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INDENTURED CHINESE LABOURERS**

by

Maxine Darnell

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Abstract

In 1847 the first group of indentured Chinese labourers arrived in the port of Sydney as part of what over the following six years was to become a systematic trade. The reactions within colonial society prompted by this trade were in the main negative, and ranged from outright admonition of the importers and employers for being involved in what was termed nothing less than a covert slave trade, to a qualified acceptance of the trade as the only measure available to those employers, specifically the squatters, in need of labourers and shepherds. Each of the responses and reactions to the importations is related directly to the different sectional interests within colonial society and the desire to promote and protect these interests. This paper presents some of the reactions and responses to the trade in Chinese labour and the impact of geographical as well as societal location on the tone and strength of the various reactions.

Key Words: Chinese labourers, indenture, racism, colonial newspapers, squattocracy, White Australia Policy

** Maxine Darnell is an Associate Lecturer in the School of Economic Studies at the University of New England. Contact information: School of Economic Studies, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia. Email: mdarnell@metz.une.edu.au@metz.une.edu.au.

RESPONSES AND REACTIONS TO THE IMPORTATION OF INDENTURED CHINESE LABOURERS

"CHINESE SLAVE SHIPS", "IMPORTATION OF BARBARIAN LABOURERS—SLAVERY". These are two of the more scathing headlines that greeted those ships carrying indentured Chinese labourers that arrived in the port of Sydney during the early months of 1852. The Chinese labourers that arrived in 1852 were not the first to arrive under indenture in the colony¹ yet experienced an unparalleled degree of animosity. The earlier importations had proceeded with relatively little notice being taken by the public or by the Fourth Estate in Sydney. The first intimations that the importation of indentured Chinese labourers was being considered generally gained praise from commentators who viewed the exercise as a cure for the colony's virtually continual labour supply problems.

When the squattocracy turned to China for a source of shepherds, the Sydney and Hunter region newspapers gladly published the correspondence between F. D. Syme, an Amoy merchant, Adam Bogue an associate of Benjamin Boyd, and the British Consul in Amoy, Temple Hillyard Layton.² The *Moreton Bay Courier*, although not carrying the Bogue/Syme/Layton correspondence, printed two personal letters which were circulating amongst the Northern squatters both of which were aimed at gauging the level of interest in the importation and employment of indentured Chinese labourers.³ A. S. Lyons, the owner and editor of the *Moreton Bay Courier*, even prefaced the publication of one letter with the statement that the letter's 'importance will be readily recognised, and the information it embraces cannot prove otherwise than highly acceptable to our readers'.⁴ The change in attitude noted with the arrival of the labourers in 1852 can be explained firstly, by the fact that most of the earlier ships either made port at Moreton Bay, or the labourers were known to be destined for the Northern Districts of the colony. Secondly, the numbers arriving

¹ The (semi) organised importation of indentured Chinese labourers to the colony had begun with the arrival of the *Nimrod* in 1848, although the idea that Chinese labourers should be incorporated into the colony can be traced back prior to settlement, with many later suggestions and attempts to import Chinese labourers resulting in a small number arriving at various periods. Prior to the arrival of the *Nimrod* four ships can be identified as bringing indentured Chinese labourers to the colony: the *Alfred* arrived 5th November 1847 carrying four labourers; the *Statesman* arrived 8th March 1848 carrying the same number, with the *London* and then the *Alfred* arriving in March and June of 1848, carrying seven and six labourers respectively.

² This series of letters, published in the *SMH* (23rd March, 1847) and the *Maitland Mercury* (27th March, 1847) dispelled all fears that the British Government, primarily in the person of Layton, could and or would, attempt to prevent any ships carrying Chinese labourers leaving Amoy for the colony.

³ "Chinese Immigration", *Moreton Bay Courier*, 10th April, 1847; "Chinese Immigration", *Moreton Bay Courier*, 29th July, 1848.

⁴ "Chinese Immigration", *Moreton Bay Courier*, 29th July, 1848.

in 1852 represented the greatest number to arrive during any one period,⁵ and thirdly, by changes within the strength of the labouring class and the changing political orientation of colonial newspapers.

Pre-1852 Responses

The arrival in Sydney of the *Nimrod* in October of 1848 with 120 Chinese men and boys on board received a minimum of publicity, no letters or editorials expressed outrage nor any other emotion at the importation. These labourers were openly advertised on the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald*⁶ a situation that would never be repeated in Sydney because of the extent of negative reactions to later importations. The only significant level of response to this, the first major importation of labourers, came from Crown officials, namely Layton, Earl Grey, and the Colonial Land and Emigration Office, who all concurred that the experiment of the *Nimrod* would meet with little success and therefore not be repeated.⁷ How wrong they were! It must be emphasised here that the *Sydney Morning Herald* was the only newspaper operating in Sydney at the time, and was owned by Charles Kemp and John Fairfax, both of whom were linked to the squattocracy personally or through marriage, and were therefore unlikely to print any negative reactions or objections to the importation of indentured labourers. However, this climate of non-competition within the Fourth Estate was not to last much longer, nor was the tendency to ignore the importations. In December 1848 *The People's Advocate and New South Wales Vindicator* appeared on the Sydney streets, which during its short lifetime acted as a foil to the squatting and mercantile focus of the Herald.⁸

The *People's Advocate* greeted the arrival of the *London* in February 1849⁹ with an editorial that stated that the ship had '...not arrived as a mere matter of experiment to see how such men would go off; but that a regular and systematic trade has been commenced...so that we are likely to have a very large importation of the most accomplished thieves, adroit swindlers, and professed

⁵ Between 1847 and 1853 just over 3,000 indentured Chinese labourers arrived in New South Wales ports, the majority arriving during the first six months of 1852, the numbers during that six month period approximating the immigration rate of non-Chinese labourers- in February and March of 1852, 1097 immigrants from Great Britain on 19 vessels and 787 immigrants from China aboard 5 ships arrived in the colony

⁶ "Chinese Immigrants per *Nimrod*, from Amoy", *SMH*, 23rd October, 1848 to 13th November, 1848.

⁷ Refer to T. C. Murdoch and C. A. Wood, 31st January, 1849, Enclosure 2 in No. 13, Earl Grey to Governor-General Fitzroy, 27th February, 1849, Despatches relating to Emigration to the Australian Colonies, *British Parliamentary Papers*, (BPP), 1849, (593), Vol. XXXVIII, p. 103.

⁸ The *People's Advocate* first appeared 2nd December 1848 and was published by Francis Cunningham and edited by Edward Hawksley, the latter having previously been the editor of the *Sydney Chronicle*, a journal owned and operated by the Catholic Church. R. B. Walker, *The Newspaper Press in New South Wales, 1803-1920*, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1976, p. 40.

⁹ The *London* arrived in Sydney from Hong Kong on 22nd February, 1849 carrying 149 labourers of whom 50 were contracted to employers in the Northern Districts, (Moreton Bay, Wide Bay, New England and Darling Downs regions) and were carried onto Moreton Bay by the *Elizabeth Jane* on 9th March.

cheats that the world can produce'.¹⁰ The *Advocate*, as a self-styled "Working Man's Paper"¹¹ railed on behalf of the labouring class against the squatters and their importation of indentured Chinese labourers:

What will be the condition of the working men of the colony if these Chinese "emigrants" are allowed to flock to our shores? Why they will soon be reduced to a state of downright beggary....But what care the monsters who require the services of these creatures, for religion, for morality, for free institution, or for social comforts amongst the people-absolutely nothing at all. They have only one idea- they have only one aim, and that is to acquire wealth and oppress the labouring man.¹²

This editorial continued on to censure the importation of the Chinese without '...a single female of their own country...' and suggested that the '...only way the People can mark the sense of injustice which has been done to them by the introduction of Coolies' was for:

...every man when he is about to make an engagement, no matter in what capacity, first inquire are there any Coolies or Chinese employed on the establishment, if there are let him not hire. Let him for a time prefer even a less wage with a no-Coolie master, than with a Coolie employer; let him submit to a little temporary convenience, and this vile scheme for the permanent reduction of his wages, this plan for inflicting upon him a lasting injury will very soon be brought to an end.¹³

The *People's Advocate* led the way in the agitation against the introduction of Chinese labourers, and gleefully reported that the fellmongers and wool sorters had convened a meeting regarding the arrival, and employment of Chinese labour in that field of employment.¹⁴ The editor's sentiments on the subject of the squatting interest, their importation of indentured Chinese labourers, and the effect of these on the condition of the labouring class, were also echoed within correspondence to the paper:

These lawless sons of robbery and spoliation having obtained land for nothing, require labour also for nothing; in short, they wish to revive the slave-trade and the feudal system with all their attendant barbarities.¹⁵

Another correspondent to the *People's Advocate*, "A Working Man", was extremely censorious of the importation of Chinese labour, on the basis that:-

¹⁰ "The Chinese and Coolies", *People's Advocate and New South Wales Vindicator*, (PA), 10th March, 1849.

¹¹ "To Every Body", PA, 2nd December, 1848.

¹² "Our Social Prospects", PA, 3rd March, 1849. This editorial, as with all during the relatively short life of the newspaper, was prefaced with a quote by Lamartine that: "Political economy has hitherto occupied itself about the production of wealth. It must now occupy itself about the distribution of wealth; so that the labourer may no longer be left without his fair share of the produce."

¹³ PA, 3rd March, 1849.

¹⁴ At this meeting it was proposed that a trade association be formed in order to '...protect themselves from the fearful and degrading competition of Chinamen and Coolies.' PA, 17th November, 1849.

¹⁵ Original Correspondence, "Chinese Coolies", PA, 3rd. March, 1849.

If the rules of European political economy were fearlessly and vigorously carried out in New South Wales, here newspaper journalists would not be ashamed to hold up this iniquitous system of tolerated slavery to the ridicule of an intelligent and industrious people; for I can conscientiously affirm that neither this nor any similar system of Emigration has been made expedient from scarcity of labour or monetary distress, but is simply the offspring of that morbid craving for cheap convict labour which cannot be appeased while hope remains that it may still be supplied.¹⁶

Moving beyond the urban centre of Sydney, a different attitude to the pre-1852 importations can be gleaned from within the pages of the local newspapers. In Maitland, the growing hub of the Hunter region, the only local newspaper the *Maitland Mercury*, ignored these importations and within the Moreton Bay region the importations went relatively unnoticed and were applauded if anything within the *Moreton Bay Courier* and then the *Moreton Bay Free Press*. These differences are explained by a number of factors, which are all primarily related to the size and structure of colonial society within the regions at the time. Outside Sydney the labouring class was relatively unorganised and non-vocal, both of which were the result of their dispersal over such a wide region and the lack at the time of any substantial urban centres.¹⁷ Until the working-class developed as an economic, social and political force, urban centres developed and provided places for the congregation of aligned interests, there was little requirement for newspaper editors to heed or take into consideration the ideas and beliefs of this class when composing editorials and deciding on the content of their newspaper.

With the *Herald* remaining silent on the question of Chinese labour and maintaining its rather undemocratic stance,¹⁸ the *Maitland Mercury* ignoring the importations, although a substantial number of labourers had passed through Morpeth bound for the sheep stations in the Hunter and New England districts; and the *Moreton Bay Courier* providing no serious objections to the trade, wishing only that '...the starving and honest poor of our nation should be allowed the first choice of the benefits offered to labourers in this country';¹⁹ the *People's Advocate* was left on its own until late 1851 to rail against the squatters and the importation of Chinese labour. Primarily, the newspaper argued that this labour was being imported under the false claims of a labour shortage and high wages. These claims as uttered by the squatters were consistently denied by the *People's Advocate*, which argued that there was not enough employment for the existing population and the immigrants arriving at the time;²⁰ and if the land tenure system was changed and land was opened up

¹⁶ Original Correspondence, *PA*, Saturday 28th July, 1849.

¹⁷ Until about the mid-1850s Brisbane, Ipswich and the other small towns such as Armidale and Tenterfield scattered throughout the Northern Districts were little more than the storehouses and trading centres of the sheep stations of the interior. By 1851 Brisbane could only boast a population of 2443; Ipswich, 932; Warwick, 267; Grafton 319; Armidale, 556; Drayton, 200; and Maryborough 299. New South Wales Census, 1851, *Supplement to the Government Gazette*, No. 30, Part I, 1851.

¹⁸ Walker, *op.cit.*, pp. 58-9.

¹⁹ "More Chinese", *Moreton Bay Courier*, (*MBC*), 29th June, 1850.

²⁰ "Chinese Immigration", *PA*, 27th April, 1850.

to an agricultural population rather than being engrossed by the "cormorant squatters", employment would be easily found for all who came to the colony.

With the appearance of the *Empire*²¹ edited by Henry Parkes, the *People's Advocate* found, even if belated and not as virulent in attack,²² at least an ally in the fight against the squatting clique in general and their importation of Chinese labourers. However, a relatively ambivalent position on the question of Chinese labour was maintained by all newspapers and interested sections of colonial society until the matter was raised in the Legislative Council in late 1851 wherein suggestions were made that the trade was merely an extension of the slave-trade. However, it is incorrect to assume that the antagonism shown within the articles and various letters to the editor prompted by the debate was all directed at the Chinese, as the greatest amount of antipathy was levelled at the importers and employers of the labourers. The result of the inferences made within the Council was a concerted attack on the squatters and the promoters of the Chinese labour trade, an attack which was in most cases more than adequately rebutted.

Legislative Questions

The New South Wales Legislative Council directly and indirectly initiated the public debate into the question of Chinese emigration to the colony when one of its members, Dr Douglass, moved to introduce a bill which would '...limit the further immigration of Chinese into this colony';²³ and voiced fears that a "Chinese slave trade" was being established in the Northern Districts. In concert with the fears expressed by Douglass and his attempt to limit the trade through legislative restraint, was the appearance in the anti-squatting newspapers of a number of extremely anti-Chinese letters and editorials which drew comparisons between the importations and slavery. One of these letters, authored by R. Orr, was published the day before Douglass placed his Bill before the house and represents that extreme of the debate on Chinese labour importation which believed that the introduction of Chinese into the colony would bring about the "Total ruin of society in Australia".²⁴ To Orr the admittance of the Chinese would turn Australian society into an idolatrous hell and reduce all merchants and craftsmen to "beggary", a future vision which played on fears of divine vengeance and unemployment.

Amoy, Hong Kong and Singapore will be the nurseries to supply us with pirates, and all that the imagination can form to itself as infamous in character. Men so thoroughly debased, that in their

²¹ The *Empire*, which first edition appeared 28th December 1850, was owned and edited by Henry Parkes, with the declared aims and values of '...independence, truthfulness, the education and the protection of the people...'. Walker, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

²² One of the most racially vitriolic letters on the subject of Chinese emigration and employment was reprinted and praised by the editors of the *People's Advocate*; "Chinese Coolies" by "Truth", *PA*, 3rd March, 1849; "Our Social Prospects", *PA*, 3rd March, 1849; 17th March, 1849.

²³ Report of the Legislative Council, 18th November, 1851; *Empire*, 19th November, 1851. Both of Douglass's statements on the existence of a Chinese slave trade and that regarding his intention to introduce the bill into the house were greeted by "a laugh".

²⁴ Original Correspondence, *Empire*, 22nd November, 1851.

own country they speak unblushingly of every moral depravity. If we alter the names of China and Singapore, to those of Sodom and Gomorrah our ideas are then perfectly correct. In those countries live the children of Satan, his own darlings, his pet dearies, destined to be the instructors of Australian youth. Alas! Australians, Britons, and sons of Erin, to what a pass have we arrived, when we stoop to be rivals and associates of the very scum of hell?²⁵

Such an extreme view as this was admittedly rare at the time, these sentiments being more common later in the decade when post-gold rush legislative moves against Chinese immigration were taken. Further developments of this view of the Chinese continued throughout the nineteenth century when fears of unemployment were coupled with racist sentiments equal to those of Mr Orr, to produce the infamous White Australia Policy.

The debate that the introduction of the Bill actuated is interesting on a number of fronts. Firstly, the divisions within the Legislative Council over the question of transportation and Chinese immigration are brought to the fore, yet the manner in which people aligned themselves is not surprising. That Wentworth and John Lamb²⁶ would argue against the imposition of any regulations on the immigration of Chinese labourers had to be expected even though the latter was a most vociferous opponent of transportation. Wentworth's involvement in the actual importations and his employment of Chinese labourers on his Sydney and pastoral establishments, precluded him from adopting any stance other than one which exhibited a grudging acceptance of the need for Chinese immigration. For John Lamb, the member for Sydney and advocate of Sydney's merchant elite, any moves to regulate the trade in Chinese labourers would have damaged the businesses of his constituents and supporters, and possibly also the pastoralists whose wool and supplies he handled. That John Richardson, the member for the "reputed" County of Stanley, which seat encompassed north and south Brisbane, seconded Douglass's motion is also not surprising on one level. Richardson, unlike G. F. Leslie or M. H. Marsh, did not represent a squatting district, but rather an urban area; albeit an urban centre that was only beginning to emerge from beneath the power of the surrounding rural interests. On another level Richardson's approval of the Bill is surprising as this was the same John Richardson at whose establishment in North Brisbane "Parties desirous of obtaining a supply of Labour, from Amoy" could affix their names to a list, stating how many Chinese labourers they required.²⁷

The second point of interest within the debate was the fact that all the participants bemoaned the importation of the Chinese, yet, all apart from Plunkett argued that employers had been driven to this end by the impossibility of any emigration flow emanating from England with the exhaustion of the Land Fund. The cessation of transportation, and the negation by the Legislative Council of any

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ 1790-1862; Merchant, partner in Lamb and Parbury of Sydney, ex-Royal Navy, and son of an East India Company captain, retired to England with a fortune in 1855. *ADB*, Vol. 4, pp. 72-73.

²⁷ "Chinese Labour", *MBC*, 22nd June, 1850.

resumption of the practice had exacerbated the dearth of servile labour, a situation that could only be overcome by the introduction of Chinese labourers. This argument was to be constantly repeated by the supporters of Chinese immigration, and those justifying the actions and position of the squatting class. In combination with these arguments one finds the sentiment expressed so ably by Douglass within his speech to the House that:

We would rather have these convicts, with all their anticipated pollution's a thousand times over, than that the colony should be inundated with the benighted hordes of Asia, whether Tartar or Hindoo, Musulman or Pagan.²⁸

This plea that the colonists would rather have access to the refuse of England's gaols than introduce a corrupting influence into society in the form of the Chinese, was used especially in the Northern Districts in the combined fight that they engaged in for a resumption of transportation and separation from New South Wales. One correspondent, an employer from the Northern Districts, used this argument in his call for government interference to oversee and control the trade in Chinese labourers, providing the reader with a compendium of the expected results if such interference was not forthcoming, concluding with the hope that:

...I have alarmed the morals of some of some of my Sydney friends, who are sure, ere long, to have these very men as the outcasts of the north (for they are worse than exiles), I will bid them adieu; and let them then remember that they forced them on us.²⁹

The introduction of Douglass's Bill into the House and the debate that ensued was beneficial to the importers and the employers of Chinese labour, as by calling attention to the extent of the importations that were to soon arrive in the colony, a fair amount of the anticipated objections to the trade were diffused before it had reached its peak. All of the objections that were subsequently raised against the introduction of Chinese labourers had previously been countered during the Legislative Council debate.

After the parliamentary tussle over the merits and demerits of Chinese labour importation the debate was forever abandoned by the Legislative Council and was taken up by the newspapers. However, despite the parliamentary debate, Orr's letter, and the *People's Advocate* earlier arguments against the trade, it was not until late February 1852 that the Fourth Estate entered the fray in force.³⁰ Relative quietude on the subject of Chinese labour importation by the Sydney papers until then is not surprising as the rate and incidence of Chinese labour importation into Sydney had been comparatively low until the arrival of the *Arabia* in December 1851. Prior to the arrival of this ship most of the Chinese labourers arriving in the colony were destined for Moreton Bay and the Northern Districts, and the majority of Chinese landed in Sydney were quickly transferred north in

²⁸ Speech of Dr. Douglass, Chinese Immigration Debate, Report of the Legislative Council, 21st November, 1851; *Empire*, 24th November, 1851.

²⁹ Original Correspondence by "Australiensis", *SMH*, 26th December, 1851.

³⁰ Gaps within existing copies of the *People's Advocate* may hide articles that had appeared in this newspapers on the subject.

accordance with this. The *Cadet* and the *Duke of Roxburgh* (1850-51) were both supposed to land in Moreton Bay, but weather conditions intervened and the Chinese labourers were landed in Sydney. The next shipment, the *Duke of Roxburgh* (1851) made land at Moreton Bay, therefore these importations were out of the direct purview of the Sydney newspapers. As the *Moreton Bay Courier* offered little or no attack against these importations it was not until the "Rush of 1852" and the arrival of the *Ganges* and then the *General Palmer* which both experienced disastrous voyages, that the squatters and importers were called upon to justify their importation and employment of Chinese labourers in the face of concerted attacks made within the Fourth Estate.

The Squatters and their "Chinese Slaves"

The editorial which carried this title was not dedicated to arguing against the introduction of the Chinese but rather called upon the Government to institute an inquiry into the '...discipline on board the ships employed in the Chinese labour traffic, and the treatment which many of these poor heathen immigrants are said to have received in their passage to this country.'³¹ In writing this, the editor was obviously referring to the passage of the *Ganges* and threatened that if the Government did nothing to satisfy the public's mind as to the "alleged cruelties and crimes", the *Empire* would '...adopt every measure within our power to bring the real state of things to light.'³² However, it was not exclusively the allegations of "cruelties and crimes" within the Chinese labour trade that worried parts of the Fourth Estate, but also the fact that since 1st January, 1852 nearly a third (687 out of 2457) of the increase in colonial population through immigration had:

...consisted of the worst description of Chinese- a race as alien to the Anglo-Saxon in faith, tradition, habits, and feeling,...We fear for the country of our adoption, when we see this shameless and wretched traffic in human flesh.³³

Within this editorial the earlier Legislative Council debate and its denunciation of the trade was recalled, examples of violence and the appearance before the benches by Chinese labourers located in the Northern Districts were reprinted and used as evidence of their debased ways. Five days later another editorial was dedicated to the importation of Chinese labourers, in which the trade was aligned with the slave trade, questioning the inability of the Chinese to '...become, to any extent, free and intelligent British subjects.'³⁴

The Chinese themselves were not the subject of antipathy within this editorial but rather the importers, who were charged with "sordid avarice" in undertaking the trade, and were '...guilty of all that the old slave traders were guilty of...'.³⁵ The sympathies of the editor were with the Chinese labourers who he argued were destined to be:

³¹ "The Chinese Slave Ships", *Empire*, 6th February, 1852.

³² *loc.cit.*

³³ "Our Population", *Empire*, 21st February, 1852.

³⁴ "The Importation of Barbarian Labourers-Slavery", *Empire*, 26th February, 1852.

³⁵ *loc.cit.*

...kept in servitude, ...under the binding force of laws that they cannot possibly be made to understand, and of which they cannot therefore avail themselves in their own defence. The contract is not equal, for they have not British notions on these subjects, and they are therefore hired under, what are to them false representations....They are bound, indeed, by the fetters of ignorance on their own parts; but their importers have taken advantage of that ignorance to extract from them a service, and under circumstances as foreign to their independent and intelligent volition as if they were kidnapped:....³⁶

The distinction between the animosity shown at this time towards the importers and employers of Chinese labourers, and the paternalistic attitude adopted towards the Chinese is extremely important as it provides an indication of the political manouverings being undertaken within colonial society at the time. The Chinese labourers at this stage were merely pawns within the fight for political and social supremacy. The importation of Chinese labourers represented the apex of the squattocracy's power, yet also provided the anti-squatting section of colonial society with a new weapon with which to attack the squatters. The supposed dangers to society which the importation of Chinese labourers threatened were portrayed as being due to the avarice of the importers and employers, and the latter's determination to employ and keep in servitude an "ignorant and barbarian race" in preference to free English labourers.

Apart from the *Empire's* editorials on the subject of Chinese labour importation, which were driven by questions of violence during the passage and the propriety of introducing Chinese into the colony, the other sections of the Fourth Estate remained relatively quiet. Even the *Empire* received only one letter on the subject after that subscribed by Orr. This letter, by "A Bushman", lacked the vitriol of Orr's letter and argued that the time and expense of importing Chinese labourers could be easily matched by the importation of "honest industrious Scotchmen".³⁷

The response of the editor *Maitland Mercury* to the importations and the debate initiated in the Legislative Council, was that the labourers had been imported as a necessary and '...temporary measure to meet an unexpected and urgent emergency...' induced by a severe shortage of labour. The editor however tempered this justification of the trade by stating that there were:

...many weighty grounds of a general character to be urged against the introduction into a country like this- already settled as it is by a British community, and for all the industrial pursuits of which British labour is suitable- of a coloured and inferior race, and particularly if that race be distinguished for its vices rather than its virtues.³⁸

All members of the colonial press eventually became involved in the debate on the importation of Chinese labour when the articles of Paul Pax were published. The publication of these articles not

³⁶ *loc.cit.*

³⁷ Original Correspondence by "A Bushman", *Empire*, 6th March, 1852.

³⁸ "Chinese Immigration", *MM*, 29th November, 1851.

only provided the reader with an insight into the mechanics of the trade in Chinese labour but also the pro- and anti-Chinese immigration interests with a point of focus from which to argue their opposing views.

The Literary Efforts of Paul Pax

The correspondence of Paul Pax³⁹ may be considered the absolute pinnacle of attempts made through the Fourth Estate to "sell" the Chinese and their "masters" to the general public. The letters were a marketing or, if one wishes to view the letters in that light, propaganda exercise which were written by someone close to the centre of the importations with the primary aim of proving to the public how innocuous was the trade in Chinese labourers, and how the trade had only been undertaken as a last resort. The articles of Paul Pax were published at a very fortuitous time for the importers and employers of Chinese labourers appearing just after the arrival of the ill-fated *General Palmer* when animosity towards the trade was beginning to increase in intensity and extent. The objective of the articles it was stated was not to question whether Chinese immigration only benefited '...a numerous, powerful and wealthy class...', nor to consider the '...propriety of imputing and receiving into our community a few hundred Chinese annually...', but rather to:

...discover, if possible, whether the principle of this immigration is good- how these men are obtained and what were their antecedents ere they consented to become the hired servants of our countrymen: whether, when they committed themselves to the protection of the British flag they received proper care, or whether in one word it is a species of slavery on the part of any party concerned, as has often been alleged-...⁴⁰

The six articles which were published over an equivalent number of weeks had been definitely prompted by the moves of Dr Douglass in the Legislative Council, and given the level of detail contained within the articles, Paul Pax had been at his task for a number of weeks at least before the publication of the first article. The inclusion of various pieces of information, however, such as the number of Chinese landed in Sydney up to only eight days before publication;⁴¹ and interviews with Captain Thomas Beckford Simpson of the *General Palmer*;⁴² indicates that in some areas the articles were written contemporaneous with objections to the trade being raised in colonial newspapers.⁴³

³⁹ The identity of Paul Pax is unknown, although the actual name may have been intended to induce some peace or friendship into discussions on the subject of Chinese labour.

⁴⁰ "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. I, *SMH*, 28th February, 1852.

⁴¹ *ibid.* The number of 1685 Chinese cited by Paul Pax included the 180 that arrived per the *Statesman* on 20th February, 1852.

⁴² "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. V, *SMH*, 27th March, 1852. The *General Palmer* arrived in Sydney 16th February, 1852.

⁴³ Objections to the trade were raised specifically in the three editorials that appeared in the *Empire* denigrating those involved in the trade. "The Chinese Slave Ships", *Empire*, 6th February, 1852; "Our Population", *Empire*, 21st February, 1852; "The Importation of Barbarian Labourers", *Empire*, 26th February, 1852.

The articles began with a negation of the views espoused during the Legislative Council debate on Chinese immigration, and criticised Dr Douglass for '...the pagan zeal with which the honourable and learned member pursues the Chinamen...'. Paul Pax questioned whether the Chinese possessed some form of '...Eastern witchcraft, by which they can turn a Christian people into pagans and idolaters...' ⁴⁴ which Dr Douglass had alleged they were capable of achieving. The imputation that the importers of the Chinese were merely another form of slave traders, buying and selling "flesh, sinews and bones", was refuted by the citing of the 1847 amendment to the Master and Servants Act, which recognised contracts signed with the Chinese, therefore, the contracts were '...perfectly fair and legitimate...' ⁴⁵ As further evidence on this point Paul Pax presented the mechanics of the trade undertaken by the importers, ⁴⁶ and explained away the violence on the *Ganges* and mortality and disease on the *General Palmer* as being singular aberrations which all precautions had been unable to prevent. Apart from these singular circumstances it was argued by Paul Pax that the Chinese have '...no ground of complaint against those persons holding commands in the emigrant vessels.' ⁴⁷

As to the suggestions of immoral acts amongst the Chinese, the '...horrid vice, the very allusion to which brings the blush of shame upon us...', Paul Pax produced the evidence of the Surgeons-Superintendent employed on the ships, who it was stated with "one mind" declared that the charge as made against '..."the race" was totally devoid of foundation...' ⁴⁸ The fear of Douglass of the moral and uncivilizing effects of the "dusky population of China" mingling with the noble Anglo-Saxon race was dismissed by Paul Pax, as such inter-mingling of races was proof '...that our race is fulfilling the glorious destiny allotted to her in civilizing the world.' ⁴⁹ The '...only really tangible evil...' raised as an objection to the immigration of Chinese labourers to the colony that Paul Pax was not able to effectively refute, a difficulty which was admitted yet declared not to be insurmountable, was the "non-importation of women". ⁵⁰ The migration and then employment of so many men in the isolated regions of the colony without a percentage of women was feared by the opponents of Chinese immigration on two levels. Firstly, there was the argument that the congregation of so many men without the "civilizing" influence of women would lead to the committal of the '...most appalling vices amongst them'. ⁵¹ Secondly, and of more importance to some sections of society, was the overriding fear of miscegenation. By importing so many men without the company of their own country-women it was feared that the Chinese might marry European women there being no other

⁴⁴ "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. I, *op.cit.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. II, *SMH*, 6th March, 1852.

⁴⁷ "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. VI, *op.cit.*

⁴⁸ "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. III, *SMH*, 27th March, 1852.

⁴⁹ "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. VI, *op.cit.*

⁵⁰ "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. VI, *op.cit.*

⁵¹ "Chinese Immigration", *MBC*, 20th September, 1851.

'...recourse in this country...'.⁵² To overcome this problem, Paul Pax suggested that women could be brought from Malaya as these two races '...have for centuries consorted well together...'; a solution which was hoped to quieten all objections on the importation of males only. It is ironic that the fear regarding the congregation of so many men together, without the companionship of women was only expressed thus in relation to the introduction of Chinese, as the whole colony suffered from an extreme imbalance in the sex distribution of the population, hence the constant attempts to increase female emigration.

Responses to the claims and declarations of Paul Pax were quick to emerge in the newspapers with the *Empire* leading the charge against Paul Pax on the basis that a "thousand shames" should be invoked on those men of '...high standing...they sit in our Legislature and on our magisterial benches, and from their wealth and position they must be looked up to as the leading men of the colony...'.⁵³ Who having:

...put themselves into such functions, should employ them, to defend themselves in the perpetration of a practice, which if largely pursued, and promoted by our "leading men", must dissolve all the social and moral virtues of the colony, into "thin air"....To take advantage of the non-existence of a law, which should punish an evil practice, in order to perpetuate that practice and profit by it is an act of more detestable dishonour...; and for the men to do it, who are put in places of trust, to be without selfishness, the guardians of the rights and virtues of society, is a moral criminality which is not easily surpassed.⁵⁴

The *Empire* also attacked the amount of space that the *Sydney Morning Herald* had allocated to the publication of Paul Pax's articles, posing the question 'Would that journal take up so much room at the simple request of a writer on the other side? A question which the editor answered in the negative "judging from historical recollection".⁵⁵ The identity of Paul Pax was also queried and after deciding that the author was definitely no "amateur scribbler", the editor suggested that Paul Pax was either directly and personally interested in the promotion of the trade or was a "paid advocate", concluding:

It is surely interest of some kind that mounts our doughty champion to his saddle, lance in hand.⁵⁶

⁵² The Aboriginal population was considered an unlikely source of wives for the Chinese, it being argued that '...the difference between a Chinaman and an aboriginal of our colony, is perhaps as great as between the former (and) an Englishman'. "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. VI, *op.cit.* Some measures were taken to import Chinese women with Thacker & Company in a letter to Jardine Matheson suggesting the importation of '...Chinese labourers with their wives and children.' Thacker & Co. to Jardine Matheson, 4th June, 1851, in Phyllis Mander-Jones (ed.), *Manuscripts in the British Isle Relating to Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific*, Canberra, A. N. U. Press, 1972, p. 390. In a letter three weeks later, Thacker requested the engagement of a Chinese cook, carpenter and overseer for Edward Hamilton of "Collaroy" (the nephew of W. S. Davidson), Thacker & Co. to Jardine Matheson, 27th June, 1852, *ibid.*.

⁵³ "Chinese Immigration", by Paul Pax, No. II, *op.cit.*

⁵⁴ "Paul Pax and the Pagans", *Empire*, 11th March, 1852.

⁵⁵ "Chinese Labour and Paul Pax Again", *Empire*, 3rd April, 1852.

⁵⁶ *loc.cit.*

After attacking all of the claims and suppositions of Paul Pax, including that it was an act of humanity to bring the Chinese to the colony from their homeland where over-population and starvation were common facets of life, the editor berated those in the colony who had introduced this "Pariah Caste" to satisfy their desire for '...a serf-like peasantry, doomed to a never-to-be-improved servility'.⁵⁷ The *Empire* attacked the Chinese on the basis of their lack of morals and inability to understand and conform to the agreements that they had signed, yet continually directed most of its hostility towards the squatters. The importation of Chinese labourers was portrayed as just another attempt by this clique to make the labouring population subservient to their will, the Master and Servants and Vagrancy Acts being cited as other examples. The introduction of low-wage workers in the form of Chinese labourers was believed to reduce the wages of all labourers, and would stifle the emigration of other labourers from England; creating and perpetuating a vicious circle where the squatters could again argue that the labour shortage had driven them to the importation and employment of Chinese labourers. It was the fact that the squatters had abused their high standing within society and the Legislature to undertake, and then justify the importation of Chinese labourers which was the main focus of the *Empire's* attack on the trade. An act on the part of the squatting clique which was constantly portrayed as "immoral", a "breach of trust", and disinterest by the squatters in the future of the colony.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* in contrast, accepted the arguments of Paul Pax that no aspects of the slave-trade to be found in the Chinese labour trade, yet gave equal voice to the belief that the trade would be unprofitable and '...politically, and socially, the employment of an inferior race of men as labourers is a great evil'.⁵⁸ The *Herald* maintained a comparatively balanced stance in the debate, deprecating the introduction of Chinese labourers and alluding to all the evils which would befall the colony from the importations, yet argued that:

The "sordid traffic" in Chinese labour is the result, not of a tyrannous disposition in those who employ that labour, but of the ruinous policy of the Marplots of the Colonial Office, who have for so long misused and misgoverned these splendid dependencies.⁵⁹

The assumption on the part of the *Herald* that the squatters had not imported and employed Chinese labour through avarice or a wish '...to gratify the "infernal spirit of the slave-master" but simply because they must get labour or be ruined'⁶⁰ was in direct opposition to the views on the subject expressed by the *Empire* cited above. The political leanings of the proprietors and editor of the *Herald* were with the squatters rather than the labouring classes as evidenced in its promotion of the idea that property and "interests" rather than manhood suffrage should be represented in the Legislature.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *loc.cit.*

⁵⁸ "Chinese Immigration", *SMH*, 22nd April, 1852.

⁵⁹ "Immigration: Chinese or English?", *SMH*, 24th April, 1852.

⁶⁰ *loc.cit.*

⁶¹ Walker, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

However, even the comparatively mild remonstrances of the *Herald* regarding the importation of Chinese labourers brought rebukes from one reader who proudly stated that 'I have during the last few years, thanks to my Chinese, been a successful sheep farmer...'.⁶² In recommending the Chinese and condemning their opponents the author declared that the Chinese are more suited to the light work of shepherding than English labourers who are neither '...inclined to or adapted for shepherding...'; that '...nine out of ten will complete their contracts...' the reverse being the case with English labourers; that all "new" species of labour introduced into the colony had been opposed, with the original "bond" labourers even opposing the introduction of free labourers; and cited the example of Manila which had prospered with the introduction of Chinese labourers as evidence that the Northern Districts could also prosper by the cultivation of sugar cane and cotton by the Chinese.⁶³ To "A Settler" the arguments against the introduction of Chinese labourers had no basis in fact, and that rather than destroying the future prosperity of the colony:

...the public will feel the advantage of population increased by my Chinese, long after the connexion between us shall have been severed; whether as I hope, they will continue to assist the prosperity of the colony by labouring for themselves therein, or whether as successful adventurers, they return home, and thereby encourage fresh streams of their countrymen to our shores.⁶⁴

Interestingly, "A Settler" was the only correspondent on the subject of Chinese emigration to the colony who severely criticised those who offered objections to the trade on the basis of propagating a "mongrel race". In arguing against those promoting fears of a "mongrel race", "A Settler" ridiculed those who '...feared the good sense, or could influence the choice of our daughters, or does not know that these may, in spite of us, select from amongst their own countrymen worse husbands than a successful Chinaman'.⁶⁵

The Northern Response

The greatest amount of support for the importation and the squatters employment of Chinese labourers was naturally found within those newspapers servicing the Northern Districts, that is the *Maitland Mercury*, the *Moreton Bay Courier* and the *Moreton Bay Free Press*. The degree of support increased as one moved north and closer to the Tropic of Capricorn, a movement which simultaneously found a diminishing degree of cohesion and agitation amongst the labouring class. When the importation of indentured Chinese labourers began in 1847-48 the labouring class within the Hunter region was only beginning to grow and flex its public and political muscles through the press and later the ballot box, as population increased and the urban centres, particularly Maitland

⁶² Original Correspondence, "Chinese Emigration" by A Settler, *SMH*, 8th May, 1852.

⁶³ *loc.cit.*

⁶⁴ Original Correspondence, "Chinese Emigration" by A Settler, *SMH*, 8th May, 1852.

⁶⁵ *loc.cit.*

developed.⁶⁶ The very weak position of the labouring class in the Hunter region at the beginning of the importation of Chinese labourers is epitomised within the election speech for the seat for the County of Durham in 1848 of Stuart Donaldson, a noted squatter in the New England region, prominent merchant and permanent resident of Sydney. In his speech Donaldson averred that he would do his best to serve the interests of his constituents by in part "strenuously exerting himself to promote the establishment of a steam ship service between the colony and Singapore", as:

...any one who looked at the soil and capabilities of the county could not doubt that it could grow cotton, and other similar productions, while the steamers from Singapore could be made available to introduce Coolies and Chinamen skilled in their culture.⁶⁷

A promise needless to say, that Donaldson did not repeat when standing for re-election in 1851 with the dissolution of parliament, as it would have taken a very brave individual by that time to openly promote the introduction of Chinese labourers as part of an election platform.⁶⁸

The increasing level of organisation and strength within the labouring classes within Newcastle and the Hunter district can be observed through the responses to the importation of Chinese labourers printed in the *Maitland Mercury*. Although a significant number of Chinese labourers were brought through Newcastle on their way to properties in the Hunter and New England districts, no responses to these events are to be found within that paper. However, the arrival of the *Eleanor Lancaster* in Newcastle in March 1852 prompted a very quick and bitter response. The antagonism within this response had not been apparent, or at least expressed as publicly earlier.

Men of Newcastle, will you be indifferent and tolerate the outrage imposed upon you, and the infraction of the rights of the colony, by allowing a disguised slave trade to disgrace your port, to the present ruin of our working population, and the moral degeneration of future generations!

Unite, assemble together, and institute such means as will effectively put a stop to a slave trade fraught with so much injury. Justice and humanity are on your side, for it is not likely that England would pay millions as compensation to slave owners, and expend millions more to prevent other nations dealing in slaves, and that she would now connive at a slave trade in her best and wealthiest colony, to gratify the avarice of an insignificant amount of its population, and thereby seriously injure nine-tenths of the colony- I remain, men of Newcastle, yours most truly,

T. M^cCormack⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Between 1846 and 1851 the population of Maitland increased from 3319 to 4230, an increase of 27.5%, whereas the whole of Durham County increased by only 374 or 4.95%. New South Wales Census, 1851, *Supplement to the Government Gazette*, No. 30, Part I, 1851.

⁶⁷ "The Nomination", Extraordinary to *MM*, 17th February, 1848.

⁶⁸ The fact that the legislature had voted £10,000 to assist in the establishment of this steam service raised the ire of the *People's Advocate* who argued that the service would soon be bringing '...five hundred Coolies every trip!' "Chinese Coolies" by Truth, *PA*, 3rd March, 1849.

⁶⁹ Original Correspondence, "To the Men of Newcastle", *MM*, 20th March, 1852.

The growing strength of the working class in the Hunter region is also apparent in the signing by 139 individuals and presentation to the Governor of a petition requesting '...the adoption of such measures as may effectually prevent the introduction of Chinese labourers into this Colony'.⁷⁰ Although the numbers signing the petition was small, the actual forgoing of the petitioners, framing of the petition and its eventual presentation, and the formation of a society for the '...moral and intellectual improvement of the working classes of Newcastle and its neighbourhood',⁷¹ indicates that the degree of organisation amongst the labouring classes in the Hunter region was increasing, and beginning to assert itself in the public arena.

In contrast to this may be stated the fact that at the public meeting called to protest against the arrival of the *Eleanor Lancaster* Mr Simon Kemp⁷² charged that the previous speakers were attempting to '...incite the minds of the working classes against their employers'. Kemp then moved an amendment to the original resolution (that the importation of Chinese labourers was to be deplored and would impede the social, moral and political advancement of the colony), and '...that Captain Lodge be invited to a public dinner for bringing his vessel with Chinese labourers into this port'.⁷³

The *Maitland Mercury* carried a number of letters on the subject of Chinese labour importation and the squatters prompted by M^cCormack's call to arms and the public meeting held to protest against the importation of Chinese labourers. The first letters received by the editor of the *Maitland Mercury* on the subject of Chinese immigration and the squatters were antagonistic, yet ambiguous within this antagonism. That by 'Cognos & Co.' denigrated the Chinese in an extremely racist manner, describing the Chinese labourers that had been imported as the '...disciples of Fo, outcasts of an nation, surpassing all the kingdoms of the earth in cunning, deceit and treachery...'.⁷⁴ The manner in which this letter is written gives the impression on first reading that the author was arguing against the squatting clique and their importation and employment of Chinese labourers. The opposite intention was the case however, as upon close reading the letter is simply a variation of the argument that the squatters were in desperate need of labour. As argued by Cognos, when the colonists as one '...turned up our noses at the Van Diemen exiles, and shouted away with them away...' the only recourse available to those requiring labourers was the '...immigration of his celestial majesty's convicts...'.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Petition from certain Inhabitants of Newcastle to prevent further Chinese Immigration, No. 19, 8th July, 1852, *NSWLC V&P*, 1852, Vol. I, p. 337.

⁷¹ "Hunter River District News", Newcastle, *MM*, 20th March, 1852.

⁷² Kemp (d. 5-2-1869 aged 76) was the father of Charles Kemp, who in partnership with John Fairfax owned the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Kemp senior owned "Mulimba" and other squatting runs around Singleton and Jerry's Plains. Ben W. Champion, *Hunter Valley Register 1843-1884*, Vol. 3, 1973, pp. 481-82.

⁷³ "Newcastle- Public Meeting", *MM*, 27th March, 1852.

⁷⁴ *loc.cit.*

⁷⁵ *loc.cit.*

A second letter reprinted in the same issue of the *Maitland Mercury* left no allusions as to the intentions or political leanings of the author. This letter by "An Australian" began by quoting "an eminent moralist of the present day" who had argued that:

No man or class of men are justified in promoting their pecuniary interests if by doing so they endanger the morals of the community.⁷⁶

On the basis of this axiom the author severely censured the squatters as '...those short-sighted individuals who have shown themselves so regardless of the public morals as to introduce into this colony, where morality is respected and freedom upheld, a class of men who have hitherto been accustomed to live in the midst of slavery and idolatry I mean the Chinese'.⁷⁷ After detailing numerous "outrages" perpetrated by the Chinese labourers, which detail it must be noted had been drawn from the earlier legislative debate on Chinese labour and editorials in the *Empire*, the author countered the argument that without the labour of the Chinese the squatters and therefore the whole colony would be ruined, by proposing that the squatters should '...contract their flocks and herds...'.⁷⁸ This suggestion by "An Australian" was not that outlandish as the squatters had practiced little or no economy, constantly increasing their flocks and therefore constantly requiring more shepherds to care for their sheep.

No other subscribers to the debate were so disloyal as "An Australian" as to suggest that the squatters could exist profitably without Chinese labour. The majority of letters subscribed to the *Maitland Mercury* were supportive of the squatters, although most, as became customary within the debate, regretted the employment of Chinese labour. The first of these letters took issue with McCormack who "An Observer" believed had by insinuating that the squatters were avaricious and '...perfectly careless of the of the spiritual welfare of the colony', imputed '...improper conduct to so valuable and respectable a class as the squatters...'.⁷⁹ Another subscriber to the debate, "Y. Q.", argued that being '...neither a laborer, nor an employer of labor...', they wished to inject a measure of dispassion and impartiality into the discussion.⁸⁰ On the question of the squatters as a political group the author had nothing to say, reserving all comments to the Chinese labourers themselves. Unlike many letters on the Chinese that date from this time, Y. Q. was openly commendatory of the Chinese and argued that when Singapore and Manila had gained so much from the useful and industrious natures of Chinese labourers, '...why should they not make good citizens and good servants here?'⁸¹

⁷⁶ Original Correspondence by "An Australian", *MM*, 13th March, 1852.

⁷⁷ *loc.cit.*

⁷⁸ *loc.cit.*

⁷⁹ Original Correspondence, "Chinese Immigration", by "An Observer", *MM*, 24th March, 1852.

⁸⁰ Original Correspondence, "Chinese Immigrants", by "Y. Q.", *MM*, 24th March, 1852.

⁸¹ *loc.cit.*

It is within the letter of "Y. Q." that is again found the belief that the importation of Chinese labourers would raise the "intelligent European labourer" from the lowly status of only having their labour to sell, to that of a small land-holder, as they would, with the assistance of cheap Chinese labour, find their '...chances of success increased...'.⁸² This argument, combined with that which argued that Chinese labour was more suitable for employment in the hotter regions and in the cultivation of sugar and cotton was to become more prevalent as the debate over the importation of Chinese labourers continued. The overwhelming number of letters published for rather than against the squatters and the introduction of Chinese labourers defined the readership of the *Maitland Mercury*. The lack of any editorial prejudice towards these subjects until about 1853, can be conjectured to be a recognition on the part of the owners that survival depended upon not alienating the squatters, a situation that changed within a short period of time. By 1853 when the *Eleanor Lancaster* again arrived in port the labouring interest was gaining in numbers and importance, politically and economically, with the squatting interest losing some of its power in this regard, making the *Maitland Mercury* more beholden to the working-man for its continued profitable existence than previously.

A change in the debate can be detected during the middle of 1852, with the subject disappearing from the newspapers of the middle districts and only being a matter of concern in the Northern Districts. Two reasons for this change in focus may be presented. Firstly, the decrease in the number and rate at which Chinese labourers were imported after April 1852, with only three more ships arriving, and those in early 1853, reducing the visibility of the Chinese. It appears that as long as the labourers were arriving in Sydney and were therefore visible to those opposed to the importation of Chinese labourers, interest in this subject was maintained. Once the importations ceased the subject was no longer of significant interest to warrant comment. The only time that the Chinese labourers made the newspapers of the Middle Districts after this date was through the reporting of Bench of Magistrate proceedings, and any commentary offered in conjunction with these reports was of the "we told you so" nature. Secondly, the Chinese labourers were replaced in the Sydney newspapers by the debate over the form that the new Constitution was to take, early disagreement centring around whether both houses were to be elective.⁸³

⁸² *loc.cit.*

⁸³ Wentworth chaired the Select Committee which formulated the draft Constitution that provided for an elected Assembly and an hereditary upper house, and presented the landed interests with the majority of the power, combined with a minimum amount of accountability. This draft was viewed by the anti-squatting interests as a more invidious attempt by the squatters to entrench themselves at the expense of the rest of society than the importation of Chinese labourers. Wentworth's draft underwent major revisions through the intervention of public opinion, debates in the Legislative Council, and major changes made by the British government to the provisions: both houses were to be elected, and no peerage system was to be established to reward the "Bunyip Aristocracy" in New South Wales for services to the colony. J. B. Hirst, *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1988, pp. 32-45.

The existence of only one newspaper for the Northern squatting districts until 1850 [the *Moreton Bay Courier*] and that until 1848 owned and edited by an ardent supporter of the squatting interest, A. S. Lyons, reduced any outward anti-squatting sentiments being expressed. Although the *Moreton Bay Courier* openly advertised the importations of Chinese labour, it was a subject that the new owner and editor, James Swan,⁸⁴ displayed an increasingly antagonistic attitude towards, describing it as "disastrous and debasing" to the colony.⁸⁵ In contrast to this was the expression of the editor of the *Moreton Bay Free Press* that he was "delighted to report" that a vessel carrying Chinese labourers '...of a very superior class...' ⁸⁶ was shortly expected to arrive in Moreton Bay. As Swan became more vitriolic in his anti-Chinese and anti-squatter stance the *Moreton Bay Free Press* was founded as a mouthpiece of the squatters and as a counter to the negative publicity regarding them emanating from the *Moreton Bay Courier*.⁸⁷ The lack of any substantial urban population or organised working-class, combined with the efforts of the *Moreton Bay Free Press* on behalf of the squatters, had allowed the proposed introduction of Chinese labourers to be advertised and proceed with little opposition being voiced. As the political balance within the Northern Districts tipped against the squatting class even the *Moreton Bay Free Press* and its contributors tempered their decidedly pro-Chinese stance to a position that argued recourse was had to Chinese only because no other labour was available to employers;⁸⁸ and '...there is no alternative but the labour of exiles or Chinamen, or ruin to the producers of capital and to the inhabitants of Brisbane and Ipswich'.⁸⁹

Within the Northern Districts the justification for importing Chinese labourers continued to revolve around the scarcity of labour and if exiles could not be obtained, Chinese labourers would continue to be imported and employed.⁹⁰ The squatters renewed and strengthened their calls for separation in order to protect their interests from the government in Sydney which was described by one of the northern squatters as '...the worst and most aggressive form of centralization which has

⁸⁴ The sale of the *Courier* by A. Sidney Lyons to Swan was noted in that newspaper, 29th July, 1848.

⁸⁵ The *Moreton Bay Courier* under the editorship of Swan assumed a tone of superiority towards the Chinese labourers very soon after their arrival, in the reporting of incidents involving them, as within the following articles: "Chin-Ring in a Difficulty", 13th January, 1849; "Interesting Colloquy", 10th March, 1849. The *Courier's* attitude became more antagonistic as the importations continued, along with the divisive debate on the resumption of transportation, as in: "Chinese Labour", 22nd February, 1851; "Available Labour", 24th May, 1851; "The Northern Elections", 12th July, 1851.

⁸⁶ *MBFP*, 22nd March, 1853.

⁸⁷ It was the increasing anti-transportationist stance of the *MBC* that led to a meeting of squatters in Ipswich which meeting concluded that another paper was required in the district in order to '...meet the expectations of its country subscribers...'. Denis Cryle, *The Press In Colonial Queensland*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1989, p. 30.

⁸⁸ Editorial, *MBFP*, 18th March, 1852.

⁸⁹ Original Correspondence by "An Ancient Moretonian", *MBFP*, 13th May, 1852.

⁹⁰ "Public Meeting to Petition for Direct Immigration", *MBFP*, 11th March, 1852; Editorial, *MBFP*, 6th May, 1852; "The Means of Supplying Labour", *MBFP*, 13th May, 1852; Original Correspondence by "W. H. W.", *MBFP*, 3rd June, 1852.

ever existed.⁹¹ The centralization of power so far in distance and ideology from the northern squatters was perceived as detrimental to the interests of this clique; placing the northern squatters in a subservient position;⁹² absorbing the majority of any labour arriving; preventing the transportation of exiles; fighting to have the "waste lands" opened up; and establishing an '...antagonism between the Pastoral class,...and the heterogenous mass of adventurers now assuming a distinct position as Diggers of gold.'⁹³ It was argued that separation of the Northern from the Middle Districts was the only way in which the former could remove itself from the stranglehold of Sydney, and obtain sufficient labour:

In this emergency the only recourse seems to be, as regards these districts, in Exiles or Chinamen; and if the former are withheld, and free emigrants in sufficient numbers found to be unattainable, it is expected that "Chow Chows" will be brought in to supply the deficiency.⁹⁴

With the spectre of further importations of Chinese labourers being constantly offered as a threat within the separation debate, the labourers did not disappear from the pages of the northern newspapers, the *Courier* and the *Free Press*. The former newspaper became more antagonistic towards the Chinese labourers, rather than just patronising, and increasingly dismissive of the intrinsicity of the squatters to the continued economic viability of the Northern Districts the stronger the squatters pushed their case for indentured Chinese labour or exiles and separation.⁹⁵

When suggestions were made regarding the importation of Chinese labour in 1854 the *Courier* was unequivocal in its condemnation of any attempt made in this direction to ease the labour scarcity.⁹⁶ It must not be assumed however, that this newspaper had assumed an attitude towards the squatters or the cries of a labour shortage equivalent to that of the *Empire* or the earlier *People's Advocate*. The *Courier* recognised the lack of labour in the Northern Districts at the height of the gold-rush, but reminded those requiring labour that the experiment of Chinese labour '...has already been tried, with very questionable success', and offered suggestions promoted by Dr Lang as an alternative.⁹⁷ Despite statements that Chinese labourers would only be imported as a last resort, the 1854 moves to re-establish the trade indicates that the squatters had not given up completely on the idea of Chinese labour. One enterprising editorial even went as far as detailing the Chinese labour trade to the West Indies concluding:

⁹¹ M. H. Marsh, *A Letter to the Colonists of Queensland*, Salisbury, Bennett, 1859.

⁹² Michael Roe, *Quest for Authority in Eastern Australia, 1835-1851*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1965, p. 65.

⁹³ "The Wool Grower and the Gold Digger", *MBFP*, 3rd May, 1853.

⁹⁴ "The Reports Regarding Separation", *MBFP*, 15th April, 1852.

⁹⁵ "The "Courier" and the "Squatters", *MBC*, 19th February, 1853; "Supply of Labour". *MBC*, 23rd April, 1853.

⁹⁶ "Immigration and Labour", *MBC*, 20th May, 1854.

⁹⁷ "Restart of Importation", *MBC*, 4th February, 1854.

Were the Chinese population not exceedingly ignorant of what is going on in a country much nearer to them than the West Indies they would never dream of taking so long a voyage, and binding themselves to work for 1s. a day.⁹⁸

Apart from the growth of northern towns, the growth of the labouring class is illustrated by the distancing of past employers of Chinese labour from any notions that the trade would be re-established. In 1854 in his battle against Dr J. D. Lang for the seat of Stanley, Arthur Hodgson fervently stated that he '...would never ask for another exile, or import another Chinaman as long as he lived'.⁹⁹ It was really quite inevitable that Hodgson would lose to Lang as the County of Stanley encompassed Brisbane where hostile attitudes towards the squatters predominated, and the importation of Chinese labourers was anathema. To many of the residents and electors of Stanley, Hodgson epitomised the squatting ideal, an ideal at odds with the lives and aspirations of the majority of labourers. Even that most ardent employer of Indian and then Chinese labourers Gordon Sandemann, tempered his attitude towards the employment of the latter when standing for election for the Pastoral District of Clarence and Darling Downs. This seat had been vacated by the resignation of George F. Leslie and was subsequently won by Thomas Hood¹⁰⁰ despite Sandemann's declaration that his '...experience of Chinamen for pastoral employment would not induce me to encourage the introduction of that class of labor.'¹⁰¹

Conclusion

This discussion has outlined the various responses that greeted the indentured Chinese labourers that arrived in the colony of New South Wales during the period 1847-53. These ranged from total admonition, through qualified acceptance on the basis of necessity, to applauding the importations or ignoring them, which was very much the same reaction. The type of response was governed by the changing political situation evident within the colony at the time- as can be seen with the emergence of firstly the *Advocate* and then the *Empire* as newspapers dedicated to arguing against the established economic and political environment. The style and tone of the responses to the importations and to the Chinese were also determined as to where in the colony they originated. The farther north one moved from Sydney the greater the degree of acceptance of the importation and employment of Chinese labourers. Here the trade was carried on in a more open manner and there was much less antagonism than found within Sydney, even though the northern regions of the

⁹⁸ "More Labour", *MBFP*, 2nd May, 1854.

⁹⁹ "Hodgson's Address to Electors", *MBFP*, 8th August, 1854; Editorial, *MBFP*, 1st August, 1854.

¹⁰⁰ Hood, in partnership with John Douglas purchased "Talgai" (64,000 acres) and "Tulburra" (48,000 acres) from George Gammie in 1854.

¹⁰¹ "To the Electors of the Pastoral Districts of Clarence and Darling Downs", *MBFP*, 30th January, 1855. A good overview of these elections and the growing rifts between town and country and within the ranks of the squatters can be found in M. French, *A Pastoral Romance*, Toowoomba, USQ Press, 1990, pp. 127-156.

colony was the final destination of the majority of the Chinese. However, as the Northern district squatters began to lose political and social power their need to justify themselves and their actions increased in inverse proportion, leading to a change in the way the Chinese labourers were discussed within the northern newspapers. Total admonition of the labourers and their importation began to emerge as a response, although this response continued to be coupled with a degree of reservation- the Chinese were the squatters last labour resort.