ‘could be quite reconciled to the idea’.²²³ Despite the delay between arrest and deportation, the detainees were not given adequate time to put their affairs in order. Intercepted letters reveal that Timms was deported prior to him being able to...

²²⁰ For instance see a letter from Reid’s sister Nell, Coolangatta to Miss Reid, c/o Mrs R.J. Appleton, Clive Street, Annerley, 1 April 1919, QF3820.
²²¹ Letter from Klushin to Acting Prime Minister Watt, copy attached to intercept of Jeannie Klushin, PO Sydney to McDonald, Daily Standard, Brisbane, 16 June 1919, QF4384. In August 1919 Acting PM Watt confirmed for Reid that the federal government would not grant her request to marry Klushin and be deported with him. For examples of Reid’s petitions to be deported with Klushin, as well as her feelings on her financial predicament and separation from Klushin, see Jeannie Reid, GPO Sydney to Wallace, Trades Hall, Brisbane, 18 June 1919, QF4385; Jeannie Reid, GPO Sydney to Lefand, Industrial Council, MO, Brisbane, 18 June 1919, QF4462; Jeannie Reid, GPO Sydney to Wallace, Trades Hall, Brisbane, 2 June 1919, QF4510; Jeannie Reid, c/o GPO Sydney to Wallace, Trades Hall, Brisbane, 8 August 1919, QF4766; S.S., Brisbane to Miss J. Reid, GPO Sydney, 12 August 1919, QF4777; Jeannie Reid, GPO Sydney to McDonald, Editor, Standard, Brisbane, 17 August 1919, QF4817; J. Loginoff, Key Street, Morningside to Miss Jeannie Reid, GPO Sydney, 27 August 1919, QF4829; and S. (Stedman?), Stanley Street, Brisbane to J. Reid, GPO Sydney, 29 August 1919, QF4845.
²²² See for instance censor’s notes, week ending 25 June 1919, QF4384. Jeannie Reid was not the only woman who encountered problems with Australian bureaucracy regarding her marital status. Timms’ wife was placed in the position of proving her marital status. For instance see M. Timms, Sydney to Industrial Council, Trades Hall, Brisbane 3 July 1919, QF4554.
²²³ P. Kreslin, c/o P. Markin, 145 Regent Street, Sydney to Stepanoff, Merivale Street cnr Russell Street, South Brisbane, 23 April 1919, QF3848. Kreslin wrote this letter whilst at Darlinghurst and, in an attempt to evade the censor, asked his visitor Markin to post it on his behalf. The letter was in fact intercepted and held.
dispose of his belongings or sell his land. Other Russian families complained also that they were suffering hardship because of the lack of time allowed by the authorities to arrange financial matters when the men were detained. Unfortunately, the authorities tended to display a callousness towards the hardship many Russians wrote about, and dismissed ‘the cry of destitution raised by the Russians and their champions’ as not being justified as ‘there may be a few cases of actual want but the majority have some means’.

After the Red Flag events most Russians were still uninformed about the passport situation or how they could return to Russia. The new passport system introduced by the Hughes government through the War Precautions (Passports) Regulations 1916 required every person entering or leaving the Commonwealth to be in the receipt of a valid passport. Jane Doulman and David Lee explore the development of this system and its implications for travelers in Every Assistance and Protection. The strong national security focus of the Regulations set a range of conditions applicants needed to meet in order to be issued with a passport by the Commonwealth. Enemy aliens, such as Russians, were clearly not eligible for a Commonwealth passport and their old tsarist travel documents were not valid under the new conditions. The uncertainty of their situation in Australia compounded by an interest in their homeland, swayed an increasing number of Russians to write of their desire to leave Australia as soon as possible. The Melbourne association appealed to Prime Minister Watt on the grounds that as the community was under attack in the press, victimised in the street and unable to find employment, the government needed to step in and allow Russians to leave. Several appeals were made to the Melbourne branch from non-political Russians for advice on and help to leave Australia. As a censor noted in May 1919, ‘this unanimity shown by the Russians in all parts of Australia to return to their native land is becoming more marked every day’.

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224 For details of those who tried to help Timms after his deportation see M. Gorman, Kosciusko, Hill Street, Arncliffe to M. Gorsky, c/o Secretary, Industrial Council, Trades Hall, Brisbane, 30 April 1919, QF3966; M. Gormon, Hill Street, Arncliffe to Dvorik, 137 Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 20 April 1919, QF3967; and M. Timms, Arncliffe to Dvorik, 137 Stanley Street, South Brisbane, QF3977. A further complication for Timms was the identity of his wife. For details of the woman (formerly Mrs Nikitin and Miss Gorman) who came forward soon after Timms was arrested see B. Rosenberg, 67 Regent Street, Redfern to Galchenko, c/o Secretary, Industrial Council, Brisbane, 20 May 1919, QF4175.

225 See Mrs Ostapenko’s letter to her husband, who was serving a seven month sentence, outlining their family’s case and that of two other friends. Your loving wife, c/o Mr Voevodin, Henderson Street, Bulimba to Mark Ostapenko, Boggo Road Gaol, Brisbane, 10 May 1919, QF4123.

226 Censor’s notes, week ending 21 May 1919, QF4123.


228 See enclosure to H. Charlesworth, Sydney to Ben Cameron, 184 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, intercepted week ending 7 May 1919, MF2765. For appeals from Russians for help to leave Australia see Bruno Rosenberg, Holdsworthy to A. Stepanoff, Acting Secretary, Russian Association, Melbourne, 24 April 1919, MF2768; Dimitri Toherkovsky, Convent, Little Sisters of the Poor, Avoca Street, Randwick to A. Stepanoff, Secretary, Russian Association, Melbourne, 27 April 1919, MF2769; Paul Johnskey, Yarraman Creek via Esk to A. Stepanoff, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 1 May 1919, MF2773; V. Gyk(? and H. Anfinogenipoff(?), Mosman via Port Douglas to A. Stepanoff, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 29 April 1919, MF2781; and William Vanin, 408 miles east west railway, South Australia to A. Stepanoff, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 30 June 1919, MF2871.

229 Censor’s notes, week ending 14 May 1919, MF2781.
organised campaign throughout the states to whip up enthusiasm and sympathy’. Another censor indicated that ‘the measure of sympathy with the Bolsheviks may be gauged somewhat by the answer to this appeal’ to be granted permission to leave Australia. By mid 1919, it was clear that widespread sympathy did exist for the Bolsheviks as regular contributions were directed to the RWA and the Sydney branch for the support of the internees’ families.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the intelligence collected in 1918 and 1919 on the RWA and those associated with the group. At this time the intelligence agencies were rapidly becoming more sophisticated in their methods of censorship, and their linking of the data they collected to the people they were monitoring. Increasingly, the censors’ notes were utilised by military intelligence officers to help determine who should be targeted for surveillance. The censors’ notes themselves were also becoming more specific and detailed as the censors became more experienced.

The chapter also examined how the agencies worked together to collect, analyse and distribute intelligence in the case of the Red Flag events, and the subsequent prosecution of participants for breaches of the War Precautions Regulations. The workings of and interactions between military intelligence, Queensland Police, Censor’s Office, Commonwealth Police and Special Intelligence Bureau were shown by piecing together the effects in the lives of the subjects censored and surveilled, such as Simonoff and Zuzenko. How wartime intelligence profiling of the RWA and its members fed into post-war policy will be explored in chapter 5.

230 Censors’ notes, week ending 7 May 1919, MF2766 and MF2767.
231 See censor’s notes, week ending 13 August 1919, QF4769.
CHAPTER 5
THE END OF THE WAR

Introduction
By early 1919 the government was preparing to repeal the precautions that monitored the home front during wartime. At the same time the rising local threat of international communism, fomented by groups like the RWA, created a need to continue wartime surveillance measures into peacetime. Building on themes established in earlier chapters and drawing on the same body of evidence as chapter 4, this chapter looks at the Russian community at the end of the war as its members struggled with tough post-war economic conditions and discrimination. The chapter focuses on discussions between government departments on how to maintain the surveillance system. The benefits of postal censorship for the intelligence agencies for monitoring disloyalty at home had been impressive. Threads on how staff in the Censor’s Office, Intelligence Section General Staff, Commonwealth Police and the Special Intelligence Bureau highlighted RWA sedition in order to garner support to continue vigilance on disloyal individuals and groups are explored. Analysis then moves onto media censorship and how this affected RWA newspapers, and general trends in selected investigations into the disloyal. The final section of the chapter addresses the links between post-war trends and the continued suppression of subversive elements.

The Russian community at the end of the war
Two prominent themes emerged in intercepted correspondence between Russians at the end of the war: disillusionment with the continuation of censorship and not being able to return to Russia; and the radicalisation of the RWA. The Russians were becoming increasingly aggrieved that letters were being opened and monitored. In Townsville it was reported that the local community decided to act on these issues by getting in touch with their brethren in the South, so that they can place their grievances before the State Government, and the Federal Labour party with a view to getting them to use their influence with the Government in order to have the regulations relaxed in regard to the Russian censorship, also to see if some means cannot be devised to enable all Russians to return to Russia who desire to do so.1

It was reported in intelligence reports that Russian communities were now encouraging strikers to use Bolshevik ideas to further the labour cause in an attempt to force a more lenient government policy. Russians – like other workers – may have felt that conditions would improve under a federal

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1 Russians in Townsville NQ 19 May 1919, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
Chapter 5: The end of the war

Labor government. Military intelligence agents concluded that ‘if there was any chance of inciting the strikers to use force against the police, they would encourage them hoping thereby to overthrow the present form of Government and form a Soviet’. In hindsight, it appears fanciful that scattered groups of Russian workers in outlying rural centres were orchestrating Soviet revolution in Australia. What the quotation may show, however, is that intelligence agents were playing up segments in their reports that fitted their preconceptions. The censors were not ready to discount the threat disloyal Russians posed to Australian society, as they had considered them a threat for several years already. These reports were a justification for the regime to continue to censor mail and to monitor the activities of Russians well after the end of the war.

By 1918 the combined security intelligence operation against domestic disloyalty and sedition was not only gathering masses of data, but using this information to target specific individuals and groups to suppress. The Department of Defence was responsible for implementing the War Precautions Regulations. This involved interpreting data collected by several agencies and using this evidence to prosecute breaches of the Regulations. Intelligence on the Russians was compiled by State and Commonwealth Police officers as well as Defence officers who attended meetings, marches and public events. From this initial data police compiled and forwarded lists of suspects to military intelligence. For their part, Customs officers seized prohibited materials and apprehended passengers travelling without approval. The Censor’s Office added persons and addresses noted in postal intercepts and material forwarded by Customs to the lists. Special Intelligence Bureau staff used these lists to index weekly censors’ and intelligence reports and their own dossiers on suspected disloyalists. This cross-referencing made explicit the links between people, groups and events. Increasingly, Censor’s Office and SIB staff attended events in the role of inquiry agents. Surveillance of the Brisbane Russians by inquiry agents expanded during and after the Red Flag events. This war time data collection extensively fed into post-war policies on and understandings of communism. A key example of this is how the censors’ reports were used as evidence in the Summary of Communism. The Summary was an influential, high-level series compiled by the Commonwealth Investigation Branch (successor to Commonwealth Police and SIB) and circulated nationally in the early to mid 1920s.

For those being monitored, the collection of intelligence through postal censorship and surveillance was intrusive. The effects of having one’s correspondence and activities subject to legal interdiction are clearly evident in many of the letters analysed in this chapter. Becker of Brunswick in Sydney complained that despite being a private person he could not send letters. He drew the comparison that ‘in Russia, for political matters, workers are imprisoned in public prisons but in Australia this free country in private prisons because people are afraid of the military’ [sic]. In this way he compared the lack of freedom from being subject to the War Precautions Regulations to being a

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2 Russians in Townsville NQ 19 May 1919, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
3 Summary of Communism and the Index to Summary of Communism, 111 and 112, series A6122, NAA.
4 Becker, Brunswick to Mrs N. Ivanoff, 65 Clark Street, South Melbourne, 15 December 1918, MF2434.
wartime prisoner. Unsurprisingly this was one reason community groups like the RWA engaged in political activities to protest against the restrictions and requested permission to leave the country. The agitation of the Brisbane Russians manifested itself in the form of RWA meetings, publications (circulars, newspaper articles, letters to the editor), public meetings, speeches at rallies such as the Sunday Domain events, deputations to politicians and government officials, and protest marches. The RWA was also instrumental in organising a march on 26 January 1919. As one Russian wrote: ‘we marched very proudly... it was something that Brisbane did not expect... there are signs that the people are beginning to wake up’. The federal government’s unresponsiveness to a cross-community desire for freedom of movement gained the Russian cause widespread support across the labour movement.

As explored in chapter 1, many Russians came to Australia to escape the repression and persecution in Imperial Russia. It was generally seen by these immigrants that despite some of the limitations of life in the colonial backwaters of some Australian towns and cities, life in Australia was preferable to the continuing struggle in Russia. By the end of World War I this attitude had changed. Not only were Russians experiencing the economic hardships of declining employment and rising costs of living, they were increasingly targeted as an ethnic group. One Australian correspondent summed up the economic situation in regional Queensland and the treatment of Russians quite clearly:

There is many thousands from each and every industry ... pennyless and hungry in cities and country villages and along the roadside. And the odd times an odd man or two might see a job open, the boss is very kind to the innocent Greek man, or Malta man. But the boss has no time or use for the Russian working man. And those unfortunate Russians are not allowed to go home to their own country.6 [sic]

These tough economic conditions were escalated by the reintegration of returned servicemen, many of whom were suffering from war injuries. One correspondent, Henry Kaplan, commented on the return of soldiers to Australia: ‘many of them have no hands or legs’. He pointed out that one could not help get ‘a bad impression of looking at men who went voluntarily to the war’ from seeing these men. Somewhat disgusted with the type of war being waged by the ruling class of Australia and America, Kaplan mused that he could return to fight in Russia guessing that he ‘would be more useful over there than here working for the Australian bourgeoisie’.7

The employment of foreign nationals by the government became an issue as the lack of resources rose sharply as the war progressed. These sentiments were reflected in the notes on Boris Rosenberg’s correspondence. Boris was the brother of Civa (Zuzenko’s partner) and son of Michael Rosenberg (who was deported for his role in the Red Flag events). He was employed by the

5 W. Smolneff, GPO Brisbane to C. Worobieff, PO Townsville, 27 January 1919, QF3022. The 26 January march was organised by the RWA in conjunction with the OBU, Industrial Council, Children’s Peace Army and the Queensland Socialist League. See week ending 29 January 1919, QF2959, QF2960 and QF3106 for accounts.
6 Jim, Cloncurry, Queensland to Mark Hagan, Reefton PO, New Zealand, 9 February 1919, QF3173.
7 Henry Caplan, Halifax, Macquade Mill, North Queensland to W. Caplan, Russia, 27 August 1918, RE1238.
Department of Biology at the University of Queensland, where his work as a laboratory assistant was no doubt more interesting and comfortable than many of the remedial positions available during the war. Boris’s correspondence, apparently sent with university letterhead, to a friend working in the sugar cane industry was not only held to be translated and for its ‘indications of Bolshevic sentiments’ but also because Boris ‘has no right to use the university paper for private correspondence’.8

In response to the pressures of the war, the federal government’s reach and its legislative powers grew intensely through the repressive War Precautions Regulations.9 The strength these powers gave the government to control society perhaps even surpassed the original legislative intent. Their insight into the domestic disloyal and malcontent had ‘awakened using departments to censorship’s potentialities’.10 Because of its usefulness it was unlikely that this level of oversight was to be easily withdrawn. As Gerhard Fischer notes, the government was under considerable pressure from community groups and members of the public to continue monitoring enemy aliens after the war.11

This issue was formally considered by the government as early as May 1917,12 but it was not until 1 October 1918 that Acting Prime Minister Watts commissioned the Aliens Committee to investigate post-war planning regarding the presence of aliens in the Commonwealth. Fischer observes that this committee ‘was not a parliamentary or judicial commission but a body of government specialists entrusted to formulate cabinet policy’.13 Its membership included E.L. Piesse,14 the Director of Military Intelligence, as well as Secretary-level representatives from the Departments of Home and Territories, Trade and Customs and the Attorney-General. They presented a report on 10 December 1918 which recommended the extension of several war time restrictions, such as

8 B. Rosenberg, University of Queensland, Brisbane to Peter Landic, Macknade Sugar Mill, Herbert River, via Lucinda, 17 January 1918, Q2699.
9 For an example see week ending 6 August 1919, MF2896.
10 This comment refers to censorship in Britain, but is transferable to Australia. Herbert, E.S. and C.G. des Graz, eds, History of the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department 1938–1946, Vol 1 (Home Office: 1952), 19. Volumes 1 and 2 of this official history are also held at the National Archives UK, items DEFE 1/333 and DEFE 1/334, series DEFE 1 Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department Papers, Communications and Intelligence Records, Ministry of Defence, 1914–1959.
12 Fischer notes that the Governor-General discussed with the Prime Minister the disposal of aliens at the end of the war in May 1917. See Enemy Aliens, 284.
13 Fischer, Enemy Aliens, 285. Input into the post-war passport system was received from wartime security intelligence agencies. In particular, E.L. Piesse, ‘flagged the peacetime benefits of a centralised passport system’ that enabled the government to monitor those entering or leaving Australia. Application forms for passports remained unchanged after the war and ‘the government reserved its right to interview applicants and determine the destination and purpose of the journey’ Jane Doulman and David Lee, Every Assistance and Protection: A history of the Australian passport (Leichhardt: Federation Press, 2008), 87.
14 A barrister by training who had worked for the Australian Intelligence Corps in Tasmania, Major Edmund Liolin Piesse took up duty in November 1914 with the Intelligence Section General Staff (known as MO3). MO3 was converted into the Directorate of Military Intelligence on 16 March 1916 and was headed by Piesse. On 20 June 1919 Piesse was appointed to the Prime Minister’s Department to collect secret intelligence on external affairs. In his capacity as the Director of Pacific Branch Piesse had responsibility for League of Nations and Peace Treaty matters and became one of Australia’s leading experts on Far Eastern affairs. See Neville Kingsley Meaney, Fears and Phobias: E.L. Piesse and the problem of Japan, 1909–39 (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1996).
continued registration of aliens which was realised by the *Aliens Restrictions Act 1920*. Additionally, the Committee recommended that aliens should be discouraged from congregating in communities; state and federal legislation should limit the use of foreign languages in public; former alien enemies should be prohibited from changing their names; and, significantly ‘statutory power to deport any alien whose presence ... is undesirable’.15

The impact of continued war time restrictions on those in the Russian community was acute. Even hardliners such as Zuzenko acknowledged that ‘the policy of repression is hitting us more and more. I have received a prohibition to attend even meetings where the public is not present’.16 Many Russians were ‘impatiently waiting for the permission to return to Russia’, awaiting ‘deliverance from this hold’ in Australia.17 As the complexities of decreasing jobs and integrating the rising numbers of returned soldiers back into society dominated home front politics, Russians were ‘being placed in a bad position by the searches made by the military authorities, which gave the Tory papers the courage to hunt Russians’.18 Russians felt victimised particularly in rural areas. In Cairns, it was rumoured that a government official was telling employers ‘not to give Russians any contracts for cane cutting’.19 Solomon Stedman, Jewish author and intellectual, wrote to his family in Manchuria that ‘if you have any illusion about Australia, put that out of your head... We are treated like pigs’.20 Many Russians thought it ‘galling to have to submit to such treatment’ but ‘what can you do? If they make up their minds to smash us there is nobody to go to for protection’.21 Quite simply, many Russians wished ‘only one thing, permission to leave this country, as you know our situation is peculiar not even being comparable with that of war prisoners’.22

16 A. Zuzenko, Russian Association, Brisbane to V. Petruuchenia, 3 Tennyson Street, Kensington, 4 February 1919, MF2581.
17 A. Gamaiunoff, c/o Talabekcy, Fitzgibbon, Ipswich to Cherbakoff, 379 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 12 January 1919, MF2495. See also G. Risecoff [sic], PO Gordonvale via Cairns to E.D. Rostovecheff, Krasnoyarsk, Russia, week ending 26 April 1919, QF3833; and Soviet of Souse [Union] of Russian Workers, Brisbane to Erik Karro PO Miriwinin via Cairns, 24 April 1919, QF3860.
18 Mick Grisman, Hope Street, South Brisbane to A. Grisman, Harbin, 2 February 1919, QF3033. For a sample of Russian accounts of the declining employment prospects see Markidinoff, PO Ayr to W. Lonin, Innisfail via Mourilyan harbour, 1 May 1919, QF3950; Emelin, Bundaberg to A. Kochevatkin, Farleigh Mill, Mackay, 13 May 1919, QF4134; and G. Bolotnikoff, Townsville to Russian Library, Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 2 June 1919, QF4295. Australian correspondents also documented the changing employment conditions for Russian workers. See for instance Connolly and Bell, Dragon Street, Warwick to T. Lang, Plasterers Union, Trades Hall, Brisbane, 28 March 1919, QF3549.
19 P. Donetz, PO Tarzali, North Queensland to G. Tocareff, GPO Brisbane, 26 May 1919, QF4149.
20 Solomon Stedman, c/o D. Blumberg, Stanley Street, Brisbane to S. Minkovich, Station Manchuria, Russia, 29 May 1919, QF4259. Interestingly Stedman’s frustrations elicited some sympathy from the censor who noted that ‘he is quite a decently educated man. He had a hard time in Australia, and is only waiting an opportunity to go home’.
21 Vesta Messervy, Geebung to Peter Landie, Corner Russell and Merivale Streets, South Brisbane, 13 February 1919, QF3137; and Paul Johnsky, PO Yarraman to Antone Hedasevich, GPO Brisbane, 7 April 1919, QF3683.
22 V. Pikunoff, Townsville to *Worker*, Brisbane, intercepted week of 8 January 1919, QF2766. Mick Grisman indicates that ‘no Russian is allowed to go to Russia, otherwise any Russian who has money enough to go would not stay here for one moment’. See Mick Grisman, Hope Street, South Brisbane to A. Grisman, Harbin, 2 February 1919, QF3033; and Philip Shopnovsky, Pear Street, Dunellan Estate, East Brisbane to Shopnovsky, Station Ussury, Russia, 24 April 1919, QF3840.
Australian officials saw this attitude as madness, detecting an anxiety in the writer ‘to throw himself into the human cauldron into which the Bolsheviks have converted Russia’. At the same time danger lay in the rising hope amongst some Russians ‘that if they cannot return to their own country the conditions here will soon be so analogous that a journey home will be unnecessary’.

One option for the remaining Russians was to agitate and to reinvigorate the RWA in light of the arrest and detention of its executive after the Red Flag events. At the end of April 1919 a new executive – A. Gorsky, K. Galchenko, S. Faginoff, V. Kaxoolin, Melcharik and M. Brodsky – executed a circular setting out their intentions to work to their best ability for as long as they were able ‘until they will arrest us and put us in the camps or let us out of this blessed country’. The same letter stated that in the face of unemployment and ostracism Russians should not hide but keep in contact with each other and organise together to achieve their goals.

Queensland OBU members commented on the situation the Russians were experiencing in Brisbane, noting the raids on the Russian rooms in their letters, and observing ‘that all the Russian fellow-workers are being victimised on the job’. The raids by military intelligence and police on the Russian Rooms were intended to be overtly repressive: officers broke bookcases with axes and tore banners to pieces. Russian workers on the railways in Ipswich also reported persecution at the hands of Australians. Many were worried that ‘the hour is near when they will tell us: go away, we do not want you’. Letters began to report cases of Russians not having their jobs renewed and being in a position where they ‘know nothing as to what will be done with [them]’. At the same time, the Brisbane Russian community felt it was being subjected to persecution in the form of increased government interest. In April 1919 the RWA issued a circular informing that the association was officially closed but that work would be continued by comrades allied with other groups such as the Queensland Socialist League and OBU. As the censor noted, ‘the Russians evidently expect the whole of their number to be arrested’. Indeed, the prevailing feeling amongst the wider Russian community was that the authorities were destroying their identity: first the RWA, and then their opportunities to work. A common mindset expressed in the intercepted letters is that Russians felt that their freedom to return to their motherland – their hope for the future – was

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23 Censor’s notes, week ending 21 January 1919, MF2495.
24 Censor’s notes, week ending 21 January 1919, MF2501; see also week ending 6 August 1919, MF2896.
25 Soviet of Souse [Union] of Russian Workers, Brisbane to Erik Karro, PO Miriwinni via Cairns, 24 April 1919, QF3860.
26 D. Burns, Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane to Percy Laidler, Bourke Street, Melbourne, 30 March 1919, MF2697.
27 Zuzenko himself noted this violence in a letter to a comrade named Elkin in Broken Hill. QF3741.
28 A. Gamanoff, c/o Zalabisby, Fitzgibbon Street, North Ipswich to T. Cherbakoff, 379 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 2 March 1919, MF2628.
29 P. Gailit, DDB (Darlinghurst Detention Barracks), Sydney to M Gaipoff, PO Box 68 readressed 135 Drummond Street, Carlton, 3 April 1919, MF2724. Gailit was serving a sentence in the Darlinghurst Detention Barracks at the time he wrote this letter. He mentions being joined by Zuzenko. See also Markidinoff, PO Ayr to W. Lonin, Innisfail via Mourilyan Harbour, 1 May 1919, QF3950; and J. Markin, Cairns to W. Markin, GPO Brisbane, 29 April 1919, QF3982.
30 Censor’s notes, week ending 23 April 1919, MF2725.
being taken out of their hands by government bureaucracy. Around Australia Russian groups were issuing protests against the Australian government’s negative treatment of requests by Russians to leave the country. In Melbourne, the Russian Association published a resolution in The Socialist that among other things called for the government to cease its alarmist treatment and to issue passports to Russians residing in Australia.³¹

Shortly after the fall of the tsarist regime in 1917 the image of Russians trapped in Australia as political prisoners surfaced in the press. Kerensky’s new government in Russia allocated limited funds to commission ships for the purpose of repatriating Russians. Former Consul General d’Abaza was charged with administrating what funding was allocated to Australia for this purpose. However, the process stuttered, and in April 1917 a group of Russians in New South Wales protested against d’Abaza’s overlooking of political refugees from the tsarist regime.³² In Queensland, a special Political Refugees Repatriation Committee was established in South Brisbane to facilitate applications for Russians in Queensland and the Northern Territory who wished to return. The Repatriation Committee met in the RWA rooms and was staffed by RWA members including B. Skvirsky, Taranoff, T. Sergaeff and J. Grey. Despite the promise of finances and assistance, funded passages were few and political vetting increasingly complicated the process.

In the wake of the February 1917 revolution Russians in Australia slowly started to return home. It was common for Russians to make their way home by working on board merchant ships bound for Europe. This was the route chosen by Artem who departed with a group of Russian seamen from Darwin in May 1917. Others returned in larger groups on direct routes such as the Japanese trading vessel the S.S. Nikko Maru. An account of the departure of a group of Russians in mid 1917 was published as the ‘Impressive Departure of Russians’.³³ Again, common themes in the depiction of the Russians by left-wing comrades included references to the flying of the red flag and enthusiastic singing of songs. The sympathetic writer sums up that ‘a splendid lesson is to be learned from those innocent, harmless but determined people’ who feel so passionately about the politics of their country.³⁴

In February 1918, a submission was made to the new Russian ambassador in London by several members of the RWA.³⁵ Their plea was simple: the Russian consulate in Australia had been closed with the change of government and the Brisbane community requested immediate action to enable them to leave for Russia. In March 1918, perhaps in response to the news that Simonoff had been appointed Russian Consul, Russians in Darwin approached the Brisbane Russian Association to

³¹ See for instance A. Stepanoff, Acting Secretary, Russian Association, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne to The Editor, The Socialist, 184 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, MF2705.
³⁵ Simonoff, Karaloff, Faganoff, Shenpoff [sic] and Loginoff, Brisbane to Russian Ambassador, London, 9 February 1918, Q2788.
‘cable Russian government request consenting consul and passage to Russia’. 36 This official approach to the new Russian regime was confirmation of ‘a desire to return to their country’ – a trend that the censors had been monitoring. Even if Russians had permission to travel back to Russia, there was the difficult condition of finding the funds to support the trip home. Some Russians were financed by loved ones who had returned before them and sent much needed money. 37

The key obstacles for Russians wanting to leave Australia were funding, the scarcity of tickets home and the invalidity of passports. Prior to the February 1917 revolution tsarist travel documentation was universally recognised, and between the February and October revolutions in 1917 old Imperial documents continued to be accepted by most Commonwealth governments. However, Imperial documents were no longer valid once the Soviet regime became established and appointed its own Consuls. Additionally, updated international regulations governing the format of passports had been adopted at the end of the World War I which rendered the old documents obsolete. 38 For some Russians in Australia this situation posed a unique problem: their old tsarist papers were no longer valid and the documents issued by the Soviet delegate Simonoff were also not recognised by the Australian government. Without valid passports Russians could not legally buy tickets or travel through other countries. Unsurprisingly, Russians felt themselves in a bind. Russians were quite literally trapped in the Commonwealth’s bureaucratic tape. Meetings, deputations and resolutions on the passport problem were frequently aired in the left-wing press by Russian groups, possibly with the intention of garnering broader labour support for their cause. 39

Aggravating their feelings of persecution and isolation were the difficulties of ‘waiting! waiting! waiting!’ 40 for changes to legislation and increased opportunities for employment. This was by far the biggest thorn in the Russians’ side during this period. Individual representations and group deputations were made to politicians and high-ranking officials, and frequent articles and letters from Russians highlighting their problem were being published in sympathetic newspapers. For example, a resolution passed by Russians in Bundaberg that the government should either help them find employment or allow them to leave the country was published in the Daily Standard. 41

36 R. Waistesky, Darwin, to Russian Association, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 10 March 1918, Q2915.
37 See the case of Tanya, Osaka to Bolotinsky, Hope Street, Brisbane, 6 March 1918, Q2885.
38 One key change to travel documentation was the inclusion of photographic identification. For information about the new passport system see Doulman and Lee, Every Assistance and Protection.
39 For particularly strongly worded articles see ‘Australian Russians: Cannot get passports’, Daily Standard (2 February 1918), 5; ‘A Russian Protest’, Worker (28 March 1918), 17 and; ‘Russians want to Return’, Worker (12 December 1918), 11.
40 Henrich Roman, Brisbane to Krohmaleff, PO 223, Cairns, 26 May 1919, QF4318.
41 ‘A fair deal wanted’, Daily Standard (10 May 1919). See Unknown, Port Pirie to Knowledge and Unity, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 1 January 1919, QF2718; Polteff(?), Homeleigh House, Sturt Street Townsville to J. Maksimoff, PO Ayr, 1 May 1919, QF3951; Comrades of Rockhampton to Comrades of Brisbane, Industrial Council, PO Brisbane, 29 April 1919, QF3978; Shoupoff, Fairymead Plantation, via Bundaberg to W. Woevadin, Henderson Street, Bulimba, 8 May 1919, QF4039; intelligence report on meeting of Russians in Bundaberg on Saturday 10 May 1919, week ending 21 May 1919, QF4129;
Most commonly, however, members of the Russian community spoke at meetings of left-wing organisations in the hope of securing broader support for their cause.

The Russian passport issue was linked into the wider labour cause in ‘one of an unlimited number of ways and means Polly has of keeping the slaves in subjection and utmost inconvenience’. Frustrations sometimes boiled over into empty threats that censors noted carefully such as ‘you must guarantee us work in Australia without molestation, otherwise if the repression against the Russians continues we will take up arms and declare war against you’. Boris Rosenberg interpreted the public support behind the Freeman case as a positive sign that ‘it is quite possible that the Russians could be liberated if the authorities do not deport them soon’. As one censor accurately diagnosed, ‘the Russians in Queensland are in a state of confusion’ as they are selling their land and disposing of their positions in desperate attempts to flee back to Russia. At the same time, ‘those in Russia with a knowledge of Australia are as anxious to come here’. When Russians were finally able to obtain recognised passports after the end of World War I, their affinity with the international proletariat was emphasised in the left-wing press. Knowledge and Unity, for instance, featured a piece on the sizeable subscriptions collected from departing Russians, demonstrating that the thoughts of the departing Russians were always for their fellow comrades.

While many letters detailed in the censors’ reports are political ramblings that clearly support radical ruminations of the time, several give an insight into the very human problems afflicting their writers. Yakor Gunn, representative of the Russian Association in Sydney, who attracted the serious attention of the authorities with his extreme and sometimes violent views, ended a highly critical piece on the hypocrisy of the allies in their dealings with the new Russia with a telling postscript that he had ‘lost my hope to go to Russia. I think I’ll be here better in gaol or in a concentration camp than in Russia’. Maruschek of Melbourne wrote to a relative in Vladivostok of his feelings of isolation, ignorance of happenings in Russia due to censorship and serious desire to return home. The censor showed little sympathy in his appraisal of Maruschek’s thoughts, stating that

Sverdloff, Tivoli Hill, Ipswich to Industrial Council, Trades Hall, Brisbane, 21 May 1919, QF4231; P. Boomakin, Bundaberg to Industrial Council, Brisbane, 28 May 1919, QF4236; W. Komaroff, PO Selwyn to Industrial Council, Brisbane, intercepted week ending 4 June 1919, QF4238; and J.S. Garden, Secretary, Labor Council, Sydney to Wallace, Trades Hall, Brisbane, 23 May 1919, QF4241.

B. Pikunoff quoted in Fred Waller, c/o GPO Townsville to Betsy Matthias, 117 Bethurst Street, Sydney, 17 December 1918, QF2701.

M. Panfiloff, Cairns to M.J. Tocaroff, GPO Brisbane, 7 May 1919, QF4033.

Freeman was an IWW agitator who was imprisoned. The campaign for his release was a cause célèbre for many on the Left. Raymond Evans explores the Freeman case in ‘Tempest Tossed: Political deportations from Australia and World War I’, in Alien Justice: Wartime internment in Australia and North America, edited by Kay Saunders and Roger Daniels (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000): 39–41.

B. Rosenberg, 67 Regent Street, Redfern to Secretary, Industrial Council, Brisbane, 4 June 1919, QF4274. News of the Freeman case also gave hope to Russians in Townsville, see QF4295.

Censor’s notes, week ending 17 May 1919, QF4094.

‘The Final Thought: A lesson to every rebel’, Knowledge and Unity (17 April 1920), 3.

Yakor Gunn, Ivelcliffe, Union Street, New South Wales to A.W. Foster, 36 Melbourne Chambers, Chancery Lane, Melbourne, 24 April 1918, MF846.

J. Maruschek, 7 Patterson Place, South Melbourne to E.E. Maruschek, Vladivostock, 9 July 1918, MF1448.
the ‘writer is quite oblivious to the fact that he is far better off and enjoys more freedom in Australia than his own country’.

Heavily tied into the community’s disillusionment was the theme of political radicalisation. External pressures gave rise to emerging tensions in leadership style that prompted divisions within the core group. Membership of the RWA was increasingly divided along lines of political colour. Simonoff felt that it had been a mistake to accept just anyone into the RWA, insisting that they ‘could not hide... [their] real colour’ and should be expelled.50 The RWA increasingly focused its attention on gaining class-conscious workers as members. Nikolai Illin, whose family’s story is explored in Elena Govor’s My Dark Brother and a subsequent SBS documentary,51 wrote to the RWA of his opinion on the conduct of Zuzenko and other Russians.52 Illin was surprised at those who joined the extremist action, and put their involvement ‘down to the prospect which Bolshevism held out, to rob your neighbours without fear of punishment, and live without work’. His scathing criticism went further, implying that the detained Russians did not have his sympathy as ‘people who destroy without reconstructing never could be spiritually dear to me’. On the Red Flag leadership Illin perceptively commented that:

Here we have half a dozen Bolsheviks who defy the law; if they were permitted to do this unpunished it would not be long before they had a big following and shortly would dominate Australia and then when they had killed everybody who was opposed to them they would start upon one another.53

Despite Illin’s obvious disapproval of the actions of Zuzenko and the other red flaggers, the censors were of the opinion that Illin ‘is apparently out to save himself and has calculated that his letter will be scrutinised by the authorities and that the sentiments expressed... will be placed to his credit’.54

The RWA promoted its ideas and program for change primarily through its newspapers, subtly shaping community identity. Newspapers can be seen as community sentinels, mirrors that reflect group responsiveness to external threats.55 The dominance of Bolshevism in the RWA publications resulted in a muting of other views both within the association and its press. When Russians in north Queensland questioned the RWA’s decision to co-publish Knowledge and Unity in English with the Socialists, the RWA replied with a rousing circular to branches in Cloncurry, Innisfail, Port Darwin and Townsville. This circular not only suppressed rumours of breakaway groups like the Group of Russian Workers but stressed that ‘a split in the ranks cannot occur. It is impossible,
because every member has full freedom to ventilate his opinions before the Soviet, so long as he acknowledges the authority of the Soviet’. Tensions within the Russian community are discernible in the written evidence the group left behind. Kevin Windle explores some of the personalities of the RWA in his analysis of a satirical play written by Herman Bykoff. Windle observes that the play, written in February 1919, reflects that the Russian community ‘was fractured and its leading figures were at odds’, and its ‘members were increasingly defiant in their attitude to the government and its laws’.

A strong example of how dominant personalities in the RWA used their publications to promote Bolshevism and a homogeneous community identity can be traced through intercepted letters. In the first edition of the illicit *Ninth Wave* the editor Zuzenko (under the alias Sania Mamim) published an article titled ‘Deliberate falsehood’ in which he attacked a Russian man, Berk, for being a spy. Berk had served in the Australian Imperial Force and it is likely that because Berk was a returned soldier he did not uncritically support all aspects of the RWA’s rigid perspective on the war. Zuzenko’s accusations would have served to discredit Berk and any criticisms he may have voiced to others in the Russian community. The censors’ reports contain an intercept of a letter from Kalinin who opposed the article for its ‘lying and treachery’ and Zuzenko for being ‘a man whose doctrine is the knife and bludgeon and who is never happy unless he succeeds in trampling upon all semblance of decency and honour’. Articles published by RWA leaders on behalf of the association were sometimes opposed by members of the Russian community and, after Zuzenko’s deportation, rumours spread that he had squandered money in his administration of the RWA and *Knowledge and Unity*.

These tensions gave birth to a radical perspective – perhaps sharpened by the months of persecution – that called for real action:

> What about us Russians? Four or five months ago we were such Bolsheviks – that I was quite delighted and went so far as to become a member. Now I am greatly disappointed. The Bolsheviks proved themselves as big scabs as the English.

Even within the supposedly loyal central core of the RWA disloyalty existed. In June 1919 it was discovered that authorities had been passed incriminating evidence by informers on the extent of Bykoff’s political activities. This information strengthened the prosecution’s case against Bykoff for breaches of the War Precautions Regulations. After the RWA got back on its feet in preparation
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for the celebration of the second anniversary of the October Revolution, Peter Landie reported that ‘the pity of it is that the Russians here are quarrelling and snarling amongst themselves’.63

One of the more dangerous attributes detected by censors in the correspondence of foreign workers was discontent. Discontent with their situation was seen by authorities as precipitating widespread malcontent with their host society. Of most concern to the authorities were foreign workers who were sufficiently educated to be able to adequately express their social criticism to others. Many Russians felt increasingly socially, culturally, economically and intellectually isolated from wider society. They wrote back to Russia about their observations of local Australian workmen not being willing ‘to defend their own rights’. This perspective was emotively described in an intercepted letter where the writer complains that he found it impossible to leave Australia and feared enduring a long wait: ‘I will suffocate here in the meantime in this hot country. I cannot call such life anything else but suffocation. It is very weary. Of course there are several Russians with whom I talk after work, otherwise I would die’.64 It is quite likely that his later comment that ‘it is better to work where there are more foreigners because they all support one another’ was what drew the attention of the censors. Indeed, the censor commented in response that ‘it is a significant admission that the most dangerous centres of unrest are the groups of foreign workers, particularly Russians’. The censor went even further by suggesting that the Commonwealth government should use the political developments in Russia as a springboard ‘for taking action to break up these rings, and to employ the Aliens Restrictions Orders as far as possible to prevent the further formation of these dangerous nuclei’.

By June 1919 letters began to report that the circumstances of the Russians in Australia were improving – Russians were being offered work again and had received permission to reopen the Russian library and publish Knowledge and Unity, funds permitting. The re-emergence of the RWA newspaper was welcomed by many in the Russian community, who felt that ‘life in Brisbane has got into the old groove’.65 The space of the Russian library also served as an important meeting space where Russians could ‘gather again to discuss... social questions’ and listen to ‘good lecturers and orators’.66 It was even said that ‘in fact [life in Brisbane was] better than ever’ and more Russians were expressing an intention to stay in Australia.67 One Russian man summed up the new feeling

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63 Peter Landie, c/o A. McNeil, Congreve Street, off Balmoral Street, Galloway’s Hill, East Brisbane to Miss Fanny Rosenberg, GPO Sydney, 27 August 1919, QF4838. Peter Landie was the linotype compositor for the RWA’s Russian language newspapers. Fanny Rosenberg is Civa Rosenberg’s sister and the deported Michael’s daughter.

64 Henry Caplan, Halifax, Macquade Mill, North Queensland to W. Caplan, Russia, 27 August 1918, RE1238.

65 Soviet, Russian Library, PO Box 10, South Brisbane to Krikmaloff, Box 223, PO Cairns, 26 June 1919, QF4458.

66 Russian Library, Brisbane to J. Bolotnikoff, PO Townsville, 25 June 1919, QF4453; and Bill Smolenoff, GPO Brisbane to J. Toooolooff, PO Innisfail, 13 July 1919, QF4642.

67 Bill Smolenoff, GPO Brisbane to J. Toooolooff, PO Innisfail, 13 July 1919, QF4642. See also Polteff, Stanley Street, South Brisbane to A. Teresavich, 49 Francis Street, Hyde Park, Sydney, 16 July 1919, QF4643. Red Flag prisoner Paul Leichman returned to life in Ipswich rather than travel to Russia after his release, see his letter to Gorsky, Box 10, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 20 July 1919, QF4671.
when he stated that ‘the English do not look with squinted eyes on the Russians now’. The most concrete evidence that relations between the wider community and the Russians was beginning to stabilise was in reports that Russians were once again able to secure employment. As the censors noted, the dual forces of employment and reduced antagonism from returned soldiers were allowing community life to return to ‘the pre-March plotting and general mischief brewing’ which had dominated the previous year. The pretence of the library was not successful in deflecting the gaze of officials; it was quite clear to the censors and their colleagues in military intelligence that ‘the “library” was a cover name for “association” or “soviet” and... [both we]re undoubtedly hot beds for revolutionary culture’.

Despite expressions of a moderate attitude to their host community by many members of the Russian community, a radical tendency was emerging. The tone of correspondence from the RWA had developed an extreme political edge and was almost venomous with references to the Australian authorities as ‘hydra’ and ‘reptiles’. Others vehemently declared that they did not intend to waste a single moment in this contemptible country amongst the ‘dirty rabble of the capitalistic crowd’, the ‘brainless idiots’ and ‘poor misguided slaves’ involved in the prostitution or trafficking of their own bodies. At the same time, radical writers expressed despair, claiming that ‘there is no earthly chance to get to Russia just now’. Evidence too of resurgence in Russian groups around Queensland aligning themselves with the RWA is evident in correspondence. Peter Kreslin wrote from the Soviet of Russian Workers in Cairns acknowledging the ‘Brisbane branch [is] a similar organisation and look[s] to yours as a central body’. Further indication of the hierarchical position of the RWA is that outlying groups received newspapers, literature and general political direction from Brisbane and in return regularly forwarded money to the RWA. Kreslin indicated that the Cairns group devoted 25% of its income to the RWA. Money was also sent from a group in Townsville represented by Bolotnikoff and Blinoff. While there is no accounting in the

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68 Chernysh, Brisbane to V. Vorobioff, PO Bundaberg, 11 June 1919, QF4328.
69 Censors’ notes, week ending 18 June 1919, QF4366; and week ending 23 July 1919, QF4643.
70 Censor’s notes, week ending 23 July 1919, QF4642.
71 Soviet, Brisbane to Sidorkin, PO Cairns, 12 June 1919, QF4327. For letters featuring references to Australian officials see also Bill, Brisbane to Tintane, PO Cairns, 11 June 1919, QF4326; and Russian Library, Brisbane to J. Bolotnikoff, PO Townsville, 25 June 1919, QF4453.
72 M. Polteff, Brisbane to Mary Barokin, PO Townsville, 23 July 1919, QF4672. Polteff is an excellent example of a correspondent whose writing rapidly became politically extreme in 1919. See Soviet of Souse [Union] of Russian Workers, Brisbane to M. Polteff, PO Townsville, 29 March 1919, QF3562; Polteff(?), Homeleigh House, Sturt Street, Townsville to J. Maksimoff, PO Ayr, 1 May 1919, QF3951; Norman R. Freeburg, Worker, Brisbane to M. Polteff, Hamleigh (Homeleigh) House, Townsville, 12 May 1919, QF4137; M. Polteff, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane, to S. Kozroff, PO Mackay, 1 July 1919, QF4500; M. Polteff, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane to Blinoff, Homeleigh House, Sturt Street, Townsville, 9 July 1919, QF4613; and Polteff, Stanley Street, South Brisbane to A. Terescavich, 49 Hyde Park Sydney, 16 July 1919, QF4643.
73 Soviet, Brisbane to Sidorkin, PO Cairns, 12 June 1919, QF4327.
74 P. Kreslin, Soviet of Russian Workers in Cairns, Victoria Street, Cairns to Russian Library, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 22 June 1919, QF4578.
75 The RWA regularly acknowledged regional finances, see for example Tocareff and Melcharek, Russian Library, Brisbane to J. Bolotnikoff, PO Townsville, 9 July 1919, QF4606. See also M.P., Cairns to G. Tocaroff, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 20 July 1919, QF4721; P. Kriulin, Souse [Union] Russian Workers, Victoria Street, Cairns to Russian Library, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 13
surviving records, the regularity of contributions indicates the strength of the regional communities and their allegiance to the Brisbane RWA leadership. An example of the strong coordinating role of the RWA was the detailed management of subscriptions to provide regular donations to support the red flag internees’ families in Brisbane and Sydney.⁷⁶

In addition to financial allegiance, regional groups also forwarded information to the RWA. Russians in Darwin provided information to the RWA on comrades killed in Russia and sympathised with those arrested for their involvement in political work.⁷⁷ On this issue the RWA circulated a request that ‘any of your comrades who have some news from Russia are to communicate them to us immediately’.⁷⁸ In turn, the RWA swiftly relayed information received and political literature to interested parties in regional areas.⁷⁹ Under this system, personal accounts of the industrial unrest in Mackay and Townsville were sent to Brisbane. Often these letters provided specific details of resolutions passed and revolutionary songs sung.⁸⁰ This news was included in RWA newspapers and circulars. In its correspondence with regional, Sydney and Melbourne branches, the RWA adopted a dictatorial tone that suggested to the authorities that Brisbane was asserting itself as the ‘headquarters of the Bolsheviks’.⁸¹

Commenting on imprisonment of Russians and Australians under the War Precautions Regulations, Gorsky stated ‘that in Russia it was necessary to experience the prisons and Cossacks’ whips to have this inevitable organic hatred to what is authority and social immorality in order to bring about the Russian Revolution and keep life in it’.⁸² Far from their activism being subdued by prison, he alludes to activists being radicalised by extreme politics. Active members such as Gorsky who were behind the push to restart the Russian library in June 1919 intended to reestablish the political side of the association. The considered opinion was that ‘only with direct action you can gain anything’ [sic].⁸³ The continued radicalism did not come as a surprise to everyone. One First Military District censor commented that ‘it was never expected that imprisonment would cure the Red Flaggers of

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⁷⁶ See J. Baronovsky for Soviet, Box 15, PO Haymarket, Sydney to A. Melcharek, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, Brisbane, 3 August 1919, QF4769; and Fedoroff for Soviet, PO Box 115, Haymarket, Sydney to A. Melcharek, PO Box Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 2 August 1919, QF4795.
⁷⁷ See Burnie, Port Darwin to H. Sherin, Boggo Road, Brisbane, 18 August 1919, QF4852.
⁷⁸ Soviet, Brisbane to Peter Kriulin, Victoria Street, Cairns, 13 August 1919, QF4782.
⁷⁹ See M. Polteff, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane to Blinoff, Homeleigh House, Sturt Street, Townsville, 9 July 1919, QF4613. The RWA also fulfilled the request of Manko for accurate maps of Russia so he could explain the movement of the revolution to Australian workers on the railway lines in Samsonvale. See Manko, c/o Resident Engineer, Samsonvale to A. Melcharek, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 26 August 1919, QF4824.
⁸⁰ See P. Grenuck, PO Townsville to M. Noodga, GPO Brisbane, 10 July 1919, QF4614. The events in Townsville were thoroughly analysed in intelligence report, week ending 9 July 1919, QF4538. For news on Russian involvement in the unrest in Mackay see A. Grudnoff, PO Mackay to Russian Library, Box 10, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 2 August 1919, QF4809.
⁸¹ Censor’s notes, week ending 27 August 1919, QF4825.
⁸² A. Gorsky, Brisbane to H. Bykoff, HM Prison, Brisbane 19 June 1919, QF4423.
⁸³ Souse [Union] Russian Workers, Russian Library, South Brisbane to Barinoff, PO Cordalba, 16 June 1919, QF4366.
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their disease’. Presumably the imprisoned men were held up as examples – by the RWA as martyrs, but by the authorities as blackguards ripe for deportation.

A new theme in the censors’ comments on the RWA after the Red Flag events was the noting of a risk of violence. In general, the censors were measured in their analysis of the slim possibility of Russians taking up arms to defend themselves. For example, when an order for explosives by a Russian living in Kuridala – a mining district during World War I – was intercepted, the censor noted that while although it was probably ‘a harmless transaction, the recent behaviour on the part of a number of Russians in Queensland shows that explosives in their hands would be dangerous to the community’. In another, mention of weapons in the possession of Russians – this time a ‘pocket dog’ or revolver – the censor admitted that ‘it is known that the Russians have a good stock of firearms but whether the weapons are private property or the property of the Soviet or of various souse, has not been ascertained’.

The key targets of RWA wrath were primarily Russians working for the government during the war. In order to track RWA developments the authorities relied on Russian language translators. The First Military District censor’s office employed several translators for this task, one of whom was Leo Selmon. Selmon commenced in Brisbane on 6 November 1918 and returned to Melbourne on 27 December 1918. The brevity of his contract in the First Military District, despite the heavy workload in Brisbane, can likely be explained by his account of being attacked by Russians when he returned to his lodgings after work.

Political fervour calling for revolutionary action was not just detected by authorities in coastal cities but also in industrial centres such as Broken Hill. In a letter to his father in Kiev, young silver miner, S. Kosiuk, urged ‘at present, in Russia, there exists the Bolshevik party; they are really honest people, who are at war with all the world, they want to free the workmen from the oppression of the capitalists, support them! Join the ranks of the Red Guard!’ His letter also outlined his views on the aristocracy and the church and his hopes for future work after a long period of unemployment. Kosiuk’s comments on his homeland from the distance of Broken Hill were seen as naïve. The Second Military District censor took exception to Kosiuk, declaring him ‘a pretty kind of mad dog to let loose on the community. There should be some means under an Aliens Restriction Order of removing this danger from such a community as Broken Hill’.

Disillusionment with the labour movement was also expressed by correspondents who sensed that the Left was out of step with the radical politics Russians saw as essential for international

84 Censor’s notes, week ending 9 July 1919, QF4520.
85 Censor’s notes, week ending 24 May 1919, Q4153.
86 Censor’s notes, week ending 30 April 1919, QF3865.
87 See account of this incident in Arov (Resanoff), Brisbane to S. Bolotnikoff, PO Ingham, 11 March 1919, QF3408.
88 S. Kosiuk, GPO Melbourne to J.R. Kosiuk, Kieff, Russia, 24 July 1918, RE1099.
developments in the revolution. Not only did the RWA feel that they ‘had ‘very little help from the English’ who ‘cannot wake up from their sleep’ but that ‘rising and revolution [w]ere everywhere’ and they could not participate.89 The desperation of Russians during this period was not just confined to those living in Brisbane. In July 1919, an unusual intelligence report was logged: a translation of a poem enclosed in a bottle found in the ocean of all places. The poem aptly sums up Russian revolutionary thoughts about their role at that period of time:

Forward comrades, in step  
Spirit strengthened in the reign of freedom, work!  
With our hands we will bring it about.  
We are people –  
Children of working families,  
Friendly union, and freedom  
That is our prize for our struggle.  
For long we were held in chains,  
For long we were held with hunger;  
Now these bitter days have passed;  
The hour of resurrection has come.  
All that supported their thrones  
Was the product of labourers’ hands;  
And ourselves, we will ruin those thrones,  
And we will screw the bayonets to our rifles.90

In early August 1919 the suspicions the authorities had about the true role of the Russian library were confirmed. The Brisbane Soviet issued a circular declaring that:

The souse [union] here got on its feet again and adopted new tactics. It is Direct Action. The souse ceased to be a culture-educational circle for Russians only... among the British workers’ organisations our active members doing an active work... The Soviet revolution [second anniversary], in November. Are you ready Comrades?... Duty of every Red is to wage an active agitation... we demand that every conscious member of the Red Republic should fulfil his obligations to the end... Don’t be frightened of persecutions. [sic]91

Unsurprisingly, this unabashed call for direct action – to work with bodies such as the OBU to radicalise Australian trade unions and hold up trade with Japan amongst other strategies – in the lead up to 10 November 1919 elicited a strong response from the authorities. The censor was left in no doubt that ‘there is no misunderstanding of this policy’ – the RWA was calling for unity with other groups to disrupt the system and bring about revolution. The First Military District censor’s several page report on this intercept was forwarded to military intelligence in Brisbane and also to

89 For instance see Russian Library, PO Box 10, South Brisbane to A. Moohen, c/o Resident Engineer, Oorallo, via Roma, 25 June 1919, QF4482, series BP 4/2, NAA.
91 Soviet, Brisbane to Peter Kriulin, Victoria Street, Cairns, 6 August 1919, QF4747. Kriulin had been active in the Ipswich branch before moving north for work.
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The censor surmised that the conditions for coordinated mass action by discontented aliens and left-wing groups were rapidly developing and:

- The approach to the second anniversary of the Soviet revolution would be a cause célèbre for action.
- A new spirit of action had imbued the RWA and ‘the writer displays a vigour and determination that implies strength behind him’.
- Several groups in addition to the RWA were known to be in active sympathy with the Soviet program.
- Industrial upheavals around the country – the Seaman’s strike and upheavals in Broken Hill – were receiving strong support, including money, from immigrant groups.
- The intention to hold up trade with Japan tied into the waterside issue of Japan traders using Chinese labour would gather popular support from Australian unions and workers on the docks.
- The financial struggle of Russians in Queensland over the past few months might make them more desperate and driven to follow extremists.

Finally, the warnings by the censors of discontented alien and radical groups uniting ‘silently and under cover’ in tangible operations (such as disturbing Australia’s international trade) that appeal to Australian workers were taken seriously. The intelligence report suggested that the release of internees from the camps be delayed as ‘without doubt’ leaders had emerged who were capable of executing such widespread operations. Around this time the censors were also monitoring international news reports on conspiracy plans planned by the Soviet leadership to extend the revolution to other countries. The plans of the RWA clearly demonstrated for the Australian intelligence and security agencies just ‘how far-reaching and penetrating is the movement now concentrating its forces and showing its repulsive face in Queensland’ and urged vigilance to monitor activities, declaring ‘the Russian danger is threatening and every succeeding day the menace waxes bolder’.

Maintaining the system: Master lists of the disloyal and disaffected

In response to the growth in Russian activism detected in censors’ and intelligence reportage, authorities put in place measures to convert home front surveillance techniques into peacetime procedures. As work on the history of British censorship observes, ‘refugee, religious, etc., movements produced a mass of international correspondence’. Administrative procedures enabled

92 Censor’s notes, week ending 13 August 1919, QF4747. See note XIV to Intelligence Section General Staff and the handwritten release order from the Deputy Chief Censor.


94 Censors’ notes, week ending 13 August 1919, QF4747; and week ending 2 September 1919, QF4832. Officials were also on the lookout for activists who might be ‘moving through the various sugar centres organising and preparing the Russians’. For an example see censor’s notes, week ending 20 August 1919, QF4784.
specialists to rigorously analyse the ‘tortuous intricacies of personality and intrigue’ embedded in the correspondence. 95 Despite the comprehensive character of the master lists and indices compiled during the war to assist the censors in each state office, there remained the chance that ‘complications may arise’ (i.e. one censor may pass what another would hold) if letters and publications were submitted to more than one office. 96 It may have also been the case that censors felt their colleagues in other districts to be too lenient. For example, in a note on correspondence between the business manager of the Worker and Ross of the Socialist, the censor noted that Ross may now be publishing in Brisbane because ‘he thought they would have a better chance of passing the censor in Queensland than in Melbourne’. 97 But in general censors worked together and they regularly sent updates on developments to censors in other districts. 98

Even while the censorship system was functioning well and revealing crucial information on radicals, there was an ongoing need for censors to be vigilant. Radicals, such as those in the OBUPL, recognised ‘that there was no need to advertise its methods of gaining control of industries; as one gentleman remarked “two can play at this Censor game”’. 99 The Deputy Chief Censor’s office also recognised that the collection of information was hampered by disloyalists not trusting their correspondence to the post. It was known to the censors that in north Queensland ‘correspondence is carried by members of the crews of coastal vessels, guards and drivers of trains’. 100

Tracking persons of interest was contingent upon keeping indices up to date with accurate names and addresses. Changes of information were usually sourced from the alien registration documents, but tracking unregistered changes was tricky. Censors had to be particularly wary that some correspondents may have been writing under pseudonyms. For example, on 4 March 1919 a Third Military District censor forwarded an intercept concerning a ‘writer who has evidently changed his name’ to the Intelligence Section General Staff First Military District so that the staff there would be aware of the writer’s new identity – as ‘he is evidently taking some prominent part in labor troubles in Queensland’. 101

Inevitably, people were hard to track when they changed their names. Specialist censors who recognised handwriting and language style were invaluable. Over time the Censor’s Office built up a considerable dossier on disloyalty in the First Military District. A cursory examination of surviving

95 History of the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department 1938–1946, Vol 1, 169.
96 See Third Military District censor’s discussion of Simonoff’s manuscript All About Russia and the Revolution, week ending 18 September 1918, MF1834.
97 Censor’s notes, week ending 31 December 1918, MF2422.
98 See for example censor’s notes, week ending 26 October 1918, MF2072 note II.
99 Quoted in Memorandum, Captain Reginald Hayes for Deputy Chief Censor, Melbourne to Chief of General Staff, Department of Defence, 27 September 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.
100 Memorandum, Captain Reginald Hayes for Deputy Chief Censor, Melbourne to Chief of General Staff, Department of Defence, 27 September 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.
101 Censor’s notes, week ending 4 March 1919, MF2610.
files held in the National Archives of Australia reveals that Queensland generated a sizeable number of reports for its small population. Censors’ comments show they concluded that the large volume of work positioned Queensland as the ‘haven of rest’ for work-weary members of the IWW who instigated unrest.\footnote{Censor’s notes, week ending 25 June 1918, MF1249.} This view was supported in censors’ notes on correspondence around the 1918 celebration of International May Day around Australia. The celebration enjoyed some support from Brisbane, yet correspondence on the topic between two Melbourne correspondents attracted telling comment from the censor that ‘one may be quite sure that ideas … would have their genesis in Brisbane’.\footnote{Censor’s notes, week ending 16 August 1918, MF1546.}

On 18 December 1918, more than a month after the armistice, the Department of Defence requested a record of disloyal and disaffected persons from all military districts. It is likely that these lists shaped the direction of post-war intelligence gathering. On 20 August 1919 Captain Woods replied from the First Military District, sending a 19 page typed list of persons, cross-referenced with other files, in particular censors’ reports and intelligence case files. The list itself was a table of names and addresses with particulars. The particulars of interest to Department of Defence were the nationalities of disloyal persons and the reasons for their inclusion on censors’ lists. Woods’s list on the Queensland home front covered a broad spectrum of disloyal and disaffected people: from Catholic nuns and Members of Parliament, to labour agitators, Irish sympathisers and political extremists. The key reason why people were categorised as disloyal and disaffected was membership or suspected membership of an unlawful association. Membership was broken down to extend to delegates, advocates, sympathisers, followers, associates, supporters, organisers, agitators and participants. People had also been included on the list if they held anti-British sentiments, such as socialist views, or if they had demonstrated disloyalty in intercepted mail. Any noteworthy association with the labour organisations (IWW, AWU, AMIEU, Queensland Railway Union, Industrial Council) or association with groups based on nationality (Russian, German, Irish) was recorded as a reason for inclusion. Association with known disloyalists was a particularly important factor when determining inclusion. The disloyalty of family members was also used to include persons whose home was used for activities supporting disloyal associations.

The entry on the list for Queensland Minister for Railways Hon. J. Fihelly reveals that he had said that ‘England is the home of cant, humbug and hypocrisy’.\footnote{Fihelly, page 7, 580/1/1096, series MP367/1, NAA.} Similarly, Queensland Police Inspector Michael Brosnan, of the Roma Street Police Station, had a full entry: ‘He is an Inspector of Police. His brother is imprisoned in New Zealand for disloyalty. He is very cautious in his remarks and in writing, but is undoubtedly disloyal’.\footnote{Brosnan, page 3, 580/1/1096, series MP367/1, NAA.} This entry shows that disloyalty and disaffection went all the way to the top of the Queensland political elite. Several of the senior RWA members were included in the list: veteran RWA member Paul Gray ‘returned to Russia after the
first revolution but with the help of Hon. T.J. Ryan got a passport back to Queensland. Censors’ reports show him still in favour of Bolshevism’. 106 One of the key appreciations of the work of RWA activists was reserved for the last entry in the record, Zuzenko. The entry on him states ‘he is well educated and a very dangerous man’. 107 This comment was based on analysis of Zuzenko’s articles in Russian newspapers and on his rousing orations at meetings. Kevin Windle refers to Captain J.J. Stable’s (First Military District censor) assessment of Zuzenko’s fine literary skills in his article on Nabat. 108

**Media censorship**

In addition to intercepting correspondence and drawing conclusions from investigations, censors also monitored the range of newspapers flowing in and out of groups like the RWA. One of the more confusing elements in examining newspaper censorship is that the prohibited publications list was in fact a working document that took into account new items issued by the Deputy Chief Censor as well as ideological changes in the literature itself that the censors monitored when checking new editions of publications. Despite the marked decrease in mail items containing publications since the beginning of the war, censors continued to come across Russian language newspapers and cuttings which necessitated holding. 109 Brisbane Russians appeared to try their luck with the censors by routing their international subscriptions via colleagues in other military districts. For instance, Nikitin tried to send his subscription to the New York newspaper Golos Truda via Petruchenia in Melbourne. However, Petruchenia’s reply to Nikitin was picked up by the Brisbane censors who in turn alerted their Third Military District colleagues to intercept any correspondence from Petruchenia to New York. 110 Copies of newly titled foreign newspapers which aimed to skim under the international net of censours were diligently tracked by the First Military District. Reports show that the RWA had held a subscription to the Kansas-based Appeal to Reason, which was relaunched with the (surprisingly) related title The New Appeal in late 1917. 111

Censors did not necessarily see their role as preventing the publication of papers, but rather as scrutinising the contents prior to public release. 112 The ideological threat posed by radical groups such as the IWW and Bolsheviks at the end of the war was taken seriously and newspaper articles were increasingly perused and recorded in detail. For example, analysis of an article entitled ‘The Crisis among the Allies’ and published in The New Republic was recorded in full, combined with an introductory summary. In the analysis the censor’s office perceptively noted that despite the sugar-

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106 Klark, page 11, 580/1/1096, series MP367/1, NAA. He is listed under his Russian name Pavel Ivanovitch Klark.
107 Zuzenko, page 19, 580/1/1096, series MP367/1, NAA.
109 In the Q reports of 1918 see Q2643 intercepted week ending 5 January 1918.
110 V. Petruchenia, 23 Station Road, North Melbourne to Nikitin, Box 10, South Brisbane, 14 January 1918, Q2697.
111 *Appeal to Reason*, Kansas, United States to The Worker, Brisbane, 29 December 1917, Q2768.
112 Censor’s notes, week ending 7 January 1919, MF2454.
coated sensationalism, the article could influence readers and was ‘dangerous’ because the writer ‘makes it palatable to people he seeks to inveigle into its ensnaring meshes…. its general tone leads to the one conclusion – to embrace Bolshevism and nourish it’. An intercept report was created for all foreign language newspapers – domestic and international – that passed by the censor’s office. Additionally, censors were concerned about the representation of events happening in Australia in the press overseas. To this end censors regularly noted articles on Australia in foreign newspapers. Dismay was expressed by censors at ‘the publication of exaggerated reports’ in “Red riots in colony of Britain: Bolsheviki fight soldiers in the streets of Australian city!” in the Texan El Paso Herald.

In the face of this strict censorship, the RWA was involved in a struggle to reinvent itself and to publish. In late 1917 an order was sent to the Deputy Chief Censor for service by the Chief of General Staff, Department of Defence prohibiting the publication of Workers’ Life in Russian. Such orders were routinely applied to foreign language and politically suspect newspapers during the war. A campaign against this order was mounted almost immediately by the RWA and they worked to gather support from the left-wing community as well as those in favour of a free press. The intercept Q2749 reveals an interesting phase of this campaign. Evening Sun editor W.G. Boorman had enclosed several letters from those who contributed to the debate surrounding Workers’ Life with his letter to the editor of Workers’ Life (presumably Simonoff). Boorman consulted the editors of Stead’s Review, the Evening News, the Herald and The Bulletin. This correspondence between the leading newspaper figures of the time is intriguing. Their debate was on whether the suppression of Workers’ Life was a matter for the Censor or for Military Intelligence. Whatever the attitude of the First Military District authorities to the Russian Association’s succession of newspapers, the RWA’s decision to relaunch a fourth newspaper in 1918 – the English Knowledge and Unity – was hardly a surprise to censors or newspaper figures alike.

Despite the Regulations, the RWA still acted as a community group for Russians in Queensland. The association’s dual role as political spearhead as well as community group meant that not all of its correspondence was stopped by the censors. Although circulars needed official approval by military intelligence before they could be published, on occasion community-focused circulars issued by the RWA, once translated, were allowed to be released and distributed. As discussed in chapter 1, the newspapers produced by the RWA were eagerly consumed by members of the RWA

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113 Censor’s notes, week ending 12 April 1919, Q4118.
114 Intelligence report, week ending 10 May 1919, QF4011.
115 See correspondence between the Commandant First Military District (Irving), E.L. Piesse for the Chief of General Staff and the Deputy Chief Censor’s office, box 5, 66/4/2072, series BP4/1, NAA.
116 Boorman & Boorman, 72B King Street, Sydney to Editor, Workers’ Life, Stanley Street, Brisbane, 24 January 1918, Q2749. See also W.G. Boorman, 723 King Street, Sydney to Peter Simonoff, Russian Association, 20 Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 4 March 1918, Q2871.
117 See for instance the recording of Captain Wood’s approval of a German circular authored by Otto Thiele, Bethania, 26 June 1918, QU47.
118 See the notes on the printed circular intercepted in Russian Association, Stanley Street, South Brisbane to Mrs M. Fedoroff, PO Pardalla, 7 January 1918, Q2674.
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as well as the wider Russian community. The interest of the community in newspapers continued to be documented in censorship reports, as Russians called for a paper to devote ‘part of its columns to the Russian revolution and in general deals with Russian life from the workers’ point of view’.\footnote{William Vanin, 408 Miles East West Railway, South Australia to A. Stepanoff, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, 30 June 1919, MF2871. See also Tokareff, Russian Library, PO Box 10, Brisbane to A. Stepanoff, ASP (Australian Socialist Party) Hall, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne, intercepted week ending 10 September 1919, MF2948; C. Schleinert, Russian Association, Socialist Hall, Sulphide Street, Broken Hill to Russian Association, Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 20 January 1919, QF2860; M. Prochoroff, Peeramon to Zuzenko, Box 10, South Brisbane, 16 January 1919, QF2877; J. Maruschak, 7 Patterson Place, South Melbourne to Zuzenko, Box 10, South Brisbane, 6 December 1918, QF2878; Komaroff, Selwyn to Secretary, Russian Association, Brisbane, 27 December 1918, QF2886; M. Polteff, Townsville to Knowledge and Unity, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 17 January 1919, QF2935; C. Bicovsky, Cobar to Secretary, Russian Association, Brisbane, 22 January 1919, QF2937; V. Petruuchenia, 3 Tennyson Street, Kensington to Russian Association, for Zuzenko, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 12 February 1919, QF3217; Melchacoff, Babinda PO to Giva Rosenberg, Knowledge and Unity, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 21 February 1919, QF3223; E.A. Berman, c/o Ganger, Burke, Orallo via Roma to Zuzenko, Box 10, South Brisbane PO, 12 February 1919, QF3736; P. Damelchenko, Cairns to P. Kreslin, Russian Association, Box 10, South Brisbane, 7 April 1919, QF3849; F. Boskakoff, c/o Resid(ent) engineer, Tarzali via Cairns to J. Gordon, Kent Buildings, Brisbane, 26 April 1919, QF4142; Sedorkin, Cairns to Editor, Knowledge and Unity, Kent Buildings, Adelaide Street, Brisbane, 22 May 1919, QF4163; G. Bolotnikoff, Townsville to Russian Library, Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 2 June 1919, QF4295; M. Prochoroff to Tocaroff, GPO Brisbane, 6 June 1919, QF4331; F. Efremoff, Socialist Hall, Broken Hill to F. Shahnovskiy, Industrial Council, Brisbane, 9 June 1919, QF4420; V. Petruuchenia, 3 Tennyson Street, Kensington to Editor, Knowledge and Unity, Kent Buildings, Brisbane, 15 August 1919, QF4798; P. Krulun, Souze [Union] Russian Workers, Victoria Street, Cairns to Russian Library, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 13 August 1919, QF4808; A. Grudnoff, PO Mackay to Russian Library, Box 10, PO Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 2 August 1919, QF4809; and E.A. Gome, 20 Gibbs Street, Balaclava to Editor, Knowledge and Unity, Box 10, South Brisbane, intercepted week ending 6 September 1919, QF4855.}

Later in 1918, RWA editor Lagutin proposed the launching of another newspaper in Russian, to be known as the \textit{Echo of Australia} (most likely referring back to the successful first newspaper of the same name issued by the Russian Club from 1911–1914).\footnote{N. Lagutin, Secretary, Russian Association, Brisbane to Zerkaloff, Haymarket, Sydney, 30 April 1918, RE816.} While a paper under this name did not eventuate – it was superseded by the more marketable \textit{Knowledge and Unity} – Lagutin’s correspondence with colleagues in Sydney allowed the censors to hold a finger to the pulse of the Russian language press and to flag ‘a case for suppression under WPR 28B’\footnote{Censor’s notes, week ending 30 April 1918, RE816. Section 28 of the War Precautions Regulations dealt with censorship. It stipulated that documents must be submitted prior to publication and authorised the censor’s power to prohibit publication. For amendments to the Manual of War Precautions see 1918/89/35, series A11803, NAA.} with the Deputy Chief Censor.

In early 1919 the OBUL and the RWA joined together to publish English language editions of \textit{Knowledge and Unity}. This propaganda exchange was immediately noted by a censor who saw the alliance between the OBU and disaffected Russians as a dangerous one that called for special observation. Indeed, this censor concluded that ‘no better scheme could be conceived than to distribute Bolshevik propaganda under the guise of OBU literature’.\footnote{Censor’s notes, week ending 21 January 1919, MF2513.} Zuzenko himself acknowledged that the new English language editions were targeted ‘for distribution amongst the English working men’.\footnote{A. Zuzenko, Russian Association, Brisbane to E. Dubatoff, PO Townsville, 10 January 1919, QF2940.} This was a signal that the RWA was shifting the focus of its publishing
enterprise from keeping Russians in Australia up to date with Russian developments to promoting Russian politics more widely. The RWA publishers ensured that their new paper contained analysis of the upcoming revolution as well as encouragement to take up the cause of Bolshevism. Indeed, the RWA made it quite clear to their publishing partners that they still wanted ideological control over the character of the paper.\textsuperscript{124} Russian agitators were appreciative of the RWA leadership’s ‘untiring energy and... desire to break into every corner of Australia’.\textsuperscript{125} This support prompted one censor to conclude that ‘there is no doubt that Knowledge and Unity contains more dangerous matter than its Australian contemporaries’.\textsuperscript{126}

From early 1919, the RWA started to receive requests from non-Russians – including the secretary of the Socialist party R.S. Ross – for subscriptions, particularly from union members and those associated with the OBU.\textsuperscript{127} Petruchenia of the Melbourne Russian Association confirmed that publishing the paper in English ‘is a great success’ whilst the Sydney group rapidly sold out of the papers.\textsuperscript{128} The sales trends of the new English language Knowledge and Unity were repeated in regional areas right across the east coast. The strong interest in these publications showed the authorities ‘the power a newspaper has in the bush’.\textsuperscript{129} Even Peter Gailit, detained under the war precautions regulations in Darlinghurst, wrote to congratulate the RWA on the quality of the copies of Knowledge and Unity that he received.\textsuperscript{130}

In June 1919 the Melbourne Russian club wrote to their Brisbane comrades that ‘what interests us most of all is the publication of the newspaper... papers were taken up here like hot pancakes’.\textsuperscript{131} The RWA newspaper office was a central point where Russians could send letters seeking advice or to express their frustrations. For instance, a group of Russians in Selwyn wrote to Knowledge and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Censor’s notes, week ending 5 March 1919, QF3298.
\item \textsuperscript{125} N. Blinoff, Selwyn to Engels (Zuzenko), Knowledge and Unity, Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 27 February 1919, QF3297.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Censor’s notes, week ending 5 March 1919, QF3283.
\item \textsuperscript{127} See J. O’Brien, Alpha via Rockhampton to Knowledge and Unity, Box 10, South Brisbane, 27 January 1919, QF2977; Also George C. Reeve, 99 Wells Street, Newtown to Civa Rosenberg, Stanley Street, PO South Brisbane, 29 January 1919, QF2981; J. Burke, OBUPL (One Big Union Propaganda League), Box 10, PO South Brisbane to W.A. Shepherd, Hotel Delta, Ayr via Townsville, 17 January 1919,. QF2986; H. Loosin, Marlborough, Res(ident) eng(ineering) gang to Russian Association, Brisbane, 4 February 1919, QF3019; M. Polteff, PO Townsville to Mrs Rimer, PO Woomoolgabba, intercepted week ending 5 February 1919, QF3020; G. Sookoff, PO Box 293, Cairns to A. Zuzenko, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 10 February 1919, QF3071; R.S. Ross, Secretary, Socialist Party of Victoria, Melbourne to Civa Rosenberg, Knowledge and Unity, South Brisbane, 5 March 1919, QF3366; Tony Rail, Hughenden Hotel, Hughenden to T. Stewart, Townsville, 21 March 1919, QF3552; and P. Mandeno, Orallo to N. Jeffery, Secretary, OBU (One Big Union), Box 10, South Brisbane, 21 March 1919, QF3589.
\item \textsuperscript{128} V. Petruchenia, 3 Tennyson Street, Kensington, Melbourne to Zuzenko, Russian Association, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 22 February 1919, QF3217; and Boris, Sydney to PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 21 February 1919, QF3218.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Censor’s notes, week ending 12 March 1919, QF3368.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Peter Gailit, Sydney to Russian Association, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 3 March 1919, QF3340. The censor noted that Gailit’s ‘internment is made the less irksome by the privilege he has of reading Knowledge and Unity’. Tolstobroff too – detained in Boggo Road jail in Brisbane – wrote to comrades about the reception of Knowledge and Unity in S. Tolstobroff, HM Prison, Brisbane to Andrew Melcharek, PO South Brisbane, 9 June 1919, QF4324.
\item \textsuperscript{131} A. Stepnoff, ASP (Australian Socialist Party) Hall, 47 Victoria Street, Melbourne to Russian Association, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 11 June 1919, QF4361.
\end{itemize}
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Unity to protest against their detention (most likely under the War Precautions Regulations). While the English language version of Knowledge and Unity had support from unions and socialists groups as well as Russians with enough English comprehension skills, many Russians objected that they now did not have a newspaper in their own language. Despite initial popularity amongst readers, the illegal Ninth Wave had been discontinued for several reasons: a lack of funds, direction within the RWA and confiscation of the type in a police raid. In March 1919, several Russians in Brisbane who had been associated with the earlier breakaway group, the Group of Russian Workers, unsuccessfully attempted to gain official permission to publish a Russian language paper to be known as The Torch.

One of the strongest indications of the success of the English language Knowledge and Unity was the renewal of international subscriptions. At the beginning of the war, the RWA sent copies of its publications to several overseas parties (for details see chapter 3). However, during the war, censorship in both Australia and the receiving countries created a double bind for publishers and subscribers alike, and international subscriptions virtually ceased until early 1919. In March and April 1919 considerable interest in Knowledge and Unity came from radical groups in New Zealand. But in line with the War Precautions Regulations, international subscriptions and correspondence dealing with extremist publications were almost always referred to and held by the Deputy Chief Censor’s office in Melbourne. As censorship restrictions were relaxed towards the middle of 1919 members of the RWA started to renew their international correspondence with other political groups.

Investigations into the disloyal

As discussed in chapter 2, investigations into disloyalty were carried out at both state and federal levels. Military intelligence was responsible for investigating breaches of the War Precautions Regulations and frequently liaised with other agencies to collect intelligence. Censorship staff gathered raw intelligence, notified Defence of new targets and, towards the end of the war, doubled

132 See Komaroff, Selwyn to Knowledge and Unity, Brisbane, 11 January 1919, QF2887.
133 A. Gamanoff, c/o Zalabisby, Fitzgibbon Street, North Ipswich to T. Cherbakoff, 379 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 2 March 1919, MF2628.
134 Bykoff, Tominogoi, Stepanoff, Polonsky and Chernish applied to the military authorities to publish a weekly review in Russian. Their application was ultimately rejected by the military authorities in Melbourne. See Soviet of Souse [Union] of Russian Workers, Brisbane to F. Goozef, c/o A. Cameron, Maroochy River via Yandina, 6 March 1919, QF3363.
135 See for example J.D. Robertson, 24 Lawrence Street, Ponsonby, Auckland to Knowledge and Unity, Brisbane, 13 March 1919, QF3449. Robertson was the editor of an extremist newspaper the Commonwealth and enclosed a copy of his publication. See also Russian Association, Brisbane to B. Dorofaeff, GPO Christchurch, 1 March 1919, QF3531; E. Anderson, Naitasiri House, Huntly, New Zealand to Knowledge and Unity, Stanley Street, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 5 April 1919, QF3776; T. Allsop, Secretary, Huntley Marxian Class, South Road, Huntley, New Zealand to Editor, Knowledge and Unity, Adelaide Street, Brisbane, 14 April 1919, QF3839; Soviet, Industrial Council, Brisbane to A. Redkin, PO Auckland, 28 April 1919, QF3908; B. Urbansk, GPO Box 472, Auckland, New Zealand to Knowledge and Unity, Stanley Street, Brisbane, 17 April 1919, QF4023; and H. Gurfinkel, c/o Avondale, Brisbane to M. Blitshtein, 10 Yamskaya, Harbin, 25 May 1919, QF4202.
136 A good example of this type of political correspondence is J. Boslovako, 611 Ninth Avenue, Seattle, Washington to Monko, GPO Brisbane, 23 July 1919, intercepted week of 6 September 1919, QF4853.
as inquiry agents. The primary investigative force that acted under warrants issued by the Department of Defence was the state police. The presence of reports from, and references to, Queensland Police in archival records dealing with disloyalty and the Russian community, indicates that military intelligence continued this relationship for the duration of the war. From 1917, two new Commonwealth agencies worked closely with military intelligence and the censors: the Special Intelligence Bureau and the Commonwealth Police. Archival records show that inquiry agents reported to both military intelligence and the Special Intelligence Bureau. Commonwealth Police officers reported on a range of events including meetings and court trials. Any evidence collected as a result of their investigations was passed to military intelligence. The relationships between agencies continued after the war and, as this chapter demonstrates, the collaboration between the authorities was critical in identifying and managing cases of disloyalty on the home front.

A series of Commonwealth Police reports in early 1918 focused on industrial trouble in Queensland and observed the suspiciously high rate of union membership among Russians. Constable H.L. Foote cited information passed to him by a member of the Federated Waterside Workers Union that at a recent meeting ‘out of 40 or 41 men applying for admission, 30 of them were Russians’. While Constable Foote noted that this was a direct refutation of Union President David Reggie’s assurance that few Russians were being admitted, Foote goes on to say that ‘it is possible that many of the Russians are joining the Union under fictitious names’, presumably to avoid ethnic identification. Constable Foote, reporting on an OBUPL meeting, wrote that the speaker’s ‘only remark I thought worthy of note’ was his reference to the Bolshevik question reinforced by the following statement: ‘Simonoff the Russian Consul General has said that the gaol system in New South Wales was worse than that in Siberia, that is before the war’.

Confirming links between industrial unrest and Russians in the Commonwealth Police reports, the commentary provided by censors in the postal intercept reports reveals an underlying tension where some censors genuinely believed that the government needed to do more to control foreign radicals on the home front. This was illustrated in censors’ correspondence in response to a letter discussing May Day plans in Sydney as part of international celebrations in 1918, where the censors posted the following question: ‘are not these foreign socialists enjoying a little too much license for the good of

137 Agent 77 regularly reported to Captain Woods, Intelligence Section General Staff as well as meeting with Captain Ainsworth, Special Intelligence Bureau.
138 The investigating officers generally noted in their reports whether evidence was seized and passed to military intelligence. On 29 April 1919 Sergeant A.M. Short searched the lodgings of K. Galehenko and G. Tokareff at the house of Kalasnikoff. He seized letters, a red flag and a banner. In Short’s report to Commissioner, Commonwealth Police Force, Sydney on 30 April he noted that ‘everything taken has been handed to the military’.
139 Industrial Trouble in Queensland 4, Constable H.L. Foote, Commonwealth Police Force, Brisbane, 17 March 1919, 2, series BP230/4, NAA.
140 One Big Union Propaganda League Meeting, William Street, North Quay, Brisbane Sunday November 3rd 1918, Constable H.L. Foote, Commonwealth Police Force, Brisbane, 4 November 1918, 1, series BP230/4, NAA.
Prior to the explosive Red Flag events of March 1919, the federal government was considering decisive action as a means of resolving what was ‘really becoming a grave situation’. At public meetings in November 1918, presumably to mark the first anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, speakers called for the overthrow of all governments and loyalty only to the working class as crowds cheered the international revolution. Of particular concern to the government was that at one meeting ‘the Bolshevic propagandists had amongst their audience several Russians armed with revolvers, and many others with their pockets filled with blue metal’. Certainly some members of the RWA had served their revolutionary apprenticeship in tsarist Russia where violent struggle on the part radicals was commonplace. Yet despite the presence of arms in both loyalist and disloyalist circles, the first reports of violence did not appear until the aftermath of the Red Flag events. The continued expression of disloyalty through speeches, statements and activities was used as grounds by military intelligence to recommend the Acting Prime Minister to take steps ‘for deporting the ringleaders at the earliest possible moment’. It is clear that calls by Australian authorities for the deportation of the troublesome Brisbane Russians came months before their fateful Red Flag March.

From late 1918 to early 1919, military intelligence, Commonwealth Police and the Special Intelligence Bureau began to target specific members of the RWA. Zuzenko was served with an unlimited order under the War Precautions Regulations that prohibited him from participating in meetings or publishing. Simonoff and Gailet were also served with similar orders. Gailet had been previously arrested under the War Precautions Regulations in 1918 for ‘spreading Bolshevism’. He was arrested in Port Pirie and later detained in Adelaide. Interestingly, in his description of his detention to Simonoff, Gailet indicates that he was told that he was to be deported to South America but the steamer was quarantined. Despairing, Gailet thought the military intelligence officers were going to kill him or throw him over the side of the steamer. His description of the interactions with his interviewing officers states that: ‘it is as plain as daylight, they hate the Russians and their only wish is to smother us’. Simonoff was deemed to have breached his orders in February 1919 and lamented to Zuzenko that he risked being imprisoned. As Soviet consul, Simonoff felt it was his duty to outline his dissatisfaction to the Prime Minister and to request safe passage back to Russia. Unsurprisingly, Simonoff did not expect any answer from Acting Prime Minister Watt to his letter about the suppression of the Russian community.

141 Censor’s notes, week ending 20 April 1919, MF824.
142 Letter, (George Stewart,) Melbourne to Acting Prime Minister Watt, 20 November 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.
143 Letter, (George Stewart,) Melbourne to Acting Prime Minister Watt, 20 November 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.
144 Gailet, Sydney to Simonoff, PO Box 10, Stanley Street, Brisbane, 2 January 1919, QF2830. See also Peter Gailet, Darlinghurst Detention Barracks, Sydney to Rodzenko(?), Box 10, Stanley Street, Brisbane, 29 November 1918, QF2509; and M. Ossipoff, Port Pirie to Knowledge and Unity, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 11 October 1918, QF2169.
145 Peter (Simonoff), Sydney to Archangel (Zuzenko), PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 12 February 1919, QF3160.
On 26 January 1919, a Brisbane procession of around 1,500 people protested against the continuation of the war restrictions. The march ended in a Domain meeting of 2,000 addressed by Hon. William Finlayson. Of note, ‘hundreds of Russians, adults and children were present and banners were carried by them, these being seized amongst other things during the military raid on the Russian Association rooms which took place a few days after the procession’. On 30 January 1919, a coordinated raid by intelligence staff of the First Military District (led by Captain Wood) was made on the Russian Rooms in South Brisbane and the homes of leading RWA members such as Bykoff and Lagutin. Military intelligence regularly conducted searches of premises seeking prohibited/suspect material. Labour campaigner Monty Miller describes his experience of the 30 January raid:

Their rooms were raided by the military authorities last week and I unwittingly walked in and was at once damned on suspicion of being either a Russian or a sinister minded villain in dark designing complicity with the Bolsheviks as they are called here, and as the OBU League are domiciled in the room under the same roof the Atlas Buildings they too are publicly dubbed Bolsheviks. The raid and confiscation of papers, banners, literature etc. lasted for nearly two hours when they vacated the premises.

Intelligence staff seized banners used in the 26 January march as well as propaganda material but – as was eagerly proclaimed in the Worker – nothing of substance was found. In early February, more raids on rooms belonging to people associated with the RWA were conducted, including previous Knowledge and Unity editor Lagutin. In this raid, military intelligence officers found articles drafted by A. Hruzki and concluded that Lagutin had published under this pseudonym. The First Military District censor’s office was contacted with this information and it was reported that ‘a note in the Russian interpreter’s diary concerning Hrutsky reads “dangerous character” which finds support’. It was through raids on private premises such as Lagutin’s that military intelligence unearthed links between like-minded people. These links were passed onto the censors who in turn broadened the scope of their reportage.

Searches by Commonwealth and State police, authorised by military intelligence, became frequent. Captain Wills’s report on the search of the Wilson brothers’ rooms in Selwyn reveals that IWW literature and ‘also … the membership button of the original IWW Association’ were discovered in a coat. The open advocacy of IWW principles, as supported through the discovery of literature and the membership button, led Wills to conclude both Wilson brothers were ‘dangerous to the community’. Commonwealth Police Sergeant A.M. Short reported to the Commissioner in Sydney the outcomes of a search conducted on a house belonging to a Russian named Kalasnikoff.

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146 Monthly report, Sergeant A.M. Short, Commonwealth Police Force, Brisbane to Commissioner, Commonwealth Police, Sydney, 17 February 1919, 1, series BP230/4, NAA.
147 Monty Miller, 26 Tank Street, Brisbane to M. Stevens, OBU League, 28 Bourke Street, Melbourne, 3 February 1919, MF2568.
148 Intelligence report on raid of Lagutin's rooms South Brisbane and censor's notes, week ending 19 February 1919, QF3161.
149 Edward and William Frank Wilson, Captain S.S. Wills, ISGS Townsville to Captain Wood, Victoria Barracks, Brisbane, 3 April 1919, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA.
occupied by 2 men – K. Galchenko and G. Tokareff. He noted that several items were confiscated and handed over to the military: letters in Russian, propaganda literature and a photograph of a group with a red banner in Cairns. The fact that the only items worthy of note to the Commissioner were basically personal effects could indicate the hit-and-miss nature of some of the raids conducted by the Commonwealth Police on the homes of Russians and other disloyalists. Raids on the homes of Russians were also reported by Short to the Commissioner in his monthly report of 17 February 1919.

As prosecutions under the War Precautions Regulations were made against writers such as Ross and newspapers such as the Daily Standard were targeted by vigilante groups, several left-wing intellectuals decided that it was time to leave Australia. Journalist and editor Spencer Brodney set out his objections to the military raid made on his New Farm home to Acting Prime Minister Watts. In his letter he questioned why someone like him, with a professional interest in Russian affairs, might be targeted. The First Military District Censor’s Office defended the raid on grounds that its object ‘was to learn more of the schemes of this Bolshevik propagandist’ and to stultify his work. At this point in time, Queensland was assessed by military intelligence to be under threat from disloyal groups. In a report to the Chief of General Staff after a visit to Queensland at the behest of the Brisbane Censor, Captain Reginald Hayes, on behalf of the Deputy Chief Censor, concluded that:

A personal visit to Queensland is necessary to realise the state of disloyalty into which a very large section of the population has sunk and it is no exaggeration to say that the leaders of the extremist section will not baulk, when they think they have sufficient adherents, at out and out revolution.

While Hayes’s report did not cover the activities of the RWA per se, it did provide context for the evaluation of the activities of the RWA. For the intelligence and security agencies headquartered in Melbourne, Queensland was already awash with IWW extremism and any activity by alien groups was only confirmation of the state of affairs in the North. In this environment, the RWA was seen to combine radical politics with alien sedition.
Examination of a selection of key intelligence reports on industrial unrest in Townsville in 1918 and 1919 shows how Russians were specifically singled out from other ethnic groups. Symptomatic of rising working-class disillusionment with the Labor government and high unemployment in Queensland at the end of the war, the meat industry in the north of the state had been plagued with go-slow campaigns and lightning strikes. The climax of the standoff was, as Terrance Cutler notes, ‘a spontaneous outburst of larrikinism, culminating in rioting and bloodshed’. As Doug Hunt observes, there have been few strikes in Australia that have resulted in actual bloodshed. The gun-fire exchange between police and unionists on 29 June during the lengthy dispute in the Townsville meatworks stands out as one of the few that did. Bloody Sunday confirmed for the authorities that ‘workers in the north had a peculiar tendency towards industrial militancy and political radicalism’. The Queensland government responded swiftly: armed police from around the state were rushed to Townsville to restore executive authority and maintain public order.

Captain Wills was the First Military District intelligence officer stationed in Townsville at the time. His report on the disturbances was forwarded by Captain Wood in Brisbane to the Department of Defence in Melbourne, and then from Defence Secretary T. Trumble to the Prime Minister’s Department. This lengthy report detailed the large-scale protests that were mounted by labour and union groups in support of arrested AMIEU organiser Pierce Carney and Industrial Council President M.J. Kelly. Wills’s account is an executive overview of the key action of the estimated 4,000 strong crowd over a 4 day period, which included violent reprisals by police and armed attacks by protesters against any symbol of authority. Wills mentions protest leaders by name but Russians are the only ethnic group singled out in his report, despite several leaders being Irish. A whole paragraph is devoted to Russian involvement in this incident in Wills’s report:

Quite a number of Russians were seen intermixed with the crowd and it is alleged that a Russian fired the shot at the Police standing at the Bank corner. The police have this matter in hand. It is known that two Russians accompanied a motor car, in which a number of rifles were stored, with three other men, to South Townsville. We are endeavouring to ascertain their names.

Examination of wartime legislation and interdepartmental correspondence on the alien question tells us that activities coordinated by groups like the RWA were triggers for social anxiety about issues such as national identity and tolerance of others. Russians were regularly the object of ridicule in reports that drew attention to any odd behaviour, or foreign manners of speaking. A report, subsequently submitted to Acting Prime Minister Watt, on the May Day celebrations in Brisbane in 1918 reflects on a piece of theatre presented by the RWA:

159 See Labour Troubles in Queensland – Miscellaneous, SC26/2, series A3934, NAA.
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A feature of the entertainment was the ‘play’. This was a tableau representing the “Breaking of the chains of Bondage”. A Russian rushed about the stage reciting and gesticulating close to a group of three one of whom was manacled and another held an upraised hammer. At the conclusion the aforesaid Russians’ gyrations the hammer came down and the chains fell to the floor. Limelight… slow curtain. Limelight – curtain. (Loud and unrestrained applause).

While at first glance this review can be dismissed as officialdom laughing at the amateurish nature of dissidents, closer reading reveals that the excerpt contains fragments of how wider society viewed the Russians. The full text of this review is similar to how the British intelligence community described Bolshevik sympathisers in the UK.

Commonwealth Police records shed light on some of the instances of disloyalty reported by members of the community to the authorities. A letter from H.L. Hall passed on information from a Nambour dentist’s observations of disloyal men in his district. Hall wrote that Dr Wilson ‘has often heard at a late hour at night a conversation taking place amongst a gathering of foreigners consisting of Russian Finns. To his mind these men are disloyalists always speaking in their own tongue, and one of them visited Brisbane and was present at the meeting addressed by Mr Finlayson M.H.R. in the Domain’. Hall concluded that Wilson ‘considers that the time (usually about midnight) and place (a lonely railway bridge) very suspicious’. On face value this does seem to be a case of unusual behaviour: foreigners assembling in the dead of night to conduct meetings. But this incident might be explained in other ways. First, the evasive behaviour of the Russian Finns could reflect the levels of paranoia foreign citizens were feeling to the extent that they chose to meet their friends in open spaces late at night to get away from prying eyes. Second, the behaviour of the Nambour dentist is indicative of the level of suspicion directed towards foreigners by loyal citizens, to the extent that he presumably monitored the activities of foreigners in his neighbourhood around the clock. Note also the chief symptom of disloyalty: ‘a gathering of foreigners speaking in their own tongue’. The archival record indicates that Hall’s letter was addressed to the Commonwealth Police. While there is no follow up correspondence on file, the report was filed on a subject file dealing with investigations into industrial unrest, and presumably kept as reference material highlighting the disloyal activities of Russians.

Post-war trends and policy developments

At a basic level, intelligence agencies perceived disloyal organisations such as the RWA and the OBU as representing a threat to Australia’s political, economic and social systems. The perception was that home grown groups such as trade unions were being infiltrated by aliens promoting radical

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160 Letter, (H. Jones,) Melbourne to Acting Prime Minister Watt, 10 May 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.
162 H.L. Hall, Organiser N.P.C. to 272 Queens Street, Brisbane, 17 March 1919, 2, series BP230/4, NAA.
ideas and methods, and this called for increased vigilance by authorities. A large number of reports were submitted to the QF reports by censors and military intelligence officers who attended Domain events as well as regular trade union meetings. These reports proved to be a useful gauge of the interactions between groups, and confirmed for intelligence and security agencies that the RWA and OBU were working together to gain support from the ‘workers of Brisbane’ via the Brisbane Industrial Council. A major concern for authorities was that small, foreign groups would link up with disgruntled Australians to whom they would introduce militant ideas. Such plans were reinforced by Russians themselves, who congratulated RWA leader Zuzenko on the publication of *Knowledge and Unity* in English as this would enable them to ‘close our ranks – we, the Russians, and English – they will then understand that we, though few, are a solid body, a handful only, but representatives of the glorious Bolshevism’. Radical Russians up and down the east coast were ‘quite positive that the idea of socialistic revolution will graft, even on to Australians’.

Authorities were worried that the pre-World War I ties between Russian clubs in outlying regional areas and central branches such as the RWA would be re-established *sans* censorship after the War Precautions Regulations were relaxed. A key difference in 1919 – in the immediate post-war years – was the character of the propaganda engaged in by the RWA. In the months following the Russian Revolution, a small core of Russians had started to promote rigid adherence to Bolshevism and the path of Soviet Russia. Around March and April 1919, censors began to intercept letters more frequently indicating that formal links were being established between regional clubs and interstate branches under the political direction of the Brisbane Soviet run by the RWA. Such an organisational model would enable the dissemination of the correct set of political ideas to Russians who could then work to motivate their fellow workers on the shop floor and through union work. The task of promoting Bolshevism outside Russian groups was greatly aided by the publication of *Knowledge and Unity* in English. On this issue a First Military District censor commented that:

> The establishment of Soviets in various centres of Queensland is a development of the scheme the Russians had for proselytising the workers of other nationalities: with each Soviet there would be several groups – souse the Russians call a group – these groups were to work quietly in the unions of which they were members. Each souse would report to the Soviet and each Soviet would be looked to make certain progress on the road to revolution.

Links between the RWA and groups overseas were viewed cautiously by censors who concluded that ‘in the minds of the writers – events are shaping towards a revolution in Australia, and ... the Russians intend to take an active, if not a leading, part in it’.

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163 For example of this analysis see intelligence report, week ending 22 January 1919, QF2864.
164 N. Blinoff, Selwyn to Engels (Zuzenko), *Knowledge and Unity*, Box 10, Stanley Street, South Brisbane, 27 February 1919, QF3297.
165 P. Kreslin, Brisbane to Polteff, PO Townsville, 6 March 1919, QF3370.
166 Censor’s notes, week ending 2 April 1919, QF3550.
167 Censor’s notes, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3531.
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The censors and military intelligence were well aware of the renewed enthusiasm that the leadership of Zuzenko had inspired, as well as his personal ability to unite those around him. An assessment of this spike in activity under his leadership was made only a day before the Red Flag events in March 1919:

The amount of correspondence passing between the hands of the Russian Association or Groups indicates excitement in Bolshevik circles – they have made much progress towards linking disaffected bodies and are ready now for solid co-operation with the IWW or the OBU or any other body with which the violence of the Russian schemes can be assimilated. The Russians, as a separate unit have gone as far as they can go without endangering their solidarity – the next step is to form an alliance which will give the Bolsheviki a field for propaganda work. That they will make the most use of the alliance is not to be doubted – the real danger of the Russian element will make its presence felt very soon.168

These comments illustrate the authorities’ understanding of the model the RWA was setting up. It is likely that intelligence reports like this one were used by authorities to assess the significance of the Red Flag march for the Russian community. One censor argued ‘that they are a danger is unquestionable, but at present they are dangerous to the limit of their numbers.... without outside help they will fail’.169

In the censors’ eyes, continued activity after the Red Flag events while key RWA members were interned confirmed defiance on behalf of ‘uninterned spirits’.170 These individuals were considered ‘untamed and barbaric... too dangerous to be at large’ and determined to work to achieve the same ‘ugly spirit’ as those arrested.171 Another censor worried that the ‘Russians are again on their feet and will begin their revolutionary tactics as soon as they can get the slightest encouragement’.172 Any indication of community activity was interpreted as ‘an excuse to break out... always on the side of disorder’.173 For instance, the renewed publication of Knowledge and Unity was seen as part of ‘a mischievous propaganda campaign’ that would serve to ‘spur Russians and other disaffected to renewed activity’.174

Censors who had built up ‘an intimate knowledge of the aspirations of a very big percentage of the local Russians’ felt convinced of the political radicalisation of the Russian community in Australia.175 Towards the middle of 1919, censors were critically aware that the revival of ‘vindictiveness towards authority and devotion to Bolshevism or anarchy show in the Russian as

168 Censor’s notes, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3508.
169 Censor’s notes, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3509.
170 Censor’s notes, week ending 16 April 1919, QF3731.
171 Censors’ notes, week ending 11 June 1919, QF4290; and week ending 25 June 1919, QF4423. See also censor’s notes, week ending 26 April 1919, QF3840. For details of how the RWA was being reinvigorated by new executive membership see Soviet of Souse [Union] of Russian Workers, Brisbane to Erik Karro, PO Mirrwinini via Cairns, 24 April 1919, QF3860. For post-Red Flag leadership see G. Tocaroff, GPO Brisbane to M. Panfiloff, PO Cairns, 29 May 1919, QF4291.
172 Censor’s notes, week ending 18 June 1919, QB4326.
173 Censor’s notes, week ending 25 June 1919, QF4420.
174 Censor’s notes, week ending 2 July 1919, QF4458.
175 Censor’s notes, week ending 7 May 1919, QF3949.
soon as his fear of personal violence has been allayed'. Federal government censors attributed the blame for this sense of safety from the law to the weakness of the Queensland State Labor government which they accused of instigating a limp response to the Red Flag events and coddling the prisoners interned in Boggo Road jail. Left-wing ‘rabble rousers’ travelling to Queensland were typecast as ‘making a pilgrimage up north where [they] will raise the flag of rebellion in a more congenial atmosphere’.

Russians linked with the RWA and its regional branches were primarily seasonal workers. As unemployment rose, the Port Pirie and Selwyn groups shut down and their members moved away in search of work. In 1919, the First Military District reported an increasing number of Russians were crossing the New South Wales – Queensland border. This coincided with the Spanish influenza epidemic when movement by public transport was restricted and state borders were closed. Quarantine camps were established at border crossings between states. One censor, somewhat bemused by the number of migratory Russians, passed judgement that:

This class of Russians in Australia have little respect for the laws of this country – or any other. Why they are making their way from New South Wales to Queensland is not explained. The influenza epidemic in the southern states might be responsible for their movements, or perhaps they have been attracted to Brisbane by the recent disturbances.

It was observed in the censors’ reports in 1919 that the activities of Russian groups continued to rise despite the increase in surveillance by the authorities. For example, the presence of propaganda materials in regional Broken Hill was likened to a poisoning, the area being ‘well dosed with Bolshevistic literature’ by the ‘nest of Russians’ in Melbourne. It is likely, however, that surveillance became more sophisticated over the course of the war and that this led to more accurate reporting. Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of the authorities to impose a regime that tightly tracked the movements of aliens and their correspondence, censors were aware that foreigners and dissidents working on shipping vessels, for instance, could circumvent official monitoring. From the Russian community’s perspective, the combination of revolutionary news from the motherland, and increased frustration with the Australian government’s inability to provide an appropriate response to their request for passports, resulted in a spike of domestic correspondence. The persistent themes of revolution and longing to leave Australia for Russia in

176 Censor’s notes, week ending 18 June 1919, QF4328.
177 Censor’s notes, week ending 20 August 1919, QF4794. The fact that released prisoner Bykoff was quickly rearrested by the military police shows that federal government was trying to readdress the error of the state government’s rule, see censor’s notes, week ending 17 August 1919, QF4800.
178 Censor’s notes, week ending 11 February 1919, MF2568.
179 For an account of the closing of the Selwyn branch see W. Komaroff, PO Selwyn to Russian Association, PO Box 10, South Brisbane, 10 April 1919, QF3730.
181 Censor’s notes, week ending 3 May 1919, QF3922.
182 Censor’s notes, week ending 26 March 1919, MF2670.
183 Censor’s notes, week ending 16 April 1919, MF2714.
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letters between Russians prompted one censor to comment that ‘it is noticeable that rarely [is] a Russian letter scrutinised in which the revolutionary spirit is not aggressively displayed’. He concluded that ‘if there are law abiding Russians in Australia they don’t write letters’.184

Ultimately, censors saw Russians as an ‘objectionable section of the population’ that was ‘becoming more aggressive’ and ‘should be well watched. They will make mischief’.185 It was recognised by the authorities that ‘isolation from Russia has saved Australia from considerable trouble; the few Russians who are here have succeeded in creating trouble but Bolshevik tactics have been advocated by people of our own breed’. The intelligence agencies acknowledged the ideology and actions of the Russians overstepped the mark on enough occasions for the majority of Australian workers not to take them seriously. Australian authorities saw Australian radicals working inside the mainstream labour and union movement as more dangerous because ‘their policy is not so far removed from the policy of the government as to call for any remonstrance from the party in power’.186

Censors and military intelligence officers were increasingly concerned that radicals such as those associated with the RWA were simply biding their time until the retraction of the War Precautions Regulations. Censorship staff felt that any ‘relaxation of censorship [would convey] … to the Russians a sense of freedom from all restrictions’ and that politics of extremists reveal ‘the spirit which breeds discontent if not something more dangerous’.187 This assessment of the character of the Russian community was prompted by two factors. First, as relations between the mainstream Australian community and the Russian community stabilised, political revolutionaries began to dominate the RWA leadership. Second, plans to end wartime censorship and the acute surveillance of the disloyal and alien population were being drawn up. Censors and their colleagues in military intelligence also picked up on expressions of discontent and disloyalty within other alien populations, such as the German community. In particular, Germans complained that despite the declaration of peace, the Australian government still kept the internment camps going and the censorship regime in place.188 Also worrying for the authorities was the infiltration of radical ideas into the mainstream union movement. For instance, censors observed that ‘the Bolshevik propaganda has taken good hold of the railway construction camps possibly owing to the employment of Russians in the gangs’.189

184 Censor’s notes, week ending 22 January 1919, QF2877.
185 Censors’ notes, week ending 11 June 1919, QF4274, QF4283; and week ending 18 June 1919, QF4366.
186 Censor’s notes, week ending 12 March 1919, QF3365.
187 Censors’ notes, week ending 23 July 1919, QF4644; and week ending 28 July 1919, QF4672. Similar concerns are developed in Deputy Chief Censor Colonel G.G. McColl’s Memoranda of 14 and 28 November 1918 to Secretary, Department of Defence, 609/29/466, series MP367/1, NAA.
188 See for instance the comments of an internee in the Liverpool Camp in R. Gehrmann, Liverpool Camp, NSW to Mrs G. Gehrmann, Martha Street, Paddington, 21 July 1919, QF4705; and a German correspondent who lamented the destruction of his homeland in Julius Walther, Lynford, Forest Hill to W. Kuken, Norwell, 16 July 1919, QF4703.
189 Censor’s notes, week ending 28 July 1919, QF4677.
By the end of the first quarter of 1919 those engaged in maintaining the home front were aware that their wartime roles would soon be ending, and the machinery of censorship and surveillance would be dismantled. One censor reflected that the practical value of his work was in preventing the maturation and carrying out of the plots of ‘degenerates, sexual lunatics, larrikins, social outcasts and other perverts’. He felt that ‘the repeal of the War Precautions Act and termination of censorship would open the door to these and others, or their way of thinking, to use an unchecked hand in polluting the minds of the young or weak minded – quite a numerous section – with their vile literature and base ideas’. This was not an overinflated idea of the censor’s role during the war: newspaper and postal censorship had been of vital importance to the government.

Despite the arrest and deportation of RWA leaders such as Zuzenko, Bykoff and Simonoff, censors were concerned that ‘still there are several dangerous men in the country prepared to carry on the work from the point where it was disturbed – characters who do not yield to any of their countrymen any distinction that appertains to the revolutionary’. On 27 July 1919, Lagutin spoke at the Social Evening held in Kents Buildings by the Socialist League. As reported by Agent 77, he discussed ‘the overthrow of Kings and Rulers as they were only parasites and should be got rid of’. Such sentiments summarise well the concern held by intelligence and security agencies that only continued vigilance could ensure that new cells of Bolshevism would be identified and extinguished. Proponents of civilian surveillance were now in the process of transforming the gains made through surveillance during wartime to shape Australia in the 1920s.

**Policy developments**

Towards the end of the war the meaning of censorship and surveillance was transformed. It no longer defended Australia against wartime enemy infiltration; it was expressly aimed at disloyalty at home. An example of this can be found in an intercept report on a Brisbane company that ordered continental typewriter vibrators from a German after the cessation of hostilities. The letter was returned to sender and the sender was labeled unpatriotic for not ordering from an allied country. Censors were also alert for reports of correspondence dealing with immigrants coming to Australia. The attitude that Australia was vulnerable to the threat of an ‘influx... of enemy and other undesirable aliens’ was already taking shape. The constant vigilance during wartime towards any manifestation of disloyalty spilled over into the post-war period. Authorities had been trained to pick up any instance of foreign contact in the context of war.

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190 Censor’s notes, week ending 26 March 1919, QF3531.
191 Censor’s notes, week ending 9 April 1919, QF3657.
192 Report to Captain Woods from Agent 77, 26 and 27 July 1919, 66/5/115, series BP4/1, NAA. Similar comments on Lagutin, based on his wartime activities, can be found in the 7 page entry on him in Summary of Communism, 111, series A6122, NAA.
193 Censor’s notes, week ending 28 July 1919, QF4689. The censor does note that the sender probably sourced type supplies from Germany as the prices were lower. Nevertheless the financial aspect did not override the disloyalty.
194 Censor’s notes, week ending 18 June 1919, QF4343.
With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to conclude that the federal government was swept up in the jingoistic mood of the Great War in an attempt to reinforce the waning British identity of the Commonwealth. One of the impacts of the increasing accuracy and reach of the wartime censorship machine was the intensity with which surveillance was able to penetrate and monitor the activities of citizens and visitors to Australia. Many officials supported the view that, in light of the considerable industrial upheavals during war, ‘the militant and extremist workers … are prepared for a trial of strength with the Commonwealth Government’. By calling for the relaxation of censorship and the release of political prisoners, left-wing activists like the Russians were inadvertently slotting themselves into the spot recently vacated by the defeated enemy in Europe. For a sensitive and vigilant home front, any calls by foreigners to resume a normal home life were interpreted as a signal that the enemy had indeed swept through the gates. The threat that foreigners on the home front were seen to pose was reflected in the formulation of policy for the post-war transition period by the Aliens Committee.

The policy initiatives of the Aliens Committee linked disloyalty with foreign influence and set up the framework that enabled the deportation of thousands of enemy aliens after the war. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the 10 December 1918 report of this committee recommended extending wartime restrictions. These recommendations were considered by Cabinet on 10 January 1919 and referred to a Cabinet Sub-Committee on 14 January. This Sub-Committee supported (with amendments) all recommendations but one, on 22 January, and between February and May that year Cabinet adopted the recommendations with slight modifications. During this 3 month period the Prime Minister’s Department was in contact with the Department of Trade and Customs and state governments about the Aliens Committee Report. The Department of Trade and Customs forwarded copies to Public Trustees, presumably for consideration and use. The Prime Minister’s Department raised 5 points for consideration with the state governments. Correspondence with the Queensland Premier’s Office revolved around:

1. The undesirability of permitting aliens to establish themselves into exclusive communities.
2. The use of foreign languages in public assemblies or as a means of instruction in schools.
3. The advisability of securing authority to prohibit by proclamation the public use of any proscribed language.

Memorandum, Captain Reginald Hayes for Deputy Chief Censor, Melbourne to Chief of the General Staff, Department of Defence, 27 September 1918, SC5/1, series A3934, NAA.

This Cabinet Sub-Committee was chaired by the Hon. Patrick Glynn (Minister for Home and Territories), with Senator Hon. George Pearce (Minister for Defence), the Hon. Littleton Groom (Minister for Works and Railways) and the Hon. Walter Massy-Greene (Minister for Trade and Customs). See 1919/590, series A2, NAA.

The Sub-Committee did not approve recommendation 22 that the ‘Imperial Conference be invited to consider substitution of \textit{jus sanguinis} for \textit{jus soli}'. Report of the Sub-Committee of the Cabinet, 22 January 1919, 1919/590, series A2, NAA.

Cabinet decisions of 11 February, 9 April and 9 May 1919.

See Department of Trade and Customs correspondence, 23 and 26 September 1919, 1919/590, series A2, NAA.
Chapter 5: The end of the war

4. Closer scrutiny into operations of foreign trading companies in Australia and the compulsory registration of aliens trading under other names than their own.


The Premier agreed that the Queensland Government would consider all points, but it was the response to point 5 (that the next session of parliament intended to amend in the Public Service Act Bill) that was the most revealing. Acting Premier Theodore concluded that ‘the consideration of [this Bill] will certainly cause this phase of the alien question to be taken into account’. This response got to the heart of the issue – how to implement policy to manage foreign elements in Australia. The Prime Minister’s Department’s set of 5 principles implemented the Aliens Committee Report in ways that bordered on rigid cultural suppression. The method proposed was not to promote British culture but rather to stifle all forms of other cultural expression through the prohibition of language and trade. At a basic level, the banning of linguistic expression had ramifications for community, religious, literary and scholastic continuity. At a higher level, the enforced absence of other cultures at a public level served to eliminate the ethnic identity of non-British Australians.

World War I was a watershed for government policy aimed at nation building through population control. Stuart Macintyre observes that ‘the iron heel of the militarised state had crushed the most dangerous rebels and with the return of the soldiers ... the country turned inwards, eschewing the exotic, the alien and the dissident’. Glenn Nicholls and David Dutton both point to the narrowing of the idea of what it meant to be ‘Australian’. Dutton concludes that:

The Commonwealth which emerged from the Great War was notably more anxious, authoritarian and illiberal than the one that entered it, obsessed by the danger of subversion, and determined to employ the full extent of its powers to observe, quantify, marginalise and deport those deemed disloyal.

Policy makers were keen for the master narrative of Australian history – which emphasised the nation’s enduring connectedness to the British empire – to be strengthened. Andrew Moore observes that the ‘silences of the right and left of Australian politics in history serve to reinforce Australia’s image as the “middle way”’. Policies that extended wartime legislation into the post-war period enabled the Commonwealth government to control the home front population and specifically to regulate the activities of aliens and subversives within the community. The ultimate tool available to the authorities was deportation. Surprisingly, the highest rate of deportation from Australia was concentrated in the

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200 Edward B. Theodore, Acting Premier, Premier’s Department, Brisbane to Acting Prime Minister, Melbourne, 21 May 1919, W26/241/49, series A456, NAA.
201 Macintyre, The Reds, 27.
period after the cessation of hostilities, from 1918 to 1920. Nicholls indicates that ‘in 1919, the
government deported thousands of enemy aliens, many of whom had lived much of their lives in
Australia’.204 He goes on to make the important point that
the struggle for enlightened deportation policies is partly a struggle against
forgetting. One of the features of deportation is that it can remove not only
individuals or groups but also the memories and traces of those peoples – an
erasure that hinders learning from the past.205

By deporting the leaders of the RWA and silencing the group’s newspapers, the government
effectively set in place the mechanism for forgetting the history of the radicals in Brisbane.

This perspective is supported by Michele Langfield. She indicates that Australia’s experiences
during World War I were highly significant not only for changing attitudes towards nationalities of
immigrants, but importantly for ‘stimulating new theories about Australia’s future development, and
influencing post-war population policy’.206 Immigration schemes in Australia were still largely state-
based with states and territories funding their own immigration bureaus overseas. The war
experience altered the ‘ideal’ immigrant type: the hardworking German immigrant wanted before
the war was no longer welcomed in the post-war era. By the end of the war the economic climate in
Australia had changed so dramatically that workers everywhere were under pressure. As one man
joked about his search for a job, ‘a man has as much chance of finding one as a celluloid dog has of
chasing an asbestos cat through hell’.207 Additionally, under the Amending Immigration Act of
1920 ex-enemy aliens (this included Turks, Bulgarians, Hungarians and Austrian-Germans) were
specifically barred from entering Australia until the end of 1925. Similar legislative exclusions were
passed in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States. One
additional change that the 1920 amendment brought, however, was the exclusion of those
immigrants who had engaged in acts of violence against the established governments of other
countries.208 As Langfield observes, ‘to restrict potential migrants on the basis of their ideas was a
new element in Australian immigration thinking’.209 The wartime concern regarding activists
promoting destabilising ideologies – such as Sinn Feinism or Bolshevism – was extended to
peacetime.

Conclusion

The intercepted letters and agency correspondence examined in this chapter indicate that at the end
of World War I, the Russian community in Brisbane was disillusioned with the wartime restrictions
in Australia, and that the RWA was undergoing political radicalisation partly in response to these
restrictions. Interagency analysis of intelligence collected on the RWA determined the group to be a

204 Nicholls, Deported, 42.
205 Nicholls, Deported, 13.
206 Michele Langfield, ‘Recruiting Immigrants: The First World War and Australian immigration’, Journal of
Australian Studies, 60 (1999), 55.
207 Sweeney, Brook Road, Manly to W. Jackson, Dock Street, South Brisbane, 18 February 1919, QF3197.
209 Langfield, ‘Recruiting Immigrants’, 61.
threat to the community. The intelligence agencies identified a need to continue surveillance of foreign nationals and disloyalists (including RWA members) after the relaxation of the War Precautions Regulations.

The recommendations by intelligence agencies for continued surveillance fed into high level decision-making by the government, specifically through the Aliens Committee report. This report established the framework for the transition into peacetime after the repeal of the War Precautions Regulations. Over the period of the Great War, censorship and surveillance had been transformed. It no longer defended Australia against wartime enemy infiltration; it was expressly aimed at disloyalty at home. It was this focus – monitoring foreigners, disloyalty, and communism in the domestic population – that underpinned peacetime government policy.
This thesis has addressed two sets of interrelated questions. The first set explores the Russian community in Brisbane from 1911 to 1921:

- What was the Russians Workers Association?
- What were its main activities?
- How did its members experience life in Australia?
- How did the group respond to home front conditions during wartime?

The second set focused on state and federal government censorship, surveillance and suppression of the RWA as part of a wider effort to monitor discontent in the Australian population.

- Which government agencies targeted the RWA?
- What mechanisms did the agencies use to collect intelligence on the RWA?
- What does the data collected on the RWA reveal about the group itself and the agencies compiling the data?
- How did wartime intelligence trends feed into post-war policy?

A close analysis of postal censorship and other documents produced by intelligence agencies during the 1910s suggests that the suppression of the RWA in its simplest form was a double-edged sword:

1) The RWA radicalised partly in response to the increased government censorship and surveillance, which was set up to control seditious behaviour, and

2) As the censorship and surveillance techniques of the government agencies became more sophisticated, they were able to detect and track the radical activities of the RWA more effectively and with greater depth.

This thesis is an insight into one example of how the seditious activities of immigrant-activists were perceived by authorities as undermining national security. The main finding of this thesis is that the threat posed by the activities and organisation of the Russian community in Brisbane helped shape the priorities and technology of state surveillance during the World War I era. It is not the purpose of this thesis to suggest that the RWA only radicalised due to the War Precautions Regulations or that government agencies were over-egging the RWA pudding. Rather, the conditions of the World War I home front, coupled with the potential and threat of the revolution in Russia, gave rise to a set of circumstances that precipitated the radicalisation of the RWA. At the same time, Australia, like the United Kingdom, began to systematically collect data on trends in the domestic population such as disloyalty.
Increased political action provided the RWA with a sense of group belonging in Brisbane. It also helped connect the group with unfolding tensions and events in their homeland whilst heightening their ideological importance within the Australian labour movement (the insider knowledge factor). Cross-cultural misunderstandings and suspicions (including by the censors and intelligence officers themselves) led to increasing isolation of the RWA, and contributed to the group’s marginal position outside mainstream Australian left-wing organisations. This occurred at the same time the Labor party was enjoying its first taste of power in Queensland, and was likely to be more conciliatory to maintain voter support. However, the thrust of the RWA’s political program was also limited by their revolutionary fervour, for as it increased, there was a decreasing audience outside the RWA. The labour movement in Australia was also moving away from radicalised action to parliamentary reform – a trend that increasingly devalued the Russian precedent as a model for action. Simultaneously, Bolshevik developments increasingly positioned ‘foreign Russians’ outside domestic needs. Indeed, as several prominent Brisbane RWA members later witnessed, ‘foreign Russians’ were persecuted as they fervently attempted to integrate into the new USSR.¹

Did the RWA pose a threat to Australia during World War I? Exploration of this question is twofold and covers the activities of the RWA on the home front and the politics espoused by the group that fed into the fledgling Communist Party of Australia. The activities of the RWA were comparatively small compared to those of contemporary groups such as the IWW. Nevertheless, widespread distribution of the group’s newspapers and regular lectures given by members ensured that the reputation of the RWA’s political activities outweighed their real impact. The RWA’s activities did not threaten the Australian parliamentary system, despite calls for class consciousness amongst workers. A few thousand Russians in Australia, even with their previous experience in tsarist Russia, were not capable of conducting a national revolution independent from wider working-class activism. Furthermore, the small Russian communities which were spread around the Australian states were not organised or united enough to take serious action against the Australian government.

The key concern for the authorities – the turning of the vulnerable working class – was far from an achievable goal. Meaningful support was not forthcoming from the mainstream labour movement, which was distancing itself from the revolutionary model (if they had ever been considering it in the first place) and moving firmly towards reform through the parliamentary model. Additionally, the Russians were only too aware of the apathy of the British workers. In Christopher Andrew’s work on intelligence in the United Kingdom, he observes that ‘the immediate impact of the Bolshevik Revolution on the British labour movement appears, in retrospect, surprisingly small’.² This conclusion can be extended to the Australian situation. One of the main concerns of Australian

¹ Zuzenko and Simonoff are two cases of Russians who worked for the Soviet regime whilst in exile overseas who were targeted during the Stalinist purges.
Conclusion

authorities in the 1920s was that the Soviet-funded Communist International would infiltrate the CPA. This fear was confirmed by the return of Zuzenko (who was by then working for the Communist International) to Australian shores twice in the early 1920s. However, it would not be stretching the historical record to suggest that Australia was on the periphery of Soviet vision. The leadership of the Bolshevik party wrote on the social and economic development of Australia (this was probably not known to Commonwealth authorities at the time), but it is fair to say that Europe, in particular Germany, was the focus of the Bolshevik’s early plans for world revolution. Even the undertaking by Zuzenko, the Soviet spy sent to formalise an official Australian Communist Party, was tenuous. The low importance of his mission to the Soviet hierarchy was plainly evident when he was at one stage required to refresh his employers’ memories of his existence and the mission itself.³

The conservative streak in the British majority isolated the suspicious alien as the root cause of social ruptures. During World War I, the key disloyal elements besides Germans and Slavs were the Russians, Irish Sinn Feiners and the American-import, the IWW. The anti-conscription campaign, widespread industrial struggle as well as incidents such as the Red Flag Riots fed fears of a fifth column in Australia. Censorship emerged as a site for resistance and survival for the RWA – the stricter the censorship and the more pervasive the nature of surveillance, the more radical the views of the RWA became.

During World War I, a range of controls were introduced to monitor population movements, including alien registration, postal censorship and a new system of passports.⁴ The passport became one of the war’s most visible legacies, representing ‘an enduring aspect of the war’s transformation’ of Australian society’.⁵ At the same time, there was a rise in the reach and scale of internal security agencies charged with surveillance of the domestic population, but more specifically aliens. Of relevance to this story of the RWA, are key agencies such as military intelligence, Censor’s Office, State police, Commonwealth Police and the Counter-Espionage Bureau (later the Special Intelligence Bureau). The extraordinary powers these agencies garnered during the war, in the most part, did not outlast the war. However, the successor to the Commonwealth Police and SIB – the


⁴ Control over movement was exercised through the passport denial. Applicants were not guaranteed that their departure and travel plans would be endorsed. Visas were required as well as passports for aliens in coming to Australia from 1924. For analysis of the passport system see Jane Doulman and David Lee *Every Assistance and Protection: A history of the Australian passport* (Leichhardt: Federation Press, 2008), particularly 51–78; and David Dutton, *One of Us? A century of Australian citizenship* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002), 105, 109–110, 113.

⁵ Doulman and Lee, *Every Assistance and Protection*, 77.
Commonwealth Investigation Branch (CIB) – had a lasting impact through its monitoring of the domestic population. The CIB, established in 1919, was Australia’s ‘first peacetime surveillance agency directed at monitoring the political activities of the population’, and as David Dutton points out, the CIB had ‘a substantial role in immigration and naturalisation policy with significant implications for the character of Australian citizenship’.6

The experiences of World War I were a turning point for the Commonwealth in its attitudes and policies related to immigration and the treatment of aliens. The British influence on attitudes towards, and the monitoring of, the alien population within Australia’s borders continued well after the cessation of World War I hostilities. As Dutton states the ‘war reconceptualised foreigners in close relation to subversion and disloyalty’.7 The machinery of registration, censorship, surveillance, internment and deportation8 clearly demonstrated the Australian government’s total commitment to war on the home front. The full potential of postal censorship was not recognised at the beginning of the war, but as the conflict drew on, Australian agencies, like their British counterparts, were concerned with monitoring ‘the menace of domestic subversion’.9 Until 1916 the threat posed by groups such as the RWA and IWW had seemed slight.

Similar to processes in Britain at the end of the war, the intelligence community in post-war Australia tapped into the existing controls over people’s movements across Australia’s borders by accessing immigration, deportation, and entry controls such as passports.10 Dutton concludes that ‘the Commonwealth which emerged from the Great War was notably more anxious, authoritarian and illiberal than the one that entered it, obsessed by the danger of subversion, and determined to employ the full extent of its powers to observe, quantify, marginalise and deport those deemed disloyal’.11 Two contributing factors to this anxiety were the revolution in Russia and the domestic industrial conflict. Enemies of the state now encompassed radical socialists, IWW, pacifists and a variety of other subsets that were ‘identified as contrary to the values and mores of Australian nationalism and British imperialism’.12 As Burgmann notes, ‘the hard work and dedication to duty

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6 Dutton, One of Us, 105–106. While the powers did not outlast the war, there were some legacies in debates in state policing, especially in the years leading up to World War II. The continuing interest of the state police in the inter-war period in aliens control, for a variety of purposes, is discussed in Mark Finnane, ‘Controlling the ‘alien’ in mid-twentieth century Australia: The origins and fate of a policing role’, Policing and Society 19.4 (2009): 442–467.

7 Dutton, One of Us, 148.


10 Britain set up a counter-subversion system that made use of the wartime network of Military Control Officers established by MI5. This network included supervision of the issue of visas and passport control to monitor entry into Britain and the supply of information on suspicious visitors. The wartime Black List was transformed into a peacetime Precautionary Index. See Andrew, Secret Service, 240.

11 Dutton, One of Us, 95.

12 Dutton, One of Us, 106.
of the police, the censors, military intelligence, and the Counter Espionage Bureau' successfully prevented groups such as the IWW from operating.13

Towards the end of the war, and in the years following the conflict, the Russian identity associated with the RWA was one of activism (and later revolution), and its members were closely monitored.14 Russians 'were stereotyped as the instigators of social dislocation and scapegoated as enemy aliens'.15 The imagery of the disloyal rabble rouser had been embedded in conservative minds and 'every street corner seemed to have a communist agitator shouting that capitalism was in its death throes'.16 As Macintyre concludes ‘the Investigation Branch grossly exaggerated the dimensions of this movement [in the 1920s and 1930s] to augment its own activities'.17

The RWA case is an example of the way in which the security and intelligence agencies extended their tentacles into different parts of Queensland society. It exemplifies some aspects of the Commonwealth (and British) response to the threat of the enemy within. The activism of the RWA was clearly a trigger for social anxiety, and the response to it reveals more about the processes occurring at the time than about the activism of the Russian radicals. The fear of sedition, the fear of revolution and the struggle to maintain a conservative British identity pervaded official action and political thinking.

In addition to augmenting the history of the censorship, surveillance and suppression of the RWA, this study adds to the understanding of Brisbane’s intellectual climate during the 1910s and 1920s. The dominant popular understanding of Queensland during this period as a monoethnic society of unchallenged conservatism is not borne out through this examination of archival material and activist publications. Not only was there a thriving ethnic and radical press in Brisbane with significant distribution amongst left-wing groups, there was also evidence of intellectual networks between the Brisbane RWA and Russian groups in Sydney and Melbourne. Russian radicals engaged in significant activism through the RWA, and their work had an influence on the

14 From mid-1918 the Queensland security branch kept files on all Russian males whether naturalised or not. Civa Rosenberg, the registered editor of *Knowledge and Unity*, was one of the few women to be closely watched, although the Investigation Branch kept files of woman associated with radical Russian activities in Brisbane, for instance, Stepanoff, Mary – Queensland, Russian Communist extremist, W302, A402, NAA See Raymond Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social conflict on the Queensland homefront, 1914–1918* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 114–115; Eric Fried, ‘Russians in Queensland, 1886–1925’ (BA Hons thesis, University of Queensland, 1980), 63.
15 Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty*, 115. Considering that the Union of Russian Workers declared itself an Australian Soviet it is not that surprising that the wider community identified them with the Bolshevik cause. Edgar Ross discusses this in ‘Australia and 1917’, *Australian Left Review* (August–September 1967), 40.
16 As Andrew Moore indicates ‘the reality was different. One comrade’s recollection of the CPA in Western Australia as a small group of people sitting “around in a dungeon of a room lit by a candle in a bottle, some bloke standing up to read the materialist conception of history from a book”, is closer to the truth than the image of well-drilled revolutionaries.’ Moore, *The Right Road? A history of right-wing politics in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), 37.
Conclusion

development of the CPA. This critical period in Australia’s history tells a powerful story about grassroots activism and the response of a vigilant host society.
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Dr Windle very kindly provided me with a translated copy of this article.