BONEGILLA RECEPTION AND TRAINING CENTRE : 1947-1971

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TO MY PARENTS - FOR RISKING THE JOURNEY
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For their help in various ways, I am grateful to Paul Hicks, a patient proofreader and friend; Dr. Alan Mayne, my supervisor; and in particular all those whose testimony enabled me to sketch this history of Bonegilla. It is just possible, despite the bureaucratic oblivion which still enfolds most of the official records, that this patterning of the kaleidoscope may help to bring a particular image of Bonegilla into focus...
The author would like to apologise for typographical errors and incorrect paragraph placement which resulted from technical difficulties with the word processor employed.
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Those who, with effort,
with concealment, with silence, had resisted
the collapsed star Death,
who had clawed their families from it,
those crippled by that gravity

were suddenly, shockingly
being loaded aboard lorries:
They say, another camp -
One did not come for this -

(from "Immigrant Voyage",
Les Murray).
INTRODUCTION

In 1945 the Australian Government created the Department of Immigration. Its purpose was the promotion of a solution to Australia's limited natural population growth in the face of defence fears and of an Australian society which, using the voices of its politicians, was increasingly willing to depict itself as an isolated and threatened British outpost. The fears themselves revolved as much around the defence of a singularly British heritage in terms of political, social and economic institutions, as a purely geographical or military threat. While the "threat" was more often perceived as assuming an Asian or non-European identity, Australians also had a history of feeling socially insecure when confronted by "non-British groups" within their own shores; the extent of that insecurity varying according to more specific ethnic categorisations within the general "non-British" label (i.e. northern c.f. southern Europeans, western c.f. eastern Europeans). The significance of the post-war period is that within two years of the formation of an Immigration bureaucracy by a party which had traditionally been hostile to immigration, an immigration programme had also begun to be formulated which would eventually allow, encourage, and financially assist, the introduction of groups which, traditionally, were depicted as posing the very threat to Australian homogeneity which immigration had been posited as assuaging. Such a development cannot be taken for granted, be explained away as accidental, or be seen as dominated purely by defence initiatives. It entails a revaluation of the role of non-British immigration in Australian society in the context of immigration's economic application and its material effects, on both the non-British migrants, and the larger Australian society. It is only then that we can begin to understand the
force of meaning that the term "immigration" came to have and has had for a
generation of Australians, one which still demands that the two categories
"migrant" and "Australian" be identified not only as separate, but as
frequently in opposition.

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The history of Australian immigration, while it has been the subject
of numerous sociological and biographical studies, has suffered from a lack
of specific research into the processes of its implementation at the level
of programme as well as of policy. Our understanding of the "migrant
experience", as it has been coined, may be reaping the benefits of acute
media and institutional interest, but even in this field there is still an
absence of research into the larger issues of Australian economic and
social policy and the structure of Australian society against which such
experiences define themselves. This thesis was conceived as a beginning in
the attempt to fill that lacuna by focusing on a particular area of
immigration history after the Second World War. That is, non-British
assisted immigration to Australia as it was associated with a Reception and
Training Centre established at a camp known as "Bonegilla".

In this thesis Bonegilla's significance is interpreted in its
relationship with the objectives of immigration policies from 1947 until
its own closure in 1971, and in its effect on the lives of the migrants who
"passed through". The nature of Bonegilla's role is highlighted by my
choice to preface Part One of the thesis with an excerpt from Berger and
Luckmann's well-known sociological dissertation, The Social Construction of
Reality. Their rather sparse formula concerns the introduction of
"foreigners" into a specific "official reality" in terms of a "threat" and
defense. I use their theoretical framework in order to provide a very
broad social historical model, positing a possible theory of the influence
of the Reception and Training concept in the immigration programme, as it was given shape and meaning in the setting up and continued operation of Bonegilla. The idea of a "threat" needs to be considered, though, as concurrent with the exertion of more exploitative interests. The motivation which promoted the very introduction of these "foreigners" was, in this case, economic. The "threat" which the "DP" scheme may have been perceived as posing was inextricable from the benefits that the mass migration of "Displaced Persons" potentially offered. The concept of Reception and Training and related principles of absorption and assimilation became the means not only by which the social threat was minimised, but by which the economic benefits were maximised. The focus is on policy formation, and the manner in which it was implemented as a programme to cope with this double-sided challenge to the "official reality".

Chapter 1, "Background to the 1947 Immigration Policy and Programme, 1945-1947", examines the events prior and up to the decision in 1947 to admit "Displaced Persons", and the way in which that decision was associated with the objectives of immigration policy. By taking account of the practical obstacles facing the viability of the "DP" migration scheme, their numbers and their "non-Britishness", accommodation shortages, employment provision, and the manner in which resolutions were found to these "obstacles", the question of employment emerges as a primary motivation for recruiting "DP" migrants. The two-year directed labour contract and the "Reception and Training" concept became the means by which the "threat" and the "benefits" of immigration policy were practically reconciled, while defining the "DP" immigration programme as essentially a manpower programme.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the implications of the "Reception and Training Centre" in the "Displaced Persons" period 1947-1951, looking at
the manner in which that manpower objective was realised through the inter-related policy ideals of "absorption" and "assimilation". Translated on a local level as employment and "training", they were applied in order to solve the dual problem of not only efficiently absorbing the migrants (maximising benefits), and assimilating them into the "Australian Way of Life" (reducing the threat), but of gaining the Australian public's acquiescence to their introduction into that society. Bonegilla, as the actualisation of the "Reception and Training" concept then, served both the function of implementing that policy as a programme, and of presenting an image of that programme to the public - what I term its "representative" status. Supported by its physical isolation, and the structure of the accommodation system, Bonegilla put into practice, and came to stand for, the idea of "control". That "control" reflected certain assumptions about the place of migrants in Australian society and the role that they were expected to play, again determined by the manpower objective which legitimated their acceptance. As Bonegilla's own function became routinised apart from the "original crisis" which created the need for its operation, those assumptions continued to carry legitimacy.

Part Two, "Responses 1947-1951", moves away from the Berger and Luckmann model although still working within the same time span as in Part One. It describes Bonegilla's initial function as a "Displaced Persons!" camp, and focuses on the operation of the programme at a local level, and particularly on the migrants' responses to the policy which was created to cater for their introduction to Australian society. While some of the sources are contemporary with the events discussed, being stored away in various official documents and newspaper accounts, the majority of the views expressed, by both migrants and Australians involved in the operation, are done so from the perspective of the past seen through the present, much like the history writer herself. Without utilising oral
sources I would have had no way of gauging the workings of social structures at the point of their interaction with human beings who re-interpret those structures' significances. These relationships present alternative readings of the programme's efficiency and of its "success". What will become increasingly obvious in the Bonegilla operation is the disjuncture between the official objectives of policy, their local interpretation, and the migrants' own impressions of events and procedures. This alienation is seen as aggravated by a lack of policy response to the migrants as "factors" to be considered and adapted to, rather than merely "controlled".

Chapter 3, "The First Arrivals", taking a broad perspective, details the relationship between the migrants and the Reception and Training concept. It firstly looks at the local community newspaper's (BMM) response to the migrants' arrival, the migrants' effect on the departmental representatives at Bonegilla, and then the ad hoc or loosely thought out policy responses which their arrival necessitated. These policy responses are seen as having a limited flexibility, according with the migrants' needs only in so far as they affect the realisation of the manpower objective. In Chapter 4, "Passing Through", the official perspective of the "success" of both the employment and training aspects of the programme, of order and control, is set against the more problematic responses of the migrants, their confusion, and the responses of the administration and staff. It also looks at the contradictions basic to the relationship between policy and programme, reception and "training", as worked out in Bonegilla, and as intrinsic to the official discourse on immigration. This chapter marks the end of the first period, 1947-1951, when Bonegilla's operation was concerned mainly with the "DPs".

Part Three, "Routinisation and Demise" 1951-1971, examines the extension of the Reception and Training scheme to assisted non-British
migrants in general in the context of Berger and Luckmann's idea of institutions persisting because "they are right" as much as because "they work". It covers the relationship between the routinisation and demise of Bonegilla in this period by utilising all available sources, "oral history" included. Chapter 5, "The Extension of the Reception and Training Scheme", provides the link between the first period 1947-51, and this second period of Bonegilla's operation, by concentrating on the precedent which Bonegilla had established and then maintained for the reception and resettlement of assisted non-British migrants. The programme's "routinisation" was legitimated through Bonegilla's practical role in reinforcing the manpower objective, and through its "representative" status as crucial to the "success" of the "DP" scheme. Consequently, in extending the assisted immigration programme, Bonegilla's own structure and its surrounding accommodation system as far as possible had to be retained. The very provision of services at Bonegilla provided a basis for labour exchange, which allowed the two-year contract to be applied to those assisted non-British migrants who were to be absorbed through its processes. The co-opting of British migrants temporarily into this programme is also discussed in order to stress the basic continuing manpower orientation of both policy and programme. The process of programme routinisation itself reinforces and legitimates the assumption that the very acceptance by the public of the "non-British migrant" remained dependant on their ability to contribute to the Australian economy in the greatest capacity.

The 1952 riots, which are discussed in Chapter 6, marked a confrontation between the "success" reading of immigration policy on the one hand, and on the other both the programme as it took shape on the local level, and the migrants' own reading of it. The most significant effect of the "riot" is taken to be its failure to secure any permanent amelioration of the assisted non-British migrants' position in immigration policy, or to
seriously damage Bonegilla's own reputation, that is its representative status. While the episode contained the seeds of Bonegilla's demise by providing a latent source for an alternative reading of Bonegilla's history, at the same time it restated its routinised role in immigration policy and programme. Similarly, the seventh chapter, "Migrant Camp Blues", covering the period from 1953 until 1960, is structured around the argument that the routinisation of the programme remained effective through complementary official invocations to policy "change". In the context of the changing world skilled-labour market and the ambition of attracting preferred voluntary migrants the needs of those potential migrants had to be seen as acknowledged and responded to even though little was done to initiate actual improvements in post-arrival services. Despite modifications to components of Bonegilla's functioning, such as the role of "training", its fundamental purpose continued unquestioned. That routinisation was so complete that even the termination of the two year directed labour contract did not seriously affect the end result of the employment placement process, and thus the assisted non-British immigration programme's raison d'être. The attitudes and conditions under which Bonegilla had been created remained entrenched in the immigration programme, affecting the lives of incoming migrants more significantly than the expanding rhetoric of immigration policy and talk of "changes" in policy approach. What changes were to take place were a matter of institutional differentiation rather than any structural change. More important changes located around the shift in employment needs from primary industry to manufacturing after 1956 would come but they were to be gradual and ad hoc, operating in accordance with the mechanisms already instituted to cope with the resettling of assisted non-British immigrants. These could be relegitimated until definite economic pragmatism and increased
social pressures dictated otherwise. The irony is that Bonegilla's very routinisation, and hence, its inability to adapt efficiently to those changes, would eventually initiate its demise.

In Chapter 8, "Camp Without Hope", 1961, I again look at the occurrence of a riot at Bonegilla, partially because it is this riot which gives Bonegilla its most infamous association, and partially to use it as an indicator of how immigration politics and policy, dominated by the manpower assumption, continued to govern the form of the non-British migrants' initiation and acceptance into Australian society at an official level. But an assisted migration programme which was set up to cope with a certain set of challenges in 1947 could not continue without contradictions even greater than those inherent in its original function. What becomes increasingly obvious in the sixties, and is dealt with in Chapter 9, "The Changing Emphasis", is the tightrope that the Reception scheme walked between its routinised role in the immigration programme, legitimated according to its representative "success" and "control" status, and its problematic practical operation. This tension became increasingly irreconcilable within the changing economic and employment arena of the 1960's, with the shift to urban concentrations of employment for immigrants, as well as the changing world views of immigration and ethnicity, and the growing problem of keeping migrants here as well as attracting them. By looking at the reasons for the demise of Bonegilla, we can attempt to gauge not only the direction in which immigration policy perceived itself as heading, but the extent to which accepted notions of assimilation and absorption, and of the need for "reception" and/or "training" had actually been displaced.
PART ONE

"POLICY AND PROGRAMME : 1945 - 1947"

... specific reality-maintaining procedures may be established to cope with foreigners and their potential threat to the "official reality" ... The violence of these defensive procedures will be proportional to the seriousness with which the threat is viewed. If conflict acts with the alternative reality and its representatives become frequent, the defensive procedures may, of course, lose their crisis character and become routinised.

The Social Construction of Reality
Berger & Luckmann, p. 176
CHAPTER 1:

BACKGROUND TO THE 1947 IMMIGRATION POLICY AND PROGRAMME

The immediate post-war years marked significant changes in attitudes towards immigration, or more exactly regarding its role within a national programme of development.1 While the imperative issues of defence and economic build-up captured the imagination of Australians through slogans such as "Populate or Perish", the manner in which solutions to these problems were formulated sustained longer standing values and prejudices, flexible to the extent that the fear of "perishing" could be invoked as urgent and imminent.2 In July 1947, it was publically announced that the Australian Government had decided to allow twelve thousand "Displaced Persons" to settle in Australia on an assisted basis.3 The announcement was not only surprising in the context of preceeding events, which will be outlined below, but it would lead to the formulation of a new concept in Australian immigration, the creation of the "Reception and Training Centre". It is possible, in retrospect, to seek relatively immediate reasons and precedents not only for the decision to take in the Displaced

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2. This phrase was coined even before the Japanese "invasion" of Darwin brought the "population as defence" imperative to the fore.

3. SMH, 11 July, 1947, p.3. For a definition and description of the term "Displaced Person", see Appendix B
Persons on an assisted basis, but for the manner in which the Government at that time assumed its responsibilities regarding that decision. That is, the policy and programme which would be instituted to cater for the Displaced Persons' anticipated arrival in relation to the Government's objectives regarding the population imperative.

By 1945 the necessity for drastic increases in the Australian population through immigration had, in political circles, been accepted to the extent that the viability of non-British sources for economic as well as defence purposes had already been urged by the Department of the Interior.4 Andrew Markus has pointed out though that the actual application of an immigration policy which depended considerably on "non-traditional" sources was slow in being realised.5 The operative assumption amongst the Government, and in general, was that immigration would be largely British or, at most, constituted partially of "Western Europeans". The very advocacy of European immigration, he argues "was based with rare exception on a demographic analysis which revealed that more desirable immigrants were unlikely to be available, not on any positive recognition of the merits of such people.6 Yet the manner in which the national obligations of population growth and economic

4. "It is recognised that the need for increased population is such that the Commonwealth should be prepared to accept any white aliens who can be assimilated and contribute satisfactorily to economic development and against whom there are no objections". AACRS, A436, Department of Interior, 47/5/16. Sub-Committee on White Alien Immigration, 1944. Similar recommendations were made by the AIAC Report in 1945.

5. op. cit. p.79. See Chapter 2 for a definition of non-traditional sources.

6. Ibid. It was just that situation which in 1945 encouraged Calwell, newly instituted as Minister for Immigration, to state in his policy speech for that year, that it would be necessary to accept "other" potential migrants, with the vague qualifier "who might make good Australian citizens", or "who are determined to become good Australians by adoption". But such conditions, including the identity of the "other", were ambiguously stated. Australia, Parliament, Ministerial Statement, 2 August 1945, Parliamentary Paper 23, Vol IV, p. 1213.
development implied by "Populate or Perish" would be implemented was just as vague in its practical definition, even if determined in its preferences for British reinforcements and the need to reach a one per cent of population quota through an introduced population.7 The steps in the formation of national policy which may have led to the eventual arrival of "Displaced Persons" in 1947 from traditionally unfavoured European areas, and the genesis of the Reception and Training Centre, were in no sense deliberate, or deliberated, until well into 1947, and even then they were closely tied in to developments in the programme for British migrants.8

In alignment with Calwell's pronouncement that for every "foreign" migrant there would be ten British, the Australian Government had consolidated its plans for enticing British migrants with the signing in 1946 of the "U.K. Free and Assisted Passage Agreement". As part of a new organised and bureaucratised approach to immigration, certain aspects of the operation were not to be left to chance.9 Responsibility for the "reception, placement and after-care of migrants upon arrival" was to be relegated between the Commonwealth and the states, while the co-operation of voluntary organisations more traditionally involved in this area became

7. Australia, Parliament, Ministerial Statement, 2 August 1945, PP.23


9. Reflected in the very creation of the Departments of Immigration, and of Information, Calwell being at the helm of both. The agreement though was not to be operative until 31 March, 1947, C/W Year Book No. 38, 1951.
In an attempt to co-ordinate immigration with specific employment needs, surveys were to be undertaken in the states aimed at discovering the capacity of each state to "absorb" migrants during 1947. They were also to discover what facilities were suitable for the temporary or transit accommodation of migrants, so that even "housing" was not to be left to chance. By February 1947, it was further decided that the states would set up "reception depots" near ports of disembarkation. The idea was that the Commonwealth Employment Service would have offices there to assist the quicker and simpler distribution of the British migrants among the workforce and into mainstream Australian society. Possible accommodation was surveyed for these Reception depots in the vicinity of principal city areas, housing a few hundred at a time and concentrating on ex-military establishments.

Despite such planning on the part of the Australian Government and the signing of the Assisted Passage Scheme, the possibility of any large scale migration of British migrants to meet the one per cent quota, and ten Britons for every foreign migrant, seemed increasingly remote in the

11. "Absorb" was a term used in direct reference to the employment requirement. See Chapter 2.
12. AA CRS, MP 1722 47/47A/16 Pt. 2. Already it had been suggested that abandoned ex-military establishments would be utilised: "In general... Commonwealth Service Establishments which are no longer required or hostels that were established during wartime by the Commonwealth, will be used by the States for the temporary accommodation of migrants after arriving."
13. AA CRS, MP 1722 47/47A/16 Pt. 2. CES letter 19th February, 1947 to Deputy Director of Employment.
immediate future because of the world-wide shipping shortage. The realisation of an inevitable shortfall meant that "aliens" from preferred parts of Europe were still a legitimate and more realistic consideration to fulfill these immigration targets, but only if shipping could be acquired for their transportation. But the emphasis was on "preferred". There did exist another source of immigrants, the Displaced Persons, who were being organised into camps and transported by U.N. organisations to willing "host" countries. Although international pressure to accept these people, (mainly refugees from Eastern European countries) was strong and Australia's achievement of its own demographic targets was still left unfulfilled, the Australian Government was unconvinced that it had any significant obligation to accept large numbers of these "unfortunates". This was emphasised particularly in the context of its own national problems: housing shortages, and the rehabilitation of ex-servicemen within a "full employment" objective, neither of which were seen as problematic in regard to British migrants "whose services and skills were urgently needed", and who coincided with Australia's plans for a secure and prosperous "British" future. It was for "humanitarian" reasons and, as it was openly admitted, due to those international pressures, that


16. See Appendix B.

17. "Then there is the tragedy of Europe's army of displaced and persecuted people. As honourable members are aware, the various allied governments have been subjected to strong pressure at international conferences to accept large quotas of these unfortunate men, women and children". Australia, Parliament. Ministerial Statement, 22nd November, 1946. P.P. 4, Vol II. p.1043.

18. ibid.
approval for the admission of a limited number of these refugees was finally given, provided that they were nominated by relatives in Australia who were in a position to accommodate and maintain them, that they did not take up space on British ships, and that they were of suitable character.19

By January 1947, it had seemed that the question of any large-scale immigration of Displaced Persons into Australia was finally quashed as Calwell made a public statement to that effect. What motivated him to do so is not so clear:

Mr Calwell said that Australia had been asked to admit some of the thousands of refugees or Displaced Persons in Europe. Because of the acute housing shortage and other factors, the Australian Government could not sanction the admission of refugees or Displaced Persons who had no relatives to look after them on arrival...20

What the "other" factors were was not mentioned, but the next month the Department of Immigration felt it necessary to issue a further ambiguously-motivated statement. It had been decided that:

Australia, having made its contribution to the solution of the problem of displaced and persecuted peoples of Europe, it is recommended that policy in respect of all aliens should be re-oriented in the light of recent developments and the needs to consider the admissions purely from the immigration point of view.21

19. ibid. "Aliens are and will continue to be admitted only in such numbers and such classes that they can be readily assimilated. Every precaution is taken to ensure that they are desirable types".


21. CIAC, 2nd meeting, 1947, Item 9, Revised Immigration Policy. That same month though Calwell also established two committees to assist with the assimilation of foreigners and advise on the migration of Europeans - later to be amalgamated as the CIAC.
Again, what those recent developments were was not stated, but implied were the problems plaguing any significant immigration two years after the first definite initiatives had been taken. The "immigration point of view", undoubtedly meant the Displaced Person's ability to suit the economic as well as defence needs of Australia.22 The Displaced Persons themselves were re-defined as "aliens" in general, a status which meant that no special treatment would be necessarily meted out to them, but at the same time, the Displaced Persons' circumstances could be exploited for other purposes as was most convenient.

In the more general attempt to try and encourage the immigration of "suitable" types, in May 1947 the Empire and Allied Ex-Servicemen's Scheme had been adopted.23 Soldiers of Dutch, Norwegian, Belgian, French and Danish extraction were to be enticed by the opportunity of re-settling in Australia. But in the same month Calwell's department began making overtures to join the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) which handled the re-settlement of the Displaced Persons.24 The duty to Australian ex-servicemen was now only secondary to the very real manpower shortage which Australia was facing through the shortfall in immigration targets. The imperatives were such that in June, Calwell felt it

22. CIAC, 1951, Item 11. The guiding principles of their acceptance were recorded as suitable in terms of age, nationality, general qualification to assimilation purposes; and according to skills, or qualifications for which there was a demand in Australia; and their ability to be accommodated without detriment to those already resident in Australia. See Appendix B.


necessary to undertake a world tour to study the question of shipping and immigration, and examine IRO's own resources for transportation. By the following month another agreement was made, but this time with IRO for twelve thousand Displaced Persons from camps in occupied Europe to be re-settled in Australia in the first year. It was not made immediately apparent what new conditions inspired this apparent change of heart since the January statement, or whether Calwell had a similar scheme in mind when he issued his February proclamation. It might be useful to ask what new imperatives had arisen so that it was felt a solution to the proclaimed obstacles of competition for housing, employment and the anticipated public reaction to such a move, were now being sought.

Apart from the Markus' argument concerning demographic necessity, the apparent change of attitude can partially be explained in that there were tempting and irresistible aspects to the offer the IRO had made: Shipping for Displaced Person migrants would be provided and at IRO's expense; the Displaced Persons would be chosen by the Australian Government, and would be subject to a twelve month employment contract under the direction of


26. This was only an experimental number and was soon increased to 20,000 even before the first arrivals, Markus ibid., p.83. See Appendix B for the Agreement.

27. Markus argues that, "The decision was a product of desperation stemming from an inability to secure sufficient shipping from the U.K. and was kept a closely guarded secret, perhaps shared only by Calwell, Chifley and Evatt". ibid., p.78.
the Australian government; even their residency in Australia would be conditional after that two year period. Australia would have control over the programme, over the choice of migrants and over the migrants themselves.

In contrast with the arrangements which had been decided for British immigration, whereby responsibility was to be divided between the states and the Commonwealth, the Government in this case would take wholly upon itself the responsibility for the selection, reception, placement in employment and after-care of the "Displaced Persons". Such responsibilities would be more than met by the benefits the agreement would offer the Australian economy. This did not mean though that the form the scheme took, in terms of numbers of Displaced Persons and the arrangements which would have to be made to accommodate them and place them in employment, did not create its own problems. The logistics involved in temporarily housing the migrants constituted a more practical problem to which a solution could be found, as it had with the plans posed for assisted British migrants. The problem of efficiently absorbing the Displaced Persons though was intertwined with convincing the Australian

28. Australia would contribute an ex gratia payment of ten pounds per head to pay for the extra distance that the IRO ship would have to cover from the normal routes to Canada or South America.

29. Calwell had assured the public: "We shall have to select them because some areas are not above sending us ones they most want to get rid of. We do not want traitors and collaborators...". SMH, 11 July, 1947, p.3 The tenor of this statement is much more alarmist than later publicity statements which emphasize the assimilability of the Displaced Persons.
public that the obstacles which had stood in the way before the July
decision had now been removed and that the re-settlement of Displaced
Persons would be of benefit to Australians at large, and worth the
Taxpayers' expense. The assisted introduction of a large number of
non-British refugee migrants on a substantial scale could be perceived as a
threat not only to the "working Australian", but to the social status quo
and the image of a "British" Australia. 30 There was an element of threat
in their anticipated arrival which would have to be dealt with: certain
"defensive" procedures needed to be implemented in order to give the public
built-in guarantees that their jobs and their communities would be "safe".

In the following chapter I will be concerned with detailing the policy
and programmes employed in order to make the Displaced Persons' scheme
workable. By doing so, we can seek further understanding of the responses
of Australian society to the opportunities which the mass immigration of
Displaced Persons as assisted non-British migrants seemed to have offered,
as well as to the "threat" they may have been seen to be posing.

30. Part of the explanation for the Government's own conviction,
regarding Displaced Persons as potentially useful in economic terms,
though not necessarily for its timing and for the type of solutions
found to the obstacles they posed, can be sought in the more
general international response of different countries to the
Displaced Person situation. England, for example, had, since 1946,
been operating the E.V.W. (European Voluntary Workers) scheme
successfully although facing the same stated obstacles as Australia:
a housing shortage and the problem of rehabilitating ex-servicemen.
These E.V.W.s were placed mostly in hostels and camps and recruited
into unskilled and essential industries for what was supposed to be
a contractual one year period. The idea was that competition for
jobs held by English workers would be controlled and that, by
placing hostels and camps in remote areas, any large scale
confrontation with the English population would be avoided. Perhaps
it was a similar economic advantage which Calwell had in mind when
he changed the tack of the response to the Displaced Persons' problem in February. These benefits, if they could be
programmatically realised, were enough to make the "Displaced Persons" an attractive source independent of any demographic
necessity. Of course, Australia had its own experiences in planning for the arrival of a large number of assisted British migrants, outlined above, but the Displaced Persons were not British, nor were they among the preferred group of "alien" immigrants. M. Bulbring & E. Nagy, "The Receiving Community in Great Britain", H.B.M. Murphy, Ed., Flight and Resettlement, UNESCO, 1955, p.114.
I have already pointed out that there were practical obstacles facing the implementation and success of an immigration programme after the Second World War and influencing the improvised manner in which the decision to accept Displaced Persons on an assisted basis was made. The very fact that the first substantial groups of assisted migrants would be refugees as well as non-British constituted its own problems. Nowhere was this more pertinent than in regard to adjusting the programme to suit "assimilation" and "absorption" ideals, conventional to the acceptance of "aliens" in Australia. Although the terms were often interchangeable, and although the latter was used more generally to incorporate both concepts, they did have specific frames of reference before 1947.1 "Absorption" was associated with the capacity of the Australian economy to contain the size of the introduced immigrant population.2 "Assimilation" was also concerned with practical problems confronting the migrants and Australians in such a

1. As evidenced in the above discussion of British migrants p4.

2. For the migrants themselves, the term's significance was related to their opportunities to find employment, along with the availability of housing and, to a lesser extent, social services.
large-scale operation, but implicit was a more socially oriented response
to the introduction of "alien" immigrants into what was envisioned as an
homogeneous society.

The concepts of "assimilation" and "absorption" have a long history of
association with Australian immigration policies.3 The basis of public,
and often official rejection or acceptance of various intended or arrived
immigrant groups depended on their assumed degree of "assimilability"
which, in turn, influenced their potential for "absorption" or vice-versa.4
While the more general term, "assimilation", suggests complex theoretical
implications (regarding degrees and types of "assimilation") its relevance
as a concept tied in with official immigration policy before the Second
World War was significant as a rhetorical position, rather than instituted
in any more specific manner. That is, it was used according to its status
as "common knowledge".5 But with the post-war drive for immigration, these
assimilation stances were organised into an official policy. As Jean

3. Charles Price discusses these terms in a pre-1947 context in
Southern Europeans in Australia, ANU, Canberra, 1965, Chapter 6.

4. These criteria often relied upon crude racial stereotypes and
pre-conceived assumptions about the considered groups and just as
general assumptions about Australian society.

5. This "common knowledge" stipulated that Australians were
identifiable with British stock, culture, institutions and values.
Thus, there was no questioning British access to Australia : it was
to be openly encouraged, particularly in respect to the defence
argument for immigration. Northern Europeans (Dutch, French,
Swedish, Belgian etc.) were the next most acceptable, as most
closely identifiable with the "Australian way of life" after the
British, whereas southern Europeans were a possible threat to that
lifestyle. The eastern Europeans in contrast had not yet been
definitively categorised, therefore it was easier to blur the lines
of their identity. See also AA CRS A434 49/3/6072, M.A. Cook,
"Various Classes of DPs", & Price, Southern Europeans in Australia,
p. 203 ff.
Martin has summarised them, the objectives of "organised assimilation" were "to keep Australians favourably disposed to large-scale immigration from countries traditionally regarded as foreign, and to encourage migrants to transform themselves without delay". The conditioning of Australians to the arrival of the Displaced Person migrants meant that the business of the Department of Immigration became to re-define the realm of "assimilability" so that it could incorporate this group. Rather than attempt to change Australian attitudes overnight, the strategy was to convince the Australian public that the Displaced Persons fitted in with the economic aims of immigration, and to ally them with the acceptable groups of northern Europeans, particularly through stressing their "Nordic" appearance. By labelling them assimilable Australians would feel that they could "predict how they would settle". The second phase was, of course, actually assimilating the migrant.

While it may be tempting to consider the propagation of the organised assimilation ideal at its most convincing as a rhetorical strategy, it was to an extent materially translated through an integrated, if improvised, policy and programme. The translation of assimilation policy into more visible contexts aimed to incorporate the "man in the street" by stressing

6. The Migrant Presence, (Sydney : George Allen & Unwin, 1978), p. 208. Or as Les Haylen, a major Labor Party spokesman and Chairman of the CIAC, phrased it: "The government should devise a publicity campaign to make the Australian people aware of their responsibility to the migrants, and the migrants in turn aware of their responsibility to Australia". APD, 15/10,47.


the value of individual goodwill and by calling on the aid of voluntary
organisations which had been traditionally involved with reception and
welfare work in Australian immigration. But the role of those voluntary
agencies was to be limited as the government established its own
bureaucratic network to deal with the problems of settlement. The
immediate institutional response focused on the main problem areas of
"absorption" and "assimilation": At a governmental level an administrative
and advisory body was established, the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory
Council (CIAC) (supplemented in 1949 by the Commonwealth Immigration
Planning Council (CIPC) to deal specifically with employment); and on a
local level these areas of concern were translated into employment and
"education" specifically. For the former the Commonwealth Employment
Service was incorporated as an agent of the Department of Immigration; for

9. This was the specific function of groups such as the "Australian
Migration Voluntary Service" active in 1947, and the "Good Neighbour
Movement" set up in 1950. Such groups were meant to liaise between
Australian communities and the introduced migrants. Other more
autonomous groups also operated: YMCA, YWCA, church groups etc.

10. The role of the CIAC was involved specifically with assimilation
aims and the co-ordination of unions and voluntary agencies. It
was deemed diplomatic to consult, (Air Force Association;
Association of Chambers of Commerce; Association of Chambers of
Manufacturers; Australian Council of Employers Federation;
ACTU; Australian Legion of Ex-Servicemen and Women; ANU: National
Council of Women, National Farmers Union; Returned Soldiers, Sailors
and Airmen's Association). Its executive was chaired by Les Haylen,
and representatives of the other groups. To an extent its reports
are more useful as reflections of actions taken policy wise, than
actually recording the decision making process which was generally
out of their hands. CIAC, 11th meeting, 11 August 1950.
In contrast, the CIPC outlined as its functions: 1) Planning and
reviewing progress in absorbing migrants into industry and
developmental projects; 2) Advising on ways in which immigration
can contribute to a desirable pattern of development in Australia,
with due regard to decentralisation and the general distribution
of population; 3) Examining major problems and difficulties
connected with the accommodation and employment of migrants. It
was chaired by J. Storey, but also had amongst its representatives
groups involved in the CIAC. CIPC, 1st meeting, 18 November 1949,
Ag. 1.
latter the Adult Migrant Education Service was created. Employment was to be the basis of the migrants' economic absorption, the English language of their social assimilation, and both were to focus their objectives on the idea of a "Reception and Training Centre". The dual emphasis was integral to underlining the benefits to be reaped both by the migrants and Australian society in general:

Camp accommodation for those who were coming homeless and friendless from the DP camps in Europe had to be arranged and staffs engaged to manage the camps, to teach the newcomers our language, to arrange their trade and occupational classifications and secure employment for them, generally to take the first important steps towards a happy assimilation of our new fellow citizens into the Australian community.

Such a benevolent view could belie the deeper political considerations latent in the manifestation of employment and English language policy at an institutional level. The solution formulated for the employment or "absorption" problem serves as a good illustration.

Although there was an acute shortage of manpower in the years immediately following the war, the spectre of unemployment still haunted many Australians. It was emphasised in concerned public responses to the rehabilitation of ex-servicemen, as evidenced in daily letters to the

11. The C.E.S. had existed since the war as a sub-branch of the Department of Labour and National Service. The Adult Migrant Education Service was created in 1947 specifically for the Displaced Persons "experiment" under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Office of Education.


13. The latter will come under examination in Chapter Three.
national papers, and Calwell's own invocation of the cause as an obstacle
to the acceptance of Displaced Persons. The problem of curbing the
public's fears on this emotional question, and also efficiently solving the
country's very real manpower problems, led to the formation of the two-year
directed labour contract that was to become an integral part of non-British
immigration programmes for the next ten years. But policy regarding the
"DPs" had its own rationale. The argument used to legitimate the initial
application of the directed labour concept was that these migrants could
and would be directed to jobs at vital points in the Australian economy for
which there was a shortage of labour, and which Australian workers refused
to do, in exchange for being allowed to share the fruits of a country
"superior" in living standards to anything they had known, at least during
the war years. In this way the Displaced Persons gained a special status
as "directable" migrants, in contrast with other assisted and non-assisted
migrants. Their labour commitment would earn them their fares, the
provision of temporary accommodation and even English language training
services. But all those services would in turn be located at a sufficient
distance from metropolitan areas and convenient to rural employment in
order to reinforce the principle of directability, of control.


15. Markus lists the labour shortages as occurring particularly in
nursing, coal mining, timber getting, steel production, building
The contract initially was only for an approximate period of one
year, but soon became accepted as two years in practice and in
succeeding contracts.
The idea had, as I mentioned earlier, been instituted in Britain
(and later in Canada as well), and Australia had its own more
immediate precedent in the wartime directed labour schemes for
native workers.
Markus also argues that they had a resemblance to the conditions
under which wartime Italian POWs were allowed to work in the
Australian rural industry from 1943-45, op. cit., p.88.
Because all potential Displaced Persons immigrants were only accepted upon agreeing to a labour contract with the Australian Government, their selection was to be made on the basis of their employability, but only in certain types of work. The workers themselves were to be classified as "labourers" if they were men, and "domestics" if women, as indicators of the type of work for which they were to be mostly destined, even if not a reflection of their capabilities. The difficulties of coping with such large numbers and their efficient placement into sectors of the economy which needed them most was partially simplified by this system of classification. Such classification would take practical effect through modifications to the already formulated idea of a "reception depot" for the earlier anticipated British migrants where all "processing" could take place. The difference between the "Reception depot", and the concept which was evolved to cater for the Displaced Persons, the "Reception and Training Centre", was that the underlying need in the case of preparing for the expected British migrants had been merely one of providing preliminary accommodation; the "Reception and Training Centre" had also to deal with

16. "...it agreed with the decision to recruit Displaced Persons simply for unskilled labour in Australia, and to leave the drafting of them to the particular class of unskilled work for which there happens to be most demand or to which the Displaced Persons are best suited to be determined after their arrival in the Commonwealth". CIAC, August 1948, as reported in CIAC 27/1/49, Item 10.

17. It was also seen as more efficient for the processing system itself. Taped interview, Gerry Catling (CBS Officer, Bonegilla).
this problem, but in alliance with the principle of "directed employment", and with English "training".

The Reception and Training Centre would be the base for CES officers dealing with the placement of migrants arriving under the Displaced Persons scheme, allocating them according to employer needs. These officers would be fed constant up-to-date information regarding employment vacancies throughout the country, and would allocate migrants as quickly and efficiently as possible to those vacancies. Their job was also to regulate and enforce certain rules of employment placement for the "DPs". These consisted of a confusing combination of egalitarian and discriminatory principles: Migrants arriving as "Displaced Persons" were not to be placed in employment for which Australian workers were available, or in circumstances leading to the displacement of Australian workers; they were to be allocated only where they would receive at least award rates, and be employed on the same terms as Australians; they could only be placed where they would be housed under conditions customary for Australian workers in the particular employment concerned and without depriving Australians of accommodation.18 When an industry was expanded or labour was retrenched, the "DPs" were to be last in and first out in relation to Australian

workers, but they were also able to receive wages on a par with those of Australians and would be required to join unions, when the unions desired it. 19 A more specific range of employment was also delimited for which the "DPs" were considered suitable and which would most fit in with the employment needs of high priority industries: "chiefly the section concerned with the production of basic building materials or in essential industries, or on important public works" for men; women had their work limited to be "mother's helpers", or work in institutions such as hospitals. 20 There were other stipulations which would make it even more difficult for Displaced Persons to have any control over areas in which they would be employed. Any professional or technical qualification could not be accepted "merely on the grounds that they have professions or technical qualifications". 21 The exception was again when there was a lack of available Australian talent to fill the vacancy and in that situation there was usually little hesitancy on the part of the Department of Labour and National Service to make use of those qualifications. 22 There was the option of refusing the first two jobs offered by the CES, but this was countered not only by the restrictions placed on employment


20. AACRS A434 48/3/11162.


22. Ibid.
opportunity, but also the threat of retributive action or deportation.23

In this capacity the "Reception and Training Centre", along with the two year contract was to provide an effective means of distribution for the smooth absorption of the Displaced Person migrant into the Australian economy without threatening the native worker.

Officially, it was preferred to consider the two year contract of benefit to the migrant as well as to the Australian economy, thus providing a humane rationale for its operation,

To ensure that during this period the Displaced Persons may be protected against exploitation or abuse by reason of their lack of a working knowledge of the English language and their unfamiliarity with Australian conditions.24

Such a rationale could also function according to more calculating logic, emphasising the control over Displaced Persons as a group, and their dependant role within Australian society. If control was not practised, migrants, it was feared,

would be free to move into metropolitan areas to compete uncontrollably for limited accommodation facilities needed by Australian citizens, and to congregate there in racial groups, the creation of which would neither be in the real interests of Displaced Persons nor of the Commonwealth, if given the right to

23. "A Displaced Person may not be compelled or required by the Employment Service to take or remain in any particular job or to stay in any particular locality, but if, during the currency of his certificate of Exemption, he takes a job in an occupation or employment or in a locality of which the Minister for Immigration does not approve, he may not only be breaking his undertaking - but also be rendering himself liable for deportation". AA MP 1722 47/47A/3289 Pt. 2, Displaced Persons. General Policy. Memo for officers of CES, Appendix to Director's Circular, Immigration, 18.

select their own employment immediately, where and how they like, they competed for jobs for which there is an oversupply of Australian workers. Were this to happen, the future development of the Commonwealth's migration policy might well be prejudiced by the growth of opposition to this policy on the part of the workers at large as unwillingness by the mass of the Australian people to co-operate in the process of assimilation...All the foregoing considerations have pointed to the employment of DPs generally in rural areas, and in undertakings remote from metropolitan areas, subject always to the over-riding principle that placement should be such that the greatest benefit to Australian industry and development will result.25

The intention was that the Displaced Persons would create more resources than they would use, and that such benefits were to be purposely relayed to an assumed hostile public as part of the "conditioning campaign" which would stress that the immigration programme, including the "DPs" themselves, was under control:

It is suggested that publicity should not stress the numbers arriving and due to arrive, but should be directed to emphasising the planned character of the employment being found for the displaced persons in terms of creating an increasing number of jobs as well as an increased standard of living in terms of houses, public works and consumer goods.26

The control which the conditions of employment gave the Australian government over the "DP" migrant meant that the "Reception and Training Centre", as their focal point, was effectively not only a place where accommodation would be provided, but where those migrants could be stratified into certain social and occupational classifications;

25. ibid.

generically as "new Australians", and occupationally as "labourer" or "domestic". What was central to the dual-edged explanation of the functioning of the contract was the understanding that the movement of the Displaced Persons needed to be controlled for the purpose not only of making the manpower programme more successful, but for gaining the acquiescence of the general public, that is for the purpose of assimilation as well as absorption.27

The priority in all arrangements being made lay with employment, as the focus of the "DP" immigration scheme was "manpower". Yet, within the "Reception and "training" concept, the "training" or education aspect gained as much media publicity during the early phase of interest in the "DP" programme. Again, in accordance with the reciprocal benefit theme, it was the "Training" which was highlighted in order to stress the services placed at the disposal of the migrants, and to reassure Australians that assimilation could and was working to ensure the safety of an "homogeneous" Australia.

At a Premiers' Conference in July 1947, after it was decided that "DPS" would be allowed in, the initiative was taken to set up a scheme whereby "aliens" could be assimilated and educated in the English language

27. Markus adds, "the imposition of disabilities on the Displaced Persons was central to the programme's success, it enabled friction to be minimised by preventing refugees from competing in the open labour and housing markets", "Labour and Immigration : 1946-49", p.87. Jean Martin has summed up these objectives as embodied in the principles of "dispersal and non-confrontation". "Migration and Social Pluralism" J Wilkes, ed, in How Many Australians, p.103.
and the "Australian way of life". The "Reception and Training Centre's" role in assimilation was to be directly involved with the institution of the Adult Migrant Education Programme:

The decision to accommodate these migrants on arrival in well-organised reception and training centres...is an entirely new departure from previous immigration plans - It is, in fact, revolutionary, and it is the first experiment of its kind to be undertaken in this country.28

While the programme covered four stages (before embarkation, during the voyage, in the staging camp in Australia, and after being placed in employment), "training" in the "Reception Centre" was to be the element which constituted the force of the programme's "revolutionary" function.29

Not so much because it provided and encouraged attendances at English classes, but because it was generally promoted that it would transform its participants into potentially good Australian citizens within the formulised period of four to six weeks.30

The month during which migrants were expected to spend their time at the "Reception" and "Training" centre was stressed as being a planned postponement, not just a waiting period. The SMH and the Argus carried


29. AA CRS A445 174/418, R.H. Wheeler to the Sec, Education, 22/10/47.

30. This was the period constantly referred to in departmental pamphlets and the press.
stories of "Acculturation" and "Back to School for Migrants". Yet despite all the positive assertions of the publicity surrounding the programme, its creation was largely a wading into waters out of the depth of the Office of Education as well as of the Department of Immigration. Education Officers had originally composed plans for self-sufficient reception depots near ports of entry where migrants would live, work and study, where women would attend an "Australian cottage" to learn how to care for an Australian household, and where all would be free to mingle with the local community. Yet the Department of Immigration had its own less idealistic conceptions of the shape which the programme should take. It had set aside ten thousand pounds for the education experiment, and the Minister had made a special request that three or four lectures be given during the four weeks period for lessons in elementary hygiene, and personal hygiene (VD) in German, to ensure that it was understood. Dr. Crossley, Acting Professor of German at Sydney University, was employed as head of the programme, and teachers with a proficiency in other languages were sought to assist on a local level. In contrast with the Education Officers' projections, the programme would take place within the outlines of the.


32. CIAC, 5th meeting, 5 November 1947, Appendix "C". "The Depots could be made practically self supporting if such work as vegetable growing, poultry keeping or labouring on public works etc were undertaken...".

employment oriented policy of "DP" re-settlement - a policy of 
"non-confrontation and dispersal", not of free "mingling" and 
self-sufficient communities. In 1947, "training" had a role specific to 
the Displaced Persons and their unsponsored immigration. It was necessary 
not only to give them a grounding in the English language, but to convince 
the public that they were not being let loose without any "guiding" hand.34 
While this in no way detracted from the "sincerity" of the efforts to 
assimilate the migrants, its basic function in this respect was to allow 
immigration to take place, in order that the manpower programme could be 
fulfilled. Yet, like the employment objective, its purpose was twofold: 
"practical", in order to provide a basis upon which in this case 
assimilation rather than absorption could take place; and "representative", 
in terms of gaining public acquiescence for the programme itself. 

In terms of policy objectives, there are a few factors then that must 
be considered as shaping the nature of the "Reception and Training Centre" 
concept, earning ideas of "training" as well as "reception" their 
significance in the overall immigration scheme: The large number of 
Displaced Persons who were scheduled to arrive as assisted, unsponsored 
migrants, the more immediate practical circumstances involved with the

34. There was a certain irony in the fact that there was still a 
considerable number of "aliens" arriving in Australia on an 
unassisted basis or outside of the Reception and Training system, 
who were receiving no preliminary English training at all.
most efficient exploitation of the directed labour scheme, and the
Australian obsession with assimilation. The eventual establishment of a
"Reception and Training Centre" at a place called Bonegilla would come to
mean that the government could pursue a policy of employment
decentralisation, that it could control the direction of labour more
effectively, and also provide a more visible means of selling the
assimilability of these immigrants, and if possible actually inculcate them
with a basic knowledge of spoken English. At the same time as providing a
feed line to rural and public works areas, it would keep migrants isolated
from major city centres so as to avoid, temporarily at least, any
"confrontation". The importance of the latter need not be underplayed and
was an accepted premise even at local levels of opinion:

> Australians have unfortunately always been resentful of
> foreigners and there is little visible enthusiasm to welcome them
> now...With proper supervision the Balts should be able to come
> and go with local residents being scarcely aware of their
> presence and with increased prosperity to the Bonegilla
> district.35

The organised and contained presentation of the Reception and Training
Centre to the public reinforced the illusion and practice of "control".
This "presentation" would constitute its "representative" value, in terms
of "representing" certain policy objectives, apart from its actual carrying
out of them. But the concept of "control", diffused through the

35. *B.M.N.* Editorial, 11 November 1947. Suffice to say that no attempt
was made to actually gauge the range of public opinion on the
question of the "DPs".
employment and education programmes, could also be transmitted in the arrangement of the built environment. The accommodation system as a whole, and its more specific example in the Reception and Training Centre at Bonegilla, would recreate the conditions of dependency for migrants and reinforce certain social values and class structures, while at the same time providing a context for their potential undermining.

The decision to locate the Reception and Training Centre at an ex-army camp was pragmatic in the context of the nation-wide housing shortage at the time. After all, the same step had been planned for British migrants. Yet the conceptualisation behind the Reception and Training Centre, the prolonged stay of six weeks, as well as the isolated location of Bonegilla were unique modifications to the original plan for British migrants which defined it as a different type of pragmatism.36 H.B.M. Murphy, in an article written in 1952, explained the use, in many DP receiving countries, of large camps purposely segregated from the more permanent native communities as "as much a political as a residential expedient".

36. This is particularly obvious in the setting up of the Holding Centres and Hostel system as ancillary to the Reception programme after 1948. See Chapter 3.
It is usually regarded as useful or necessary that refugees, as arrived and rootless people, should be kept under a centralised and mobile control, and should not be allowed to forget their especial status until those in control decide that this is advisable. In all cases the principle of regarding refugees as a political mass rather than a conflux of individuals predominates and the conscious or automatic application of this principle at lower echelons explains many of the special features which camp life presents. 37

These essential features were segregation from non-refugees, sharing of certain facilities, a lack of privacy and a sense of dependency. As the Reception and Training Centre project would become definitively associated with the Displaced Persons, the Displaced Person stereotype of being deprived and dependant would be reinforced by their very segregation within the immigration accommodation system.

The genesis of the accommodation programme was based on the provision of reception, processing, and then movement to more permanent hostel accommodation near work sites provided by the employer or, if possible, by the Commonwealth Government. 38 During the two years that these assisted migrants would be under contract to the government they would not need to impinge upon the limited housing resources of the states. The initial

37. "The Camps", in Flight and Resettlement, p. 58. Murphy had joined UNRRA in 1945 as a medical supervisor, and in 1950 undertook research in refugee psychology and resettlement; with the aid of the Jewish agency and of IRO he visited Israel and Australia to investigate resettlement conditions.

problem of not only coming up with a viable accommodation plan, but of locating a suitable camp was somewhat reduced by the fact that only workers and not family units were expected to be catered for in the immediate future. Therefore no special facilities were deemed necessary and surroundings could be more spartan. This could be further justified by arguing that the camp was only a transit camp and therefore migrants would not be there for very long.

The choice of Bonegilla, on the outskirts of the Albury-Wodonga area of northern Victoria, as the site for the Reception and Training experiment was in no way inevitable, but it can be quite simply explained by virtue of its convenience for employment and distribution purposes. The camp was situated at a gauge connection point, so that migrants could be railed out from the centre to almost anywhere in Australia with the least inconvenience in regards to changing trains and offloading luggage. There was also an active de-centralisation movement in the Albury-Wodonga area, and the introduction of migrants to more rural areas was in accord with the more general de-centralisation initiatives. Being almost two hundred miles from Melbourne, it also suited in other ways: Bonegilla was at least halfway between the two largest cities in Australia, Melbourne and Sydney, and a relatively short drive to the still being built capital, Canberra, as well as to the large public works at the "Snowy Mountain

39. ibid. Other ex-military camps were available closer to city centres with varying capacities. Most of these, i.e. Bathurst, Woodside Royal Park, Northam would later also be incorporated into the accommodation scheme, whether as workers' hostels, holding centres or temporary Reception and Training Centres.

40. Interview with Pastor Meutzelfeldt, 21/4/85.
Scheme". Bonegilla thus offered a nation-wide feed line, even though the migrants themselves would find it isolated and the major cities inaccessible for private purposes because of transport costs.41.

* * * * *

In the middle of sunny fields and on the banks of Australia's greatest river, the Murray, lies Bonegilla, the reception camp established by the Australian Government for European citizens. The new arrivals spend their first weeks in their new homeland here in order to become acquainted with its customs and mores and thereby ease their passage into the Australian way of life.42

The setting described in this publicity sheet, issued to "DPs" in European camps, belies the less impressive layout of Bonegilla itself as it was when taken over in 1947, on tenure from the army, by the Department of Immigration. A former army camp and POW hostel during the Second World War, it was spartan to say the least, and now dilapidated after years of neglect.43 Not only was it isolated, being some eight miles to the nearest town, Wodonga it covered an immense expanse of land extending over 242 hectares of windswept Australian countryside. Within, it contained something like eight miles of unmade roads. If, in peak capacity, a

41. But if its isolation was a further attraction increasing the dependancy of the migrants upon the government-directed employment scheme, it also meant that from the late fifties onwards, as migrants were recruited more and more for the purpose of feeding secondary industries, Bonegilla itself would grow increasingly inefficient in its employment provision function.


43. Allan Fitzgerald, The Italian Farming Soldiers (MUP, 1981), Appendix. It had been a POW hostel from May 1944 until March 1946.
migrant was billeted on the outskirts of the camp it might be a two mile walk to the camp's centre where the administrative activity went on.44

Initially it had been envisaged that only about 1,500 migrants would be accommodated at the camp at any one time so that only a portion of its blocks were opened up.45 Its landscape was dotted with the unbroken monotony of mainly regulation galvanised iron and a few timber army huts. Usually thirty or more of these huts made up one block, each block having its own mess hall, kitchen, supervisor's office, and normal ablation areas. The huts each held about twenty-six people, dormitory style, were unlined, and had a gap of about six inches running the length of the upper circumference. This gap was covered with wire meshing for ventilation, but through it infiltrated cold winds, dust storms and swarms of mosquitoes.46

The blocks themselves were arranged around a central area known as the Civic Centre. This Centre would house the Administration and CES offices, Social Service Department, Alien Registration, Customs Baggage room, gym, Paymaster, Information Centre, theatre and churches. The camp also had a small hospital that had been used by the army, and which, like the

44. This description is an amalgam of various unclassified and roneoed Dept. of Immigration publicity sheets circa. 1947, 1952 and 1961 (untitled), as well as "oral sources": Franken, Mrs "K", Catling, Smith.


46. Interviews: Franken, Kazmircek.
existing accommodation arrangements, had to be upgraded. The camp's relative isolation also dictated that certain additional facilities had to be provided, such as a "canteen" (or shop), and a Post Office.\textsuperscript{47} Its transition from army purposes to civilian needs was not a simple or speedy process even if it was hoped that it would be inexpensive. In one sense this huge task was not even completed in Bonegilla's lifetime. Renovations and improvements in the aesthetics of the environment continued to plague the Centre according to the attitude of the Department towards financing new requisitions, and the attitude of the Commandant at the time. It took a number of years before Bonegilla reached any satisfactory stage of repair, and when the first Department employees arrived in November 1947, in preparation for the arrival of the migrants, even the initiation of such a task still lay before them.

It was Bonegilla's "permanent population", or its departmental representatives and employees, who would reinforce and reinterpret directives at Canberra level according to the challenges of immediate circumstances. The administrative organisation of Bonegilla was catered

\textsuperscript{47} By 1952 this would extend to banks and even hairdressers. \textit{Cabinet Sub-Committee on Accommodation for Immigration}, April 1949, Agenda 2, Dept of Immigration, Canberra.
for through a fairly straightforward line of authority.48 While the Minister for Immigration had overall control of the Reception and Training Centre and the final word on admissions and exclusions, it was the Secretary, or Permanent Head of the Department, T.H.E. Heyes, who was more directly involved with executive decisions and who provided a line of policy continuity from 1947 until 1961.49 When Bonegilla was first set up there were no official intermediary authority positions, only the Department of Immigration officers who acted as ministerial representatives, and the Commandant of the centre itself, so that the administration at the centre exercised a substantial amount of control over its own operations on a day to day basis.50

The Commandant headed the artificial community created at Bonegilla and set the code of conduct towards other members of staff, towards migrants, and towards the role of "authority". The list of his duties was quite extensive and gave him overall power in the centre, being responsible for discipline in the camp and the co-ordination of the various departments represented at Bonegilla, although important policy decisions had to be referred to Canberra.51 In order to fill this position, the Immigration Department looked to the military for persons of suitable ability and experience, just as the Department itself had been staffed by a large

48. This line of authority was legislated into a body of regulations by the Migration Act 1958-1966.

49. His successor was Sir Peter Heydon.

50. "Commandant" was later changed to the less imposing "Director" in 1948, acting on local initiatives.

51. AA MP1722 47/47/3289 Pt. 3. Memo for Director of Employment from Heyes, 23 April 1948.
number of ex-servicemen. The reliance on ex-military personnel was
directly involved with the experience of migrant camps within Immigration's
own youthful ranks. The army was seen as efficient in matters of mass
movement which would be vital at a Reception Centre. Colonel Henry Guinn,
who was instituted as Commandant of Bathurst when it was made into a
Reception and Training Centre and then at Bonegilla, explains his
perception of the role of the army in the immigration programme and the
qualifications which he regards as having fitted him for this new
responsibility:

For thousands of years the army technique has provided the answer
for the best system of handling large bodies of human beings,
covering accommodation, feeding, transport, etc. Having
commanded a brigade reinforcement centre in addition to an
Infantry Battalion I had more than the necessary experience to
control and supervise a Migrant Centre.

--- As Guinn outlines it, the emphasis was on administrative ability
rather than experience with the problems which migrants themselves might
encounter in their "assimilation" process.

52. Wilton and Bosworth, Old World and New Australia, Penguin, 1984,
p.20.

53. Letter from Col. Guinn. He was Director at Bonegilla from 1954-64.
Guinn made his rise in the army during the war from a soft goods
manufacturer to a Commander of the 17th Australian Infantry
Training Brigade in Palestine, and later sat in on various War
Crime Courts. Desmond O'Grady, "Migrant Camp Blues", The Bulletin,

54. An Administration Officer, Pat Smith, also recalls how he ended up
in Bonegilla, after a career in the military forces: "The
gentleman, Mr Jack Schroder who recruited me was looking for
basically ex-service officers who had experience in administering
large numbers of people from a movement in and out aspect, mass
feeding and providing a general overall experience of service type
administration". Letter from Pat Smith. During the Second World
War, convenors of alien internment camps in Australia had also
been military personnel and there may have been some resemblance in
the concept of a "camp", although internment camps were operations
based on controlling a permanent population, and run in strict
wartime conditions.
Much of the camp personnel was made up of ex-servicemen and women, though in some areas, such as teaching, there were fewer of the professional military. While service-ranks were no longer an indicator of a person's place in the administrative structure, military titles, ranging from ex-Brigadier to ex-Sergeant, were initially retained. The army also ran canteen services and up until 1950 foodstuffs were indented via the army camp at nearby Bandiana. But the regimentation of army organisation did not always suit the rather different circumstances of an immigration Reception Centre. Food supplies tallied to suit the daily needs of soldiers did not meet the needs of children or others requiring special diets, and modifications were slow in being organised as an army system tried to accommodate itself to civilian purposes. Sentry Officers were also made use of at the entrance to the camp, even if more to keep unwanteds from coming in, than preventing any migrants from going out. Consequently, the impression that some staff had upon first arrival was that Bonegilla was still an army camp, run on army lines, but with a new purpose. An early teaching recruit, who ended up raising her family at Bonegilla, recalls the atmosphere in those pre-migrant arrival days:

55. Major Kershaw, the first Commandant at Bonegilla, continued to wear his uniforms for at least a year before the Dept of Immigration thought it unwise in the better interest of the camp's image, or the migrants' first impressions. Taped interview Mrs. E.K. Stevens. The same concern with the public image of the Centre and the military's role is shown in Heyes' refusal to comply with the P.M.'s idea to allow the military to handle employment placement as well, arguing it would leave the government open to attacks of recruiting slave labour, or strike-breakers, 5/4/49, Heyes to PM, AA CRS A434 48/3/11162, Hostels for DPs for Employment, 5 April 1949.

56. CRS AA A446 56/66660 Telex Schroder to A.H. Priest, 1950.

57. Taped interview, Mr. Franken.
When we first got there, the teaching staff was there, nearly as soon as the administrative staff, which was all ex-army, like the Supplies, he was an ex-Captain...And the teaching staff was something quite a few of us, twenty or so...a lot of husbands and wives...and we had to battle to get anything we wanted from administration, because we weren't used to it and they weren't going to make any concession for teachers at all.

The environment was an alien one for the military as well as the new recruits. This unfamiliarity not only with conditions but with each other often led to misunderstandings and more basic dislikes. The hardcore military may have spoken a different language, but they were not the only ones who had their own particular bodies of experience from which to draw; the hierarchical networks of influence were more complex.

Apart from the presence of the Immigration Department, internally the make-up of the Reception and Training Centre revealed a greater cross-section of bureaucratic and departmental representatives which created further areas of operational control or interest, and often conflicting aims. Registration and allocation to employment was under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labour and National Service; the Department of Social Service was responsible for registering migrants for financial benefits; the Department of Health provided the hospital services and staff, and later the supervision of infants' feeding; the Commonwealth Office of Education looked after Adult Education, the State after the children; the Department of External Affairs had attachés; the Department of Supply and Transport was also represented as was the Department of Works and Housing for construction work, repairs and maintenance. The Customs Department had an office there until the early fifties, and Army Canteen

58. Taped interview, Mrs. O. Steiner.
Services were official "caterers"; voluntary organisations and various denominations were also represented. While the aim of all these different groups was ultimately to assist in the efficient assimilation and absorption of the migrants, their ideas on how this might be achieved were not always in accord. Pat Smith, ex-army and an Administration Officer himself, offers a more general observation on the nature of bureaucracies and of the major obstacles which dominated the manner in which the camp's priorities were organised:

At its inception there was a good deal of heartburning, particularly amongst the ancillary non-immigration departments who all thought that the whole place revolved around their own little worlds. However, with a good deal of patient negotiation and many conferences gradually everyone came to understand that everyone had to contribute in their inter-dependent way to the general overall principle of: a) Receiving the newly arrived migrant. b) Processing them as required as quickly and efficiently as possible. c) Housing them and feeding them as best as was possible despite the difficulties. d) Getting jobs for those in the employable category and sending them away to work. e) Moving the dependants as quickly as possible to immigration centres as close as possible to the breadwinners work. f) Looking after all their other needs as best as possible whilst resident in the centre.60

59. See Appendix D "Life in the Centre".

60. Letter from Pat Smith. Although Smith was only there from 1949, clashes of interest were also observed by official visitors to the centre in 1947 as well. Dr. Burton, Sec for the Dept of External Affairs, wrote to Calwell suggesting "the camp might be in the general overall control of a senior officer of the Dept of Immigration, and thereby overcome some of the lack of co-ordination between departments concerned and some person friction". 19 December 1947 AA CRS A434 49/3/25380. Burton to Calwell.
It was the teaching group in particular, as Mrs. Steiner's comments suggest, who seemed to be at greatest odds with those administrative and employment objectives of the centre. Many of the teachers had been recruited with little or no training and were less constrained by departmental policies or structures. They also acknowledged the feebleness of their own mission in the face of the short period of time during which the migrants could attend classes at the centre before being whisked off to employment. 61 The aim of teaching then was inherently in conflict with the aims of the employment service people and the administration in general, whose job it was to see that movement in and out of the camp functioned as smoothly as possible, pressured by the knowledge of expected arrivals and limited camp capacity:

...the quicker we could get people, whether workers or dependants, out of Bonegilla the better we liked it because only we and Canberra and the offices in Melbourne and Sydney knew of the number of ships carrying thousands of migrants appearing on the horizon. 62

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61. Taped interview, Julia Caminer.

62. Letter, Pat Smith.
Eventually the inter-dependent nature of the operation did achieve an equilibrium through the directives passed on at Canberra level guiding policy at the centre, although it could not totally re-interpret its functioning in day to day circumstances. Smith remarks that this immediacy meant that "in many cases it was like making decisions in wartime".63

The "community", then, developed its own stratifications and means of effecting policy objectives; while pre-packaged policies and programmes took little account of local needs, they exerted enough pressure to prevent effective reciprocity between those needs and immigration goals, or if it occurred it was a slow process. This also meant that the social welfare and "adjustment" of the migrants in regards to language often suffered. Co-ordination of employment and migrant numbers left little time for co-ordination of migrants' own needs with those policies. In the next section I will examine those needs within the context of the policy and programmatic structures which I have so far outlined by way of

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63. ibid. "Things had to be done quickly and as far as possible effectively. In most cases the decision had to be made quickly and "on the spot" - ie Bonegilla. Not talked about and debated etc, etc, in Canberra, it was a question of "NOW, NOW, NOW", immediately if not sooner, like "yesterday". We were dealing with human beings who couldn't wait for too much talking. Things had to be done sometimes in an "ad hoc" way, meeting problems quickly as they arose. There was no precedent, no-one had ever done this before. Decisions had to be taken quickly, in many cases it was a case of "do it now, do something quickly, right or wrong, but do it". 
introduction. But before I go on to record the migrants' responses, as recollections, it might be useful to gain a more distanced overview of operations as they got into gear.64 The arrival of the first group of migrants in 1947 offers the most complete documentation in terms of local community responses (Albury), along with those of the local administration at Bonegilla and the Department at Canberra, to a single group of migrants' arrival under the Displaced Persons' Scheme and their processing through Bonegilla. It also provides a neat introduction to the interaction of those employment and education objectives within the actual camp operation, and as they affected the lives of the migrants as a group.

64. See below, Chapter 4.
PART TWO

"RESPONSES : 1947 - 1951"

"We ... say of some people that they are transparent to us. It is, however, important as regards this observation that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language, we do not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves). We cannot find our feet with them".

Wittgenstein
(Quoted in The Interpretation of Culture, C. Geertz, p.13.)
CHAPTER 3

THE FIRST ARRIVALS

Bonegilla siding, bare and lonely, is not a romantic looking area - it's a jumping off place amid acres of sunbrowned grass - but there's life and romance in every trainload of new Australians to arrive.1

On 9th December, 1947, the Albury paper, the BMN, led with the headlines "Attractive Girls from Baltic Countries": 727 men and 112 girls, all single and all aged between seventeen and thirty, had arrived at Bonegilla. They came, it was reported, from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia: farmers, teachers, office workers, students, stenographers, accountants, an architect, and would-be waitresses. Re-classified, they appear on the nominal rolls as 514 labourers, 75 builders labourers, 140 agricultural workers and the women as domestics, waitresses, housemaids and typists.2

Their average age was twenty-four, the maximum thirty-two, they were either single or widowed and with no families.3 The papers described the girls as "healthy, handsome, with surprisingly good complexions and figures", the men, to complete the stereotype, as "suntanned, strong and particularly good humoured". The article reported them to be enthusiastic and

1. BMN, 24 December 1948, p.3.
2. BMN, 9 December 1947, p.2. No precise numbers were given for these "female" categories.
optimistic raving about the food, the landscape and grateful for all that
had been done for them.4

The succeeding days and weeks brought the camp considerable attention
from the press and gave glimpses of life inside the centre:

They are helping to run their own camp. Besides being rostered
for routine camp maintenance, they are handling individual
jobs.5

These were jobs such as answering the telephone if they had a substantial
command of English; clerical work, and cleaning work, since the camp was
still not fully staffed. Little news was given as to the progress of their
"education", the community being more curious about the "looks" of the new
arrivals and their behaviour than the services provided for them and
whether or not they were adequate. Everyone it seemed was curious about
how the migrants would react to their situation. In a January editorial,
the BMM reflected on the introduction of the "New Australians" into the
community surrounds. After five weeks no complaints had been voiced, and
the migrants, it was noticed, had not yet roamed onto private properties:

The general opinion seems to be that they are "the goods",
"courteous and keen for work". Quite a number of the Balts, in
their time off, worked on nearby farms helping with the harvest
and their energy and adaptability in learning work entirely new
to them was pleasing.6

4. BMM, 9 December 1947, p.2. In an interview Major Kershaw proudly
claimed, "a building has been set aside for screening pictures,
organised games...and swimming excursions", adding, to placate the
well publicised worries among the local community that these
migrants would be a fire risk, "officials in charge of the camp
will instruct the Balts in the observance of fire precautions and
they do not anticipate that they will cause landholders any
concern".

5. BMM, 11 December 1947, p.2. It would become a pattern for migrants
to be recruited into these type of jobs in the centre, making up, at
times, 80% of the staff. See Appendix D,

Visiting government representatives voiced admiration based on similar
criteria of their ability to "adapt":

To begin with their [Department of External Affairs
representatives] enthusiasm for the Balts is unqualified. In
fact the description was "top level" intellectuals, clean,
law-abiding, courteous, friendly and industrious. We are very
lucky to have them. 7

What astonished departmental representatives was the social "calibre" of
this highly selective group of "DP" migrants, when the stereotype of the DP
fitted a more deprived group. 8

On 18th December, Calwell visited Bonegilla "to see Balts being
Australianised", learning songs such as "Three Blind Mice" and "Its a Long
Way to Tipperary", reading poetry from "The Man from Snowy River", "Its a
Sunburnt Country", and to be the delighted observer of a concert presented
in his honour demonstrating the migrants' "cultural" accomplishments. 9 But
despite the happy picture newspapers and official reports painted, work
placement continued to be postponed as businesses took their annual leave,
and all was not running as efficiently as had been hoped. The prolonged
period of stay in the camp caused little consternation in official circles,
but the migrants were not responding in all cases as they "should" to such
an opportunity for "training", and not all the officers involved were as
positive as the "External Affairs" representatives.

7. AA CRS A434, 49/3/25380. Letter from Dr. J. Burton to Hon. A.A.
    Calwell, 19 December 1947.

8. Dr. Crossley, who was to be responsible for the "training" project,
    would write to the DPs, "We were prepared to find the effects of
    malnutrition and harrowing experiences of the past years on the
    intellectual powers of our pupils. But we were soon aware that the
    average of our group was higher than the normal intelligence in a
    cross-section of a stable society". BMM, 21 January 1949.

L. T. Gamble, as acting Commonwealth Migration Officer at the centre, wrote with surprise that a large number of the males had little knowledge of English upon leaving the camp, and, for those who continued to stay on, camp life was having a demoralising effect:

From my observations I come to the conclusion that it is desirable that these DPs spend as short a time as possible in the R&T centre, after they have been medically examined, issued with clothing and been selected for employment.10

The longer the migrants were there the less interest they took in classes and the greater was the "deterioration" in their "behaviour", so that it was necessary in some cases to "reprimand" them for imbibing alcohol.

According to Gamble, the migrants usually responded to these reprimands by pleading to be sent out to work "where he [the migrant] states he will learn the English language quicker than in his class". Often too, the migrants decided to take the situation into their own hands:

Cases have come under notice where some of the migrants have visited farm houses in the vicinity of this centre in an endeavour to obtain employment. When the cases came under notice the farmer was interviewed and has stated that the person concerned has told him that he is sick of camp life and wants to get out to earn money as soon as possible. These cases I consider go to prove that any prolonged educational training would not have been to the advantage of any individual in that frame of mind.11

10. AA CRS A445 174/4/8. 10 January 1948 to Heyes. Gamble as the Department of Immigration's official representative was there to assist migrants with any general inquiries they might have had. cf. AA MP 1722 47/47A/2289 Pt. 1. 17 November 1949, Memo from CES to all state branches: it was claimed that one in five could speak English, and the rest with different degrees of fluency or difficulty.

11. ibid.
Gamble's report highlighted themes which would become important in the lives of each group of migrants who would pass through the camp, and the recurrent problems with the system from the perspective of those migrants. It illuminated the lack of congruity between perspectives on the "success" of the system, between the centre's employment and education function, and between the migrants' expectations and those of the administration, the latter solved through the exercise of discipline and "reprimands".

The first group did finally all find themselves sent out to other places or they obtained jobs within the centre. With policy directing that they were to be "absorbed" in groups of at least five or six, including at least one English speaking migrant in each group, the employment placement process was quite lengthy, and the last of the first group did not leave the camp until 29 January, nearly two months after their arrival.12 By this time the women had been sent out work in their specified areas: nursing positions, hospital work, typing and domestic labour in Canberra, Victoria and New South Wales.13 As the table below indicates, the men, in contrast, were dispersed all over Australia and into areas of employment which hardly reflected their qualifications as the BMM had recorded them, supporting the argument that their usefulness was, initially, perceived in terms of primary rather than secondary industry, and in accord with the

principles outlined by the Department of Labour and National Service prior to their arrival: "the Displaced Persons should, as far as possible, be found employment in country districts in preference to employment in the vicinity of the principal cities".14

Table 1: Employment Allocation of First Group of D.P. Migrants, 1948, Males15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vic:</th>
<th>NSW:</th>
<th>SA:</th>
<th>WA:</th>
<th>TAS:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 Kiewa Dam</td>
<td>25 Building &amp; Material production</td>
<td>16 Salt Harvesting</td>
<td>30 Timber industry</td>
<td>12 Newsprint industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Yallourn (coal)</td>
<td>105 Forestry &amp; Timber</td>
<td>33 Timber industry</td>
<td>65 Waterworks construction</td>
<td>12 Zinc production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Timber Industry</td>
<td></td>
<td>65 Railway construction</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Flax Production</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Export Milk Processing</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Salt Harvesting</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Quarry work</td>
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<tr>
<td>200 Fruit Harvest (reallocated after 6 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
<td>65 Waterworks construction</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Before the first group had been cleared through, the second was already on their way, but they did not arrive until the 12th March.

Numbering 857, including 212 women, this time they were described in the press according to their occupationally reclassified groups: 400 labourers, 126 women factory workers, 223 railway men, 45 domestic, 24 hospital workers and 16 farmers. They included Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians.


15. CIAC, January 1948, Item 10. No corresponding table was provided for females.
Yugoslav fettlers, Ukrainians from the American zone, and 39 married couples without children, whereas, before, only singles had arrived. But not all were to go to Bonegilla. The fettlers were to be sent straight to the South Australian Railways at Port Augusta, and 300 other men were to go fruit picking first, joining the women in the camp when the season was over. The ideal operation of the Reception and Training Centre, that all Displaced Persons be given the advantage of the induction training Course at the Reception and Training Centre and that all placements in employment be made from the Centre, and not from any point en route to it from overseas, was flexible according to specific employment needs. Policy, it seems, did not always accord with the shape the programme took depending on immediate circumstances and re-interpretations at the local level.

16. BMM, 9 March 1948, p.5.
17. CIAC, January 1948, Item 11.
18. AA MP1722 47/47A/2289, Pt. 1. 19 November 1947 D.P. Memo to Mr. R. Marsh – CES Bonegilla. There were other migrants who were passing through the centre from 1948, who also were not encouraged to make use of "training" facilities – the Poles and Maltese arriving as Allied ex-Serviceman, who were expected to have already some contact with Anglo-Saxon culture.
19. This was also the case with the directive regarding working placements which were to include five or six with at least one English speaking migrant. This was not always practical, because it slowed placement down, so was often disregarded.
Report of the arrivals also continued in the BMM, almost always accompanied by photos of "pretty new Australian girls", and with comments on their physical attributes. Concerts were arranged sporadically for the entertainment of prominent Albury citizens and the "girls" were escorted on shopping excursions into Albury, both groups observing each other with some curiosity. The local press remained entranced with the subject of these DPs; editorials praising the ideal of learning from each other or referring to Bonegilla as a "bare and unprepossessing group of huts", also provided assurances that these people were not only assimilable, but that they were not being discriminated against or in favour of:

They are no different from dinky-dis...They have the same facilities for learning, for working, playing, and living as we do...They have something to offer Australia. They possess courage and determination.

Attitudes became entrenched, and media approaches routinised. But in those first few "experimental" years the system itself did undergo some expansion and streamlining.

For the first half of 1948 the scheme went according to plan. All Displaced Persons arriving would travel to Melbourne, via Fremantle - some disembarking at Fremantle where another Reception centre was set up to cope with local employment needs, the remainder boarding trains which took them

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21. BMM, 28 April 1948 Editorial; 20 July, "An afternoon with the Balt Migrants".
to Bonegilla.22 By the second half of 1948 a new Reception and Training Centre had been opened at another ex-army camp, Bathurst, in NSW, to cope with increasing numbers.23 But numbers were not the only difficulties of maintaining "order" facing the system. The "type" of migrant arriving began to include married couples and no adjustments were considered to the basic concept of male/female segregation, despite ensuing social problems.24 Cubicles, whereby a couple could share a room, were only slowly installed in the huts, and were not to reach any stage of significant progress until after the peak of "DPs" had arrived. Further difficulties set in affecting the balance which it had been hoped would be maintained between provision for employment and accommodation.25

Once family "units" were also officially recruited in late 1948, the response was to section off parts of the Reception and Training Centre

22. This was the Holden camp at Northam in W.A.

23. CIAC, 14 April 1948, 7th meeting, Item No. 15. min 156. It was to accommodate up to 1,200 men and not less than 300 women, eight bed camp hospital, and post, thirty classrooms, separate recreation rooms for the sexes, picture theatre and dry canteen.

24. "Reports from the supervisors indicate that some married men are joining their wives in the married women's quarters during the night, and despite the maximum vigilance, it will be very difficult to stamp the practice out". AA CRS A445 174/4/8. Report by Controller, 8-9 May 1949.

25. The very introduction of a greater rate of married couples while it had benefits, also caused some concern within the Department of Labour and National Service, or at least with some of its representatives: "It is only a matter of time before these people commence having families, and this will greatly curtail their employability and aggravate the accommodation angle. The mothers will generally cease to be employable persons, and the fathers will want to emulate the Australian habit of being with the family each night". AA CRS 47/47A/3289, Pt. 3, Department of Labour and National Service, Queensland. Division of Employment, Sydney, 4 August 1948.
where the dependants, separated from their spouses, could continue on at Bonegilla or Bathurst on a more permanent basis while the breadwinner worked out his contract.26 Some arrangements were made to keep families together in the camp, or at least mothers with children, but segregation of the breadwinner from his family was the rule and not the exception until after 1950 when their numbers diminished and arrangements became more manageable.

What began as a result of necessity was soon transformed into an official policy and became a permanent part of a disturbing system whereby the principle of separating dependants from breadwinners was complacently continued. At the time that approval was being given for the building of workers' hostels, special holding centres were established to accommodate the families of those workers, or their "dependants".27 Benalla and Uranquinty were amongst twenty centres set up specifically for this purpose in isolated and converted army camps, and catering in their case for dependants accumulating in Bonegilla.28 In terms of official policy objectives, the system which was being pieced together effectively reinforced the principle of non-confrontation, keeping the families as well as the workers physically segregated from Australian communities.29

27. Senate, 23 June 1949, p.1426. Senator Armstrong (NSW Supply and Development). The system incorporating R & T centres and workers' hostels was generally referred to as the "hostel system".
28. This enforced separation led to headaches for officials as men began taking their families out of holding centres without having accommodation for them. But the spectacle became even more desperate for the many widows and unmarried mothers who also ended up interminably in these centres. B. King, who was a social worker at the Benalla Holding Centre, as well as Bonegilla sporadically from 1952–57 defines the effects of the system: "Benalla was a sad and tragic camp where widows and single mothers were sent. The plan was that they would be able to find work in Benalla fruit factories. It was psychologically a mistake to isolate the women and children from the men. The C.O. there was an army man with little idea of how to cope with the problems. The morale of the women was low and assimilation into the community poor" (Letter 1984).
29. Other migrants were also being incorporated into the system i.e. Poles and Maltese arriving under the ex-Allied Servicemen's Scheme or other agreements. They would not stay in the centre for longer than a few days, only to be allocated to employment not to be "trained". AA CRS A434 50/3/28888 Accommodation Plans for DPs 2 July 1948.
By 1949 then, the migration of Displaced Persons was a booming industry; Reception and Training centres and hostels had sprung up in most states, and a network of Holding Centres and workers' hostels had also been put into operation. The Ministry of National Development argued that the primary objectives of the accommodation arrangements, including the Reception Centre, was "the placing of migrants in hostels located where they can make the maximum contribution to essential production and regional development". The Immigration Department continued to have direct control over those facilities provided specifically for the non-British DP migrant, the Reception Centre and the Holding Centre, while the workers' hostels were under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labour and National Service.

The boom in DP numbers meant that Bonegilla's own capacity was doubled in 1948 to 4,000. By 1950 with an expected 90,000 DPs arriving, Bonegilla could accommodate 7,700 migrants and 1,600 more in emergency conditions by setting up tents on its outskirts. The expansion in the transient population capacity meant that the centre's administration was also reorganised, through subdivision into three smaller areas of control.

30. These hostels were of the type that Peters had advocated in his memorandum (see chapter 2) and assisted in the diversification of employment opportunities for the migrants since they could be easily despatched in large numbers to areas where the hostels were located, but only as single workers, no room being provided to accommodate families.


32. The latter also co-ordinated workers' hostels in preparation for anticipated British migrants, but built around the principle of housing families, rather than the segregation operative in the case of the DPs.

33. AA CRS A434 49/3/18017 Pt.2. October 1949, CIPC, Aug 1950, Immigration centre capacities as at 31 August 1950. In 1948/49 33,816 arrived, in 1949/50 89,217, and in 1950 alone, it was expected that 8,500 would arrive in February, 10,000 in March, 10,000 in April, 4,000 in May, 4,000 in June, (AA 1969/441).

34. Letter Pat Smith, 1984.
Each new centre was to have its own Director, and the old position of Director was retitled "District Controller". The Controller, ex-major Kershaw, had an assistant who was responsible for most of his administrative tasks, ex-Sgt. Dawson, while he himself became the camp's "unofficial diplomat". 35 Each centre ran independently from the Headquarters which was to co-ordinate their activities. 36 But the system quickly grew unwieldy and only added to the bureaucratisation of the "community" which had been established, setting up even greater barriers between the migrants passing through and operations on a policy as well as a programme level. 37

35. *ibid.*

36. *ibid.* Centre 1 was administered by Mr. Heywood and became the temporary home for assisted British immigrants during their brief introduction to life at Bonegilla; Centre 2 which was a Holding centre from 1949-51 was under the control of ex-Brigadier Lemaire and Pat Smith was administrative officer there until he went on to become Chief Administrative Officer under the District Controller; and Centre 3 for "other migrants", was under the jurisdiction of Mr. Clifford.

37. Once the number of migrants had also diminished in 1951 the Department of Immigration replaced the system with the previous centralised arrangement having only one Director.
This, then, was the general administrative and "community" setting into which the Displaced Persons were introduced between the years 1947 and 1951. Despite the structural modifications and innovations to the accommodation system which were progressively made in order to reinforce the main employment objectives, the later "DPs" experiences would, in many cases, repeat those of the first arrivals. But so far we have only examined their time at the centre as reported through newspaper accounts and in terms of initial policy responses to the form of the immigration programme. These responses underline the migrant's lack of personal representation within the centre and within the formulation of policies which were to profoundly affect their first few years in Australia, their experiences being generalised and categorised through the common processing they underwent.38 In the following chapter I will examine more fully the manner in which the reception, training and employment allocation functions of the camp actually operated over the "DP" period, 1947-1951, by taking into account some of those migrants' own "responses" in conjunction with the available reports and recollections of administrative operations.

38. Something which the writer is all too conscious of doing, but in an attempt to recreate the manner in which the migrants were received and absorbed, rather than to under-estimate the wealth of diversity in backgrounds and individual experience. See Appendix A, B and C.
CHAPTER 4
PASSING THROUGH: THE "DP" ERA 1947-1951

Our reception arrangements including education of DPs in English and the Australian way of life, and the conditions under which they are employed have been a subject of much favourable comment and, it has been stated, set a standard for other countries concerned in the settlement within their borders of these unfortunate people.1

I was too tired, too shocked, too disappointed, and everything in the bush frightened me.2

If the physical appearance of Bonegilla and circumstances surrounding each arrival altered, what changed very little during that time was the manner in which the incoming "assisted migrants" were received, "trained" and allocated to employment.3 Whether each migrant went through all these procedures or not and whether they all viewed the system from the same perspective, is another matter.4 Discrepancies occur between what the officials claim was supposed to happen and did happen, and what the migrants remember as happening. But, as McLaren, a social worker visiting in 1950, observed, the routine of reception and clearance occurred so often that it proceeded very smoothly indeed, even if, in its routinisation, it

1. Minister's June 1st message to Lord Pakenham, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. CIAC, 8th meeting, 11 August 1948, Item 4.
3. See Appendix D.
4. See Appendix D.
could not cater for all migrants all of the time and the migrants
themselves often had little recognition of what was occurring or why.5

When a ship docked at Port Melbourne with perhaps 800 to over 1,000
migrants destined for Bonegilla, immigration authorities were there waiting
to greet it, to match up numbers with their own checklists, and to escort
them onwards.6 The migrants, without really knowing where they were going,
were then shepherded on to special trains and, eight hours or so later,
they would arrive at Bonegilla siding. The journey there, passing the
alien Australian landscape, further and further from any urban centre, was
an unexpected and often frightening adventure in itself, and once at the
siding the situation could be even more forbidding.7 For one "DP" who was
recruited as a Block Supervisor at the camp, his own arrival experience was
constantly replayed for him in the three years that he was there:

I received every train that came in, if it came at four o'clock
in the morning or two in the morning I was there...the flaw of
putting people at four in the morning on a very cold night at a
railway siding with nothing but grass...and then put them in a
bus and then take them to a hut...with twenty-five beds, no
partitions, nothing at all...My wife went into one hut and the
men into another hut in the middle of the bush...to us the bush
is a different story, we were people who came from very urbanised
societies...and to be dumped in the bush with trees and the
stories of snakes and things like that...was a bit of a shock to
people's systems. And that was perhaps one of the psychological
mistakes.8

5. AA CRS A457, 49/6/381, "Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre,
March 21-23 1950". A pamphlet was prepared in 1948 in order to
inform the migrants in European camps of the life awaiting them in
Australia, unfortunately "Gleuck in der Neuen Heimat" also
romanticised not only "Bonegilla, but the "holiday" time awaiting
them. AA CRS A436 48/5/506. See Appendix D.

6. Dymtro Chubb, a Ukrainian who arrived in Bonegilla in 1949 as a DP,
has written an autobiographical account about these early
experiences, So This is Australia (Bajda Books, Melb., 1980), see
The more informed of the migrants may have known that they were going to
Bonegilla, but even then, the name meant little:

We did not know where it is, or at least, we could not imagine
quite where it is. That is, in the middle of nowhere, just a few
tin sheds...We knew Bonegilla is going to be a Reception Centre
from where we are going to be sent to different consignments
which would be found for us.9

For Mrs. "N", the reception process took on a more chaotic air:

...it was getting dark...George had the luggage...we arrived in
Bonegilla it was already sunset...we got out...men all this side,
women all that side. Some people panicked because they had heard
concentration camp too, men one side, women other side...we were
separated, and it was getting dark and we didn't know. We were
just like cattle, here follow us...men were more than one
kilometre away. We were not told. We were just treated like
stupid sheep. If they had said, look, this is just a processing
centre, this is temporary...tomorrow we will sort it out...10

Recollections of the process of reception by staff are more precise and
lack the disoriented sense of the migrant being directed into an alien
world. For them the process was one of successive and well-organised
stages repeated endlessly in the long history of the Reception Centre:
Sandwiches and tea, a welcoming speech and allocation to huts. The next
day followed a more formal address which officially informed the migrants
of their role in Australia: of Australia's expectations of them; of the

7. Chubb captures the fear that many of the immigrants expressed in
their descriptions of that journey: "The night was dark and
forbidding as the train carried us European refugees from Melbourne
to the transit camp at Bonegilla. Lightning flashed in the
distance and occasional raindrops splattered the windows of our
small, comfortable carriages...Though it was May, the last month
of autumn, the ground was covered in grass and the trees still had
leaves. Occasionally dead hulks of trees which seemed to emphasise
the uncertainty of our situation swept past the windows". ibid,
p.15.

8. Taped interview, Mr. Franken.


flag and what it represented; of the necessity of learning the English
language; and of access to information and assistance.11 While it can be
expected that many of the arrivals were either too tired or too deficient
in the English language to make much of what was said, some did, and what
they heard was not always very promising or welcoming, particularly if they
were professionals. H.B.M. Murphy, who had spent some time with a group of
DP migrants upon arrival at the centre, describes the welcome that met
them:

The group that I travelled with, containing two doctors, a
veternarian, several lawyers and other professional people were
given a reception address by the camp commandant in which it was
stated that it was of no use their showing diplomas to employers
etc, because everyone (in Australia) knew that they had been
bought on the blackmarket in Europe.12

Such attitudes were hardly conducive to endearing these migrants to their
new compatriots, particularly if they are read as legitimations of wider
policy and community attitudes.

After the welcome, there was the actual confrontation with the
provided facilities and accommodation:

11. Letter from Col. Henry Quinn. Not all Directors disposed of their
welcoming role as efficiently and professionally as others. Major
Kershaw, the first Director, lacked a certain diplomatic tact. He
approached his task with all the verve of an army leader addressing
his troops. These early arrivals (1947-1949) found themselves
arriving at Bonegilla sideling only to be later addressed with
paternal reminiscences of previous hardships and the pioneer spirit.
The formula included a reminder of how lucky they, the "DPs" were,
because Kershaw's own grandmother had not had the luxury of
travelling the countryside in trains but of having to walk. Taped
Egon Kunz claims that Kershaw had been a POW camp commandant during
the war, but provides no evidence, The Intruders (ANU Press;
Studies, 5:3, (March 1952) p.182. The speech itself seems to have
been delivered by rote, as Kunz also describes such an introduction
to another group's experience of the Australian way of life:
"But whatever promises they were given in Europe, or whatever fears
that they may have held, they certainly did not expect that when
they arrived in Australia they would encounter attitudes by
reception staff which were, according to one doctor who later left
Australia, 'full of prejudice, plainly hostile, and purposely
...in the camp theatre we were assigned our accommodation, and
soon after I entered one of the tin bungalows, which contained
two rows of beds, on each of which were a mattress, four
blankets, sheets, a pillow, and towels. On the ceiling near the
light bulb sat two enormous moths...The married men were assigned
one set of bungalows, the wives and children another, and the
single adult members of families yet another. Immediately people
began to seek each other out. Husbands searched for their
families. The women's quarters were similar to the men's. There
were no stoves, no dividing partitions, and the outside walls had
a half metre wide gap all the way around covered in wire netting.
Tears filled the eyes of well-bred ladies unaccustomed to such
luxury. It was cold and miserable..."so this is Australia?", a
four year old girl asked her parents.13

There are as many different stories to be told about these early first
impressions as there were migrants, and not all are negative. For those
DPs I interviewed who had arrived in Australia after having already spent a
few years in camps in Europe, the more usual pattern was one of
over-expectation followed by disappointment or disillusion. Conditions did
not always live up to expectations of the lucky country, nor did work
placement and non-recognition of qualifications:

When we arrived in the bay of Melbourne, it was King George
Day...and we were so happy finally that we left European camp
behind that we didn't even think about it...we thought we
disembark at ten o'clock in the morning...there was a train, we
did not know where to go, what to say...I think they only told me
we were going to a reception centre and we didn't know what a
reception centre was...Bonegilla we didn't worry, it was just

12. (cont) Of course such an attitude was not representative of the
whole camp. "Barbara" and "E.K." themselves, as teachers at the
camp during the DP period, complained of the attitude of the
administration as a separate group in the camp hierarchy.
See Appendix G : Frantz story.

13. Chubb, Op. cit. p. 16. His reference is to a "half metre" wide gap,
but in my other interviews it was more often referred to as
approximately six inches wide. See Mr. Franken, Mrs "K", "Boris".
another camp it didn't hit us. A few days after it hit us, when...I apply for a certain job and he say no, you go whatever come around,...then slowly. It took us quite a while to register really, I start to register properly when I went on to Mildura, really...me, mother and younger sister in the camp there and very hot day, then mother start to say...we carry on the cross...Look where we are...14

What "Pino" offers us is a general impression of confusion regarding the system into which he and his family were thrust. It is that "system" which needs closer scrutiny as policy being actively applied and modified on a local level into an evolving programme.

The first week at the Reception Centre was paid for by the Department of Immigration. As well, it had been decided to pay transient migrants a "special benefit", an allowance of twenty-five shillings a week. Eligibility for the benefit was meant to give the migrant an economic status in parity with that of the "average Australian", but after the first week one pound was deducted automatically from that amount towards the cost of maintenance of the centre.15 The migrant then retained five shillings to cover incidental expenses, which was usually enough to purchase a few packets of cigarettes and some stamps.16 This situation of dependancy upon the centre for food and accommodation, and limited funds, although


15. AA MP 1722 47/47A/2289 Pt. 1. Department of Social Services to Department of Immigration, F.H. Rowe Director-General, 1 December 1947.

appreciated, meant also that employment was a major aspiration of the migrants, just as it was the most significant of expectations. Without assurance of employment, any other fringe benefits, such as English "training" or social service benefits, were worthless. While they were given the opportunity of refusing two jobs before they could be compelled to take what was offered or threatened with deportation, according to H.B.M. Murphy, in the groups he had observed, the majority took up the first job offered in an attempt to give their "new life" a real start, out of the camp and on a wage. 17 But the particular circumstances into which the migrants were introduced also dictated to an extent their response to the employment situation. King, who was a social worker at various Reception and Holding centres including Bonegilla, offers a general impression of the differing role of employment for migrants in these varying circumstances:

This was the most important thing in their lives. In summer when there was grape harvesting and fruit picking in the south and cane-cutting in Queensland, life was hectic with men being sent off to jobs, wives and families to follow if and when accommodation was found. In winter when jobs took longer to find and there wasn't as much demand for unskilled men then morale was low. Some went off unaided to look for work. This was risky for them because there was a rule that prohibited them from

"The number who have to be reminded of their contract by being left in the reception camp without a work permit until they agree to accept the work they previously refused was unofficially estimated for me to be about 5% of the reception camps' capacity - say, less than a hundred at the time of my visit - and the number who have been sent back to Europe for persistent refusal or obstructiveness in work is very small indeed". circa. 1949.
returning to the camp if they failed to find a job. Doubtless some did and kept themselves hidden from Block Supervisors. You can guess that the YWCA officer and I, in our small way, tried every contact we had in the surrounding district to find jobs for individual migrants, some single, some married. These would be men who just could not be fitted into any of the categories of work at the employment office.18

What these migrants had in common with the "first arrivals", was not only their aspirations, but that their prospects for employment centered on allocation from Bonegilla. The process of registering migrants for employment, interviewing them and finally placing them was only meant to take up to ten days, but the procedure held the key to the immediate destiny of the migrants and their families.

The day after arriving at the centre, migrants would be called up over the loudspeaker to register for employment. Once at the employment office they were confronted with four tables, each supervised by a resident CES officer. Each table's purpose was defined by a sign in German which corresponded to the categories: "single men", "single women", "married couples" and "heads of families".19 The intending employee who fitted into the major categories would attend the suitable table whereupon the employment officer would commence the interview.20 This consisted of


19. The reasons for this categorisation, the brainchild of local CES authorities, were obviously pertinent to the differing employment potential of men and women within the employment placement process, but also to the particular problems associated with placing married couples or "breadwinners" with families from an accommodation point of view. Taped interview, Alex Connolly, CES Officer, Bonegilla, 1948-51, (1984).

20. ibid.
using an interpreter, usually German speaking, and asking the migrants questions concerning basic details about their backgrounds. The migrants were then classified, "just the same as an Australian", except that their work or educational qualifications had little or no bearing.21 What counted was the nature of employment requisites being sent in from various states and private companies, and individual employers.22

From the migrants' perspective, accounts as to this procedure of employment "interviewing" differ from denials that it ever took place to a memory of a different procedure likened to a "cattle auction" whereby the potential migrant employees were prodded in order to discover their physical condition:23

Before getting this job [as interpreter at Bonegilla], I was once standing in this line of job seekers, and there were what looked to me like peasants from outside wanting perhaps some seasonal help and they were sort of looking us up and down and one of them actually touched me to see whether I had any muscles and I immediately turned around and told him to take his dirty paws off me or I am going to flatten him. I said I am not a cattle and if you do not want to employ me that is alright with me, and if I don't find employment I might as well be sent back to Europe, I will not be treated like cattle, and they were a little bit perplexed because I spoke English as well as any other language, and I ticked them off for most unbecoming behaviour.24

21. Taped interview, Gerry Catling, CES Officer, Bathurst then Bonegilla 1952-1964, (1984). Although he was CES Officer over such a long period, he remarks on the absence of change in the actual procedure.


24. Taped interviews, "Boris", see also "Joe", "Louis", (all 1984).
"Boris" ended up living at Bonegilla for almost two years as an interpreter in the hospital, regarding it as a better way to work out his contract than risk being placed in a remote private industry area. 25 A similar episode is recalled by Mrs. "N", whose husband "George" also faced an employment line-up. George wanted to do farm work, but when the "N's" had arrived at Bonegilla, they were warned by other migrants not to go on a farm, where they would be isolated and become the farmers' "slaves". The "N's" had other aims in mind, ironically enough not that distant from the official assimilation objectives: "We were interested to meet Australians, improve our knowledge of English, and learn about life in Australia". 26 So when Mrs. "N" was called over the loudspeaker to be interviewed for a cook's position on the same farm, she told them she couldn't cook so that they would not be sent away. Her feelings were resentful, "they wanted to keep us down that was obvious". 27 The descriptions of "cattle type" auctions in a period when rural or seasonal work took up a large proportion of DP labour was not, according to CES officers who had been employed at Bonegilla, strictly government policy. 28 The appearance of the employer at the camp was generally discouraged, although they admit it may have been practised by some officers.

25. With a Masters degree in International Studies from Geneva, and many other military as well as academic achievements to his credit, he was probably better suited to the former. See also Franken, and Appendix D.

26. Together with her husband, Mrs. "N" was finally placed in a wool carding factory in northern Victoria.

27. Taped interview, Mrs. "N".

28. Taped interviews, Connolly, Catling.
The difficulty of attempting to translate policy into a working programme was encountered in other phases of the employment placement process, particularly the co-ordination of placements with "suitable" migrants. Migrants were often left to wonder at the logic of the system's well known inequities, and even the Department of Labour and National Service acknowledged that certain problems needed to be tackled:

This system holds the administration up to discredit in the eyes of Displaced Persons in that when they volunteer for a type of employment they are told none is available and later learn that their friends have been sent to the particular type of employment which they wanted. Other situations arise in which Displaced Persons are able to tell the Employment Officer in the centre of vacancies in jobs alongside friends who arrived on earlier transports, but which are known to the employment officer in the centre.29

Such difficulties were compounded by the limited scope of areas in which the officers were allowed to place Displaced Persons, and the complexity of policy strictures (from Canberra) regarding standards of accommodation. Added to this was the policy of not encouraging migrants to go outside of the system to seek work, which they were apt to do if the waiting period became overly long. The irony was that this became common recourse just

29. Letter to the Assistant Secretary of the Encouraged Migration Division, from G.C. Watson 15 March 1949. AA CRS A434 50/3/13 P 2
In the same letter from Watson described from a CES officers perspective the process which took place after the interview had been staged:
"When this classification is completed the Central Office advises the Central Employment Officer of a limited number of vacancies. The Employment Officer then endeavours to fill these vacancies and despatch the people allocated to them to their jobs. Central Office then advises him of further vacancies which are filed and people sent off. It would appear that allocation to employment is usually done in several stages, the most difficult jobs to fill being notified and filled first. In effect the employment officer has a limited number of vacancies and has to fill them irrespective of the suitability of people for specific jobs. This reverses the normal procedure of a non-governmental employment agency which obtains the vacancies first and then tries to find suitable people for them."
because of the system's inflexibility. 30 Yet at least the lack of real opportunity or recognition of qualifications were temporarily acceptable in ways that long periods of waiting for employment and separation of families and married couples were not. In the peak years (1949-51) there were forty officers who were called upon at times to process about a thousand migrants a week. 31 While attempts were made by sympathetic officers to try and keep married couples and families together, they were fighting an accommodation system and labour market which was not structured around the family unit, and in fact worked to thwart such considerations in its reliance on bulk requisitioning and mass processing. 32

Apart from the problem of matching up suitability for certain employment or accommodation needs and family or marital situations, there were certain groups who were singled out as creating special problems for which the Departments of Labour and National Service and of Immigration, or the local administration could find no real solution within the basic employment and accommodation policies. They were among those who consistently found it difficult to find or be found a niche within the system: unsupported women with children (whether widowed or unmarried);

30. Taped interview, Franken. Such attempts were foiled though very often as CES strictures meant that unless the job was in a priority area it would have to be declined.

31. Taped interview, Connolly.

32. See Appendix D for the problems of separation of families that this caused. Particularly since young males and females over the age of sixteen were also subject to placement.
youths under eighteen who paid the same hostel fees but earned less wages; and those suffering from injury or disease. In 1948, Eve Morrison, the visiting social worker, memoed some of these cases as representative of wider problems and not as "isolated cases". It was most often women who were long term victims of employment programmes, and of the lack of co-ordination between employment officers and social workers or migrants themselves, particularly married mothers and widows with children who could not be housed near the mother's employment.

In the face of inconsistencies in the programme, and with a projected increasing continuum of migrants expected in 1949 and 1950, the Department of Labour and National Service decided that it would be of benefit to the economy if certain modifications were made to the placement process. The CES officers' discretion in regard to the employment placement of individual migrants was to be extended as was the scope of work available for the DPs.


34. AA CRS A434 50/3/7477, Memo; Morrison, 16 July 1948.

35. For those able to find placement at a centre such as Bonegilla life was at least a little simpler, since children were not separated if you worked there and some security of accommodation and food were freely available. Taped interview, Mrs. Kotov (1984). See Appendix D for the particular circumstances of the permanent migrants in the camp. Children could not always stay with parents even in this situation though, the Franken's had to board their child in Albury.

36. AA CRS A434, 50/3/13, p.2. Letter from Watson, 15 March 1949. "From now on, however there will in effect be a continual stream of DPs arriving and the real problem will be to move people quickly out of the camp rather than to divide a limited number of people amongst a few high priority jobs. It is considered that quick movement through the centres and placement in employment more in keeping with the individual aptitudes of displaced persons could be achieved if the CES were to place greater confidence and greater discretion in the hands of the employment officers in the centres. If these officers had before them at the actual time when they were interviewing displaced persons lists of jobs for filling in excess of actual number of persons to be placed, it is
...women displaced persons may be placed in nursing, domestic and like work; in hospitals, institutions and schools; in private homes, with priority for certain designated classes of citizens with community obligations; as waitresses, maids and the like (but not barmaids), in hotels, and guest and boarding houses; as typists and stenographers; in laundries, in food processing and in the manufacture of textiles and footwear and household equipment.

Men may be placed in the production of basic iron and steel products building materials, furniture, and household equipment; in rural works; in mining and quarrying; in public constructional work; in forestry; with public utilities; in the manufacture of pastoral and agricultural machinery and the like; food processing; and as wardsmen, gardeners, helps etc. hospitals, institutions, schools and the like. To avoid as far as possible the breaking up of families, a wide discretion is allowed to the CES as to the employment in which members of families may be placed.37

Yet whether or not such changes had an enormous effect on the quality of the migrants' experiences is more difficult to discern; even the expanded employment prospects were of a limited nature. According to the testimonies of migrants in the situation of "Sylvanna" and "Pino", who arrived after this directive was issued, it would seem that again it was more difficult to activate such changes on a practical level. In itself this is understandable considering the pace of arrivals and departures at the centre with which the administration had to cope. For example, in 1950 it was expected that the numbers of arrivals would require movement from

36. (cont) thought that not only would their work be easier, but there would be less misfits and in the end the same object would be achieved, namely all DPs would be placed in suitable employment.

37. AA CRS A434 48/3/11162. Those changes correspond with changes in the local administration system. See Chapter 3. Trade Testing facilities were not introduced until the following year at Bonegilla and Bathurst, but even these were inadequate in terms of enabling more skilled migrants to have their qualifications recognised. CIPC 6 March 1951, Agenda 11.
Bonegilla to employment at the rate of 1,600 from the 21st February to the 28th, 3,300 from the 1st March to 31st, 2,500 in April, and another 2,500 in May. The pressure on all staff, including employment officers, could at times be overwhelming and was for two years almost constant. Such conditions were also accentuated by events such as the 1949 coal strike, and the 1949/50 rail strike both of which hampered movement in and out of the camp for most of that year.

In July 1949, the SMH reported that 10,000 Displaced Persons were without jobs because of the coal strike, and yet migrants continued to arrive at the rate of 2,000 a week. Certain steps were taken to ease the congestion, such as the conversion of Holding centres into temporary reception camps. Tents were erected to cope with excess capacities, housing about 1,600 at Bonegilla. According to policy they were only for men, but "Sylvanna's" own family were in these tents for about three weeks. Emergency work was created at military bases, and men defied policy by seeking their own work with some help from local CES officers. In such chaotic conditions certain policy strictures had to be re-emphasised even if along with attempts at alleviating the migrant's situation:

38. AA 1969/441. Or, as Smith recalls a day in the life in the camp: "On November 8th, 1950 three ships arrived in Melbourne, on the same day there was a rail strike, 5,000 migrants awaited. Earlier in the day starting at 5 a.m. we commenced to move out 3,000 people partly dependants going to family centres and partly workers going to Sydney in three special trains from Albury. In between the people leaving to go away and the first lot of new people arriving from Melbourne at 7 p.m. The actual operation of moving 3,000 people out and 5,000 people in took 24 hours and we were totally on duty the whole time without a break". Letter, 1984.

39. 12th July, p.2. "Strike means no jobs, more classes for migrants".
40. AA MP 1722 49/23/5390. Temporary transfer of Displaced Persons from Reception and Training centres to Migrant Workers Accommodation Division Hostals, Policy and Procedure. "This movement is a transfer to other accommodation and not a movement to employment. Arrangements will be made by the CW Employment Centre at a later date to place you in employment. In the meantime you must not seek employment by your own efforts". Taped interview, Catling, Rofil. Letter, Smith.
It is desired to emphasise that in the present industrial disruption the displaced person stood down is in the same position as an Australian similarly without work. Although it is appreciated that he is without the usual resources of Australians and has less mobility in his choice of jobs, differential treatment cannot be given which would place DPs in a more advantageous position than Australian workers. 41

Such official thinking, which revolved around the combined principles of egalitarianism and discrimination, would dominate the response to crisis situations in the future as it had in the past. But the local administration also conceived its own means of ensuring a certain order and efficiency was maintained in the camp. The same year, probably in response again to that stimulus of unstable conditions, the principle of a disciplined camp was reinforced with the organisation of an "Area Patrol" to assist the only other representative of law and order in the camp, a local constable from Albury. 42 Constituted only of migrants, the patrol had to serve purposes such as the "regulation and control of traffic, maintenance of order in the camp, marshalling duties, firefighting". 51 The body became a regular institution in the camp for about five years under Dawson's administration, even though its permanent existence went against official policy. 43


42. AA CRS A434 50/3/47288, 29 September 1950. Memo from Dawson to Raidme. This was also reinforced by the prohibition of alcohol in the centre.

43. ibid. The Area Patrol was created by Dawson, who was still only A/G District Controller and yet dominated the camp administration.
More orthodox strategies of keeping the migrants in order were also retained, such as the use of educational facilities to keep them occupied while they were out of work. Education in English or "training", seemed always to reach greatest prominence when periods of difficulties with employment placement arose, partially justifying decisions to keep the migrants there. Although it was intended that "training" would play a significant role in the lives of the migrants at Bonegilla, when employment demands for migrants were frequent education usually came second in camp and official priorities.

Even apart from its conflicting purposes with employment allocation, in practice the educational aspect of Bonegilla's function was less successful than had been hoped, as is seen in the accounts of experiences of the first arrivals. The head of the programme, Dr. Crossley, had prepared some instructional material in the form of a book, "English for Newcomers to Australia", but he also preferred to place his faith in a simplistic approach to teaching: songs with English words, and the prominent placement of Australian flags and Union Jacks around classrooms, seeing this move as "wise from a political viewpoint".45 When questioned by the SMH in 1949 as to his experiences at Bonegilla he claimed,

43. Its creation as a permanent civilian police at the centre was not in keeping with policy which permitted the use of such a force only temporarily in extreme cases at the Director's discretion. AA CRS A434 50/3/7164. Instruction to Migrant centres. Schroder, June, 1950.

migrants could sing "pack up your troubles", the school "theme song" within a week of their arrival, and they sang it with feeling. In teaching pronunciation, the standard adopted is educated Australian sometimes to the bewilderment of our pupils outside the classroom, when they hear expressions like "Ayrdoonmite" and "Arnchergontergetcherpie".46

From the Commonwealth Office of Education's point of view, the teaching of the English language was to involve the imparting of a whole new culture embodied in "Australianisation" lessons and notions of pronunciation and social behaviour as well as familiarity with the spoken language, at least one hour each day is devoted to giving information about Australia including brief historical and geographical facts, information about Australian life and manners and useful and necessary items to be used by the migrant when he goes out into the community...Emphasis is laid on pronunciation practice but it is unlikely that adult migrants will entirely lose the accents that mark them out as foreigners.47

The problem with such theoretical objectives was their application within a reception and allocation to employment situation which meant that the benefits of the programme for the migrants themselves were inconsistent.

Teachers had only the experience which they were to gain from the actual Bonegilla "experiment" to use as guides, and had to cope on occasions with attitudes within the centre that understood little about the task with which they were faced. Education in the English language for

46. 21 January 1949, p.2.

47. AA CRS 48/23/3295, Dept. of Labour and National Service. Central Office Employment Division. Acc. MP 240/1. General correspondence file, 1946-1953. See also Miller, 1950 A.C.C. "We have in mind two things. First we give the newcomers a start in using English...secondly we try to give them a start in understanding our society. We have woven these things together".
the purpose of speaking rather than reading or writing could serve a worthwhile immediate purpose as far as the local administration were concerned, "just to keep them occupied", or in the long term, training could mean to "stuff as much English into people as we could possibly do in four weeks before the next transport of 1,000 came". 48 Despite complaints by teachers that "it took years for a more serious attitude to be developed about the course", certain facilities were provided by the Commonwealth Office of Education and the Department of Immigration, as requested by the local teachers. There were permanent classrooms equipped with picture materials and teaching aids library and a reading and study room. 49 Instructors at the camp and advisors, particularly George Pitman, together developed and refined the techniques of the "direct" method of teaching, which was meant to be able to cater for the lack of a common language amongst the migrants by being action-oriented rather than language specific. 50 Special teaching aids and course work books were devised out of the immediate needs of the migrant teaching situation, and around this


49. The library held only pictorial or overly advanced books in English, since the whole field of second language teaching was relatively unprofessionalised. Conferences were held between teachers at Bathurst and Bonegilla to consult over the efficacy of methods etc., but again they were thrown back on their own experiences. Taped interview, Caminer.

50. George Pitman, who helped organise the education programme at Bonegilla and then Bathurst, also developed the "situational" or "direct" method into an organised teaching method which was to remain at the forefront of language teaching techniques for at least the next twenty years. The technique is described in a short story by Lucija Bertsins, "The Berlitz Method", Ed. N. Jurgensen, Ethnic Australia Brisbane : Phoenix, 1981: "It is a system which is based on the use of verbs mainly. You leave out all the adjectives in the beginning, use as few nouns as possible and concentrate on the use of verbs. You have to teach as many verbs as you can". p.195.
method. Such books combined the tasks of setting exercises in language training with the introduction of migrants to famous Australians and the significance of the monarchy to the Australian way of life.51 Pictures of the Queen were also mandatory in classrooms, and films were shown focusing on the Australia of sheep and wheat with simplified narratives provided by the teachers, who were again given the task of making the most practical use of the misguided Office of Education's notions of "training".52

While "Australianisation" was offered in conjunction with English "training", it had its own official role to perform:

The course is determined primarily by their [migrants] immediate or early needs, secondly by the needs of other government departments which have dealings with the migrants, and thirdly by the natural interests of the people in the history, geography and social organisation of their new country.53

The problems arose with the differing perspectives of the migrants, teachers and departmental representatives on just what those "immediate or early needs" might be. Of those migrants who were aware of and attended language classes, not all of them saw the value of Crossley's song and poetry method, and had their own ideas of what areas of "Australianisation" they would prefer to examine.54 It was this that disturbed an otherwise grateful "DP" doctor who had resided temporarily at Bathurst:


53. AA MP 240/1, 48/23/3295, Mills.

54. Pino Bosi, in Farewell Australia, Kurunda, 1972 commented, "...my teacher at Bonegilla had taught us to sing 'Roaming in the Gloaming' and he was pleased with me because I could roll the "r" like a true Scot. True, I had vainly tried to see the relevance of learning Scottish songs as a form of acclimatisation to Australia, but then again, I don't know. Menzies had just become Prime Minister I suppose". p.13.
Everything in your system is well thought over and tries to help us in our future in Australia...[except] the political side of this primary education of new settlers: Having here good food and accommodations, studying English language, Australian customs, mood of life etc. the newcomer has no newspapers which he can understand, no political information, lectures etc., more than that you directly advise him not be be interested in the "politics" but think of his future life, sports etc...55

Dr. Kalinowsky's concern with the political side of Australian life was an extension of the DPs' awareness of the political context from which they had just emerged and a determination that events would not have chance to repeat themselves in their new life. It also reflected the extent of the isolation which the migrants could feel, being left ignorant of the workings of the society into which they had been introduced for a specific purpose. Similarly "Rolf", who arrived from Latvia in 1949, remembers no lessons being given, only a visiting lecture from an Austrian instructor, who imparted certain advice about "how to relate...how to adjust...";

I remember only two things which he emphasised...There's two things you don't talk about with Australians...religion and politics.56

Of course not all migrants ever expected a thorough grounding, the ability to practise their English would have been enough of a gain. "Hans" recollects his own reasons for finally wishing to leave the camp, which


are ironic when read in the context of the official objectives of assimilation:

During this time we came into very little contact with the English speaking, or let us say Australians, very little contact. It was really so bad that if you wanted to grasp a little more everyday English it was nearly impossible. You learnt all other languages beside it but not English. And that was one of the reasons why I got sick and tired of it and got out...57

During the "DP years" there was no shortage of official criticism of the programme's value within the Reception Centre, but in regard to employment priorities rather than the migrants' own misgivings. Despite the devotion of teachers to their task, attendances were frequently down, and women under represented.59 In 1949, the co-ordinator of the Reception and Training Centres, J. Schroder, argued about the programme's inefficiency during a time when accommodation was short and English teaching facilities were taking up valuable hut space; teaching staff were occupying too many potential migrant quarters and were undercharged for their "messing".60 More emphasis, he added, could be placed on education within the Holding centres for women, and in continuation classes for men, with perhaps the use of exclusively audio-visual material for those in the camp with a

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57. Taped interview, Hans L. c/f "Gordana": "So Bonegilla was like a real heaven for us and we stayed about nine months there. It was a comfortable place and interesting too but you were not in real Australia at all. You had all sorts of people from everywhere and you did not have to speak English, that was the main thing. You could live there and work and not speak one word of English". M. Loh, The Immigrants, Penguin, 1977, p.83.

58. Letter from Senator Lajovic, 1984

59. Migrant children were largely uncatered for until 1952 when a State school, mainly for the camps migrant workers' children was established in the centre. Vision & Realisation, Ed. L.J. Blake, Education Department of Victoria, 1973, P.1027. See Appendix D.

60. AA CRS A445 174/4/8, Report by Controller - Reception Training Holding Centre on visit to Bonegilla on 8 and 9 May 1949.
working knowledge who may wish to brush up. The burden of "training" could be taken off the Reception Centre, and located in the outside community.

Schroder’s complaints were further supported by the lack of attendance at classes and the hold that they placed on employment placement.61 Instead, in the following year, the states took over the education services with Commonwealth funding, so that the responsibility was merely passed on.62 The effect was that the "training" function, although continued, was even further downplayed in favour of the employment function of the camp.

Reasons for fickle attendance varied: some women had the problem of caring for children for whom classes were not provided,63 or more generally "it depended on the teacher to a large extent, or the weather...If it was hot they'd go swimming, if it was frightfully cold, everyone stayed in bed".64 It was obvious that staff attendance was more fully supervised, thus the more favourable ratio of participation. But this did not mean that the transients were merely ignored. In this situation pressure was placed on the local administration in order to make the programme more successful. Attendance at school was to be enforced wherever possible:

61. ibid. While the reports from the Education Centre in 1950 could admit, "From the first it was obvious that the vast majority of the course would be given little opportunity to learn English or increase what knowledge they already had", Heyes to write to Schroder, "The instruction in English at the Reception centres consolidates the instruction given on ships and is of vital importance to the whole policy of migrant education", 11 April 1951.


The Chief Instructor supplied this administration with lists of persons who fail to attend. These people are interrogated and the reason for non-attendance is supplied to the Chief Instructor. If a person fails to attend on two occasions without reasonable excuse, necessary disciplinary action is taken.65

What that might have been Dawson did not mention, although Block
Supervisors "encouraged" migrants to go to classes.66 Despite the conflict between education and employment priorities on a local level of organisation, education was taken seriously by the Departments concerned, and the local administration then occasionally had the task of attempting to reconcile both demands, even if only in a superficial manner:

At this stage in the early days of Bonegilla the shipboard officers came up from Melbourne on landing with the migrants and when possible, with time available continued the education in English and the "Australian way of life". With the other registration procedures in progress on arrival in Bonegilla this was necessarily pretty basic and "on and off". Nothing could interrupt the main effort to get people in and get them out as quickly as possible.67

The role of training was reinforced, despite criticisms, when the Director of the Office of Education hit back at statements condemning the programme, arguing that it was a difficult situation, and one made worse by the lack of standing that education had within the local reception operation in contrast to the preoccupation with movement "in and out".68 In addresses


67. Letter from Smith.

made at the 1950 ACC convention, and during a CIAC meeting, R.C. Mills, pleaded the circumstances of the education programme at Bonegilla:

Everyone who is familiar with our migrant centres such as those at Bonegilla and Bathurst will realise what hives of industry they are. In these centres the emphasis is on employment; in some cases education comes in a bad last. However, we are persevering, although we realise that we are up against a difficult problem. We should like to keep the newcomers for at least six months and then pass them out gradually, according to their knowledge of English... No one should be complacent about the results of teaching English in migrant centres. 69

Mills' ambitious projection of a six month Reception and Training period, reveals just to what extent the assimilation ideal, and the ideal of a more adequately "Australianised" migrant being "gradually" passed out into the community, could theoretically at least be taken.

Official enthusiasm for the experiment, despite the prophets of its doom, did continue, and bribes were offered of shortened contracts for those migrants who persevered successfully. 70 More effective measures were taken in the staffing of the Reception centre itself, as it became Department of Immigration policy to employ migrants in the centre with a working knowledge of English, and staff were "encouraged" to go to classes. 71 But these were isolated cases in a camp where eighty percent

69. ibid.

70. CIAC, 1950, 12th meeting, Item 2. (Held at Bonegilla).

71. AA CRS A434 50/3/7164, 1950. Centres Instruction No. 90, 22 August. Alien Assimilation Division. Skabiej who was in the camp for about a month in 1949 recalls an inferred pressure to speak English in public and "K"'s daughters would come home to Bonegilla from school having been told to speak English at home. Taped interviews, Skabiej and Mrs. "K" (1984).
of the workers were migrants and, as Hans had complained, you could hear every language, except perhaps English.72 The urgency of the situation which could lead to the need for such "enforcement" pressure was dictated by pragmatism at the crux of the assimilation ideal: "Unless migrants realise that the learning of English is essential, government policy in the immigration programme cannot be carried out in its entirety".73 Assimilation was not just a matter of "imposing" culture and identity, it was partially a response, albeit a calculated one, to assumed community pressures and employment realities, directed as much at the public as the migrants. That the dual obsession was not only a temporary concern either was established when, in 1950, Heyes announced that the "experiment" in education having shown itself a "success" would continue as accepted practice but in a new form:

...in all new agreements the migrants will be asked to sign an undertaking to use every endeavour to learn the English language and to attend regularly the night classes which are conducted for all migrants at the Commonwealth government's expense.74

While Bonegilla would retain its association with the "training" function, the new agreement would mean that the government retained, in appearance at least, some measure of "control" over attendances outside of the Reception

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72. See p.77.


74. CTAC, 12th meeting, 1950. Minute No. 288.
and Training scheme. Consequently pressure was taken off the reception situation for training effectiveness. Education in the English language had become incorporated as an obligation along with the two year labour contract, both of which by 1951 would be imposed on non-DP migrants, but as a consequence of a system set up specifically to cope with the DP groups. The experiment, despite criticism, instituted itself as inclusive and mandatory practice.

Although the practice of "training" on a local level had been reduced to concentrate on its employment operation, there were other contradictions in Bonegilla's function as a Reception and Training centre which were not as easily resolvable. In an article detailing his time in Displaced Persons camps and in Bonegilla with the early Displaced Persons, H.B.M. Murphy argues that the very grouping together of these non-British migrants not only went against the strong Australian anti-foreign enclave feeling, but also stunted the "assimilation" process itself:

Despite the present camp life it is the official policy not to permit minority communities to form, but rather to press for speedy assimilation of the Displaced Persons as individuals, the main weapon for this purpose being language teaching. The learning of English is slower than had been hoped for and reflects the relative failure of social adjustment and acceptance since few DPs are making the necessary contact with Australians which would make them wish to enter further into the new culture.75

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Instead, they were to be kept for at least a month in an isolated and artificial community. The paradox becomes internal to the official policy and its relation to the programmes instituted to cope with that policy, or as Murphy restated the argument:

This would be unimportant if it were not for two facts, the aforementioned conscious desire for assimilation on the part of most immigrants and the efforts to accelerate assimilation which the Australian government is attempting to make.76

Such observations were not frequently stated within government circles, but in 1951, the Premier of South Australia raised an isolated voice of genuine concern which also passed officially uncommented upon:

Only one phase is causing us concern, and I mention it not with the intention of criticising. I believe that the people coming into the country will more quickly become Australian in the full sense if we mix them up with our own people. Today there are barriers which are separating the migrants from the general community - the two year labour contract and the reception camps, which unfortunately, owing to the housing shortage have proved to be holding camps. The sooner we can do away with barriers which prevent the new settlers from mixing more freely with the Australian people, the sooner we shall derive the real benefit from the migration policy.77

The same year that Playford made this plea, the Australian government was negotiating new contracts with individual non-British countries for more migrants, and like the Displaced Persons, their acceptance was to be

76. Some qualification is perhaps necessary here between the two conceptions - migrant and departmental - of the concept of assimilation. In the migrants' case it was more often associated with acceptance generally and assuming an active place in the Australian community, rather than becoming specifically "Australian".

"There are some features of our policy in relation to New Australians that we do not approve. I refer particularly to the housing of new arrivals in camps...but in present circumstances 'we have no alternative'". p.15.
dependant on their agreement to contract their labour for two years, and consequently to make every effort to learn English. Instead of dying an inglorious death with the diminishing of DP sources, the Reception and Training Scheme was to continue its operation. The official interpretation of the "success" of that operation in terms of its employment and "training" function would entrench the legitimacy of its role in the immigration programme. Any modifications to policy and programme would not be motivated by migrant responses, but the overall immigration objectives. The value of Bonegilla's function remained to an extent practical: absorption aims had, in the eyes of the Department of Labour and National Service, been successful, and production was up in almost every industry in which the migrants were allowed to participate. Even if there existed a certain contradiction in the aims of assimilation, the end result of reassuring the public, by having a tangible programme to point to, ensured Bonegilla's place in that assimilation process.
PART THREE

"ROUTINISATION AND DEMISE: 1951-1971"

...institutions may persist even when to an outside observer they have lost their original functionality or practicality. One does certain things not because they 'work', but because they are 'right'.

CHAPTER 5

The Extension of the "Reception and Training" Scheme

As early as 1949 a prominent ALP spokesman had been proclaiming immigration not as a "political issue", but as an "Australian ideal". That same year the Liberal Government had in turn resumed the Labour immigration policy and programme, the only change being the increased enthusiasm with which they picked up on that "ideal". By 1951, the acceptance of immigration as a "bi-partisan" policy had been widely assumed; rhetoric was directing the status of immigration to that of an institution in Australian society, allying it with national security needs, and its "unquestionable" economic returns. Its "success" was based on its definition as a manpower programme backed up by an "efficient" system of reception and allocation to employment, as applied specifically to the settlement of those persons arriving under the "DP" scheme:

It is this group which gives us our best returns, in purely economic terms, and provides the least inflationary pressure of all groups. Migrants in this group can be directed to critical points in the economy and they are making a contribution which spreads its benefits throughout the length and breadth of Australia. They are selected from the younger age groups, and measured by industrial achievement, are likely to give the best returns over the years.

1. Les Haylen (Parkes) A.P.D. 31 May, 1949, p.306. "The government's immigration policy is not a political issue but an Australian ideal". But at the same session it was also claimed that, "The Balts are housed under conditions which the average Australian would not willingly accept", (p.310) as a means of defending the programme against arguments concerned with housing shortages.

2. These were the standard assumptions put forward at the A.C.C.C. meetings from 1950.

The official reading of the employment contract, and its practical application through the Reception and Training Scheme, as an overall "success" had made the Displaced Persons an attractive group on their merit as "directable" migrants. But it had also been realised since 1950 that the Displaced Persons did not provide an infinitely regenerative means of fulfilling continually escalating immigration targets (themselves generated by that "success" reading). Changes in the programme and modifications in policy had to be implemented without affecting the basic objectives of the "immigration ideal". The I.R.O., through which the government had negotiated the "DPs!" settlement, planned to terminate its operations by 1952, and projected numbers were already diminishing. The Immigration Department was looking into the future to determine new sources to replace Displaced Persons, as well as a new means of co-ordinating immigration on an international level.

In the 1950-51 period, the number of Displaced Persons arriving in Australia was down by more than fifty thousand from its peak.4 While agreements had been in operation prior to 1950 in order to encourage the assisted migration of non-British groups other than "DPs", they had been negotiated on the basis that the responsibility for employment and

4. That peak was in the period June 1949-June 1950 - 89,217 c.f. 1950-51 - 36,912. Slightly outnumbered by British migrants, who continued to arrive in modest proportions, their combined numbers were still a long way short of the one percent of national population growth target.
accommodation was to lie with the source country.5 But in November 1949 it had already been suggested that Maltese immigrants under group nomination schemes should be bound to accept approved employment, "on much the same conditions as former 'DPs'".6 Even though the Maltese were British Nationals and voluntary migrants, they would be "directable" for two years, "as this would help them to settle, discourage them from wandering from place to place as is the case with those who have arrived".7 It was even argued that the traditionally favoured Dutch migrants who were assisted and thus, like the Maltese, paid a portion of their fare, should be initially accommodated in Reception and Holding centres, "under similar conditions to DP dependants".8

The advantages of pushing the association between accommodation provision and the validity of the two year contract as an acceptable exchange had been effectively utilised in the Displaced Persons' "campaign".9 The focus of the attempt to attract "new" voluntary migrants after 1950 retained similar emphases; "the migrants should work where directed for two years in return for financial assistance towards the

5. Those agreements had been made with the Netherlands and Malta: Netherlands Emigration Foundation Scheme, 1947 (Maltese Assisted Passage Scheme, May 1948). There were other schemes in operation - (eg Ex-Allied Servicemen's Scheme), the beneficiaries of which were also processed through the R&T Centre but not on any official or contractual basis.

6. CIAC, March 1951, Min 296 (see also CIAC 1949 24th November, 10th meeting, Item 2. "The Minister...wrote to the Minister for Emigration in Malta, suggested that Maltese coming to Australia under group nomination in future should be bound to accept approved employment on much the same conditions as former DPs".

7. ibid.

8. CIAC, 11th August, 1950, 11th meeting, Item 5.
cost of his fare, accommodation and placement in employment". Under such conditions even greater hopes were held for these voluntary non-British groups as "increased control" could be exercised in selecting them, thus helping to overcome some of the problems of employment suitability which the Displaced Persons Scheme had posed:

It has been possible in the terms of the agreements made with these countries to specify the types of migrants, the ratio of sexes, and of the breadwinners to dependants, and the conditions under which the migrants shall live to work in Australia for at least two years. It is probable that the economic value of the migrant from Europe will be even greater than it was under the DP scheme...

While traditional ethnic biases still coloured the reception of the scheme in terms of the favoured migrants whom it was hoped it would attract, a migrant's nationality could, to an extent, be negated by the imposition of the two year labour contract on to her/his settlement in Australia. The basic benefits to be reaped by the Australian economy were to be gained through the process of "direction" and the concept of "control".

9. This underlay Calwell's conceptualisation of an exchange in the DP programme as recollected in his autobiography: "We had told the newcomers that they would be subject to a number of conditions. One was that they had to accept employment for two years in a place decided by the Immigration Department. This was my idea. I thought it was fair because we provided accommodation at Bonegilla..." Be Just and Fear Not (Lloyd O'Neil, Vic., 1972), p.13.

10. CIAC, March 1951, Minute 296.

11. CIPC, 18 February 1952, Ag 10. Sir Douglas Copland, "The Case for Migration". The objective of the "new migration" had also become more specific; the excerpt continues, "...though it may well be that migrants will expect better accommodation than was available to the displaced person. This type of migrant is new in Australian experience, apart from the experience Australia had under the D.P. programme. It offers the prospect of improving the age constitution of the population and the ratio of bread winners to dependants and thus increasing the total workforce". But the same control had been exercised over the D.P.'s selection, it was the sample itself that was more limited in the D.P. case.
At the same time, the legitimation for the extension of the employment scheme which centred around the Reception and Training concept underwent some re-ordering by placing more emphasis on the reciprocity of benefits to be accrued through the two year obligation. While again operating to curtail the Australian public's assumed fears of an implied employment threat, it would offer practical support for the migrants themselves in their apprehensions regarding their future in Australia, no longer being able to use the migrants' refugee status as part of the legitimation:

The two year contract provides a convenient breathing space while the migrant is learning the language, finding his feet, and getting to know the localities and occupations in which he would like to settle. It is evidence of the value of this arrangement that the Dutch government freely entered into it. The new Dutch migrants will engage in these work contracts, but with them, as with the former DPs, we shall adopt a flexible attitude and in proper cases give opportunity for transfer to other work or other areas where the migrants can be closer to their wives and children.12

These arguments, developed initially to cope with the DP situation, were based on the services that the accommodation system, the Reception and Training Centre specifically, were represented as offering. "Training" though is here emphasised over the Centre's employment allocation function, even if both are part of the exchange "deal". The Reception and Training Centre provided the Australian government with bargaining power through what it was now made to represent for the voluntary assisted migrant, as well as the Australian public, while also ensuring the practical feasibility of continued immigration without sponsorship and under continuing accommodation duress.

12. ACC, 1951, Holt, p.20. The audience of this legitimation is still the Australian public, but the "new migrants" are granted a superior status to the D.P.s by virtue of the need for such justification.
It was not only the non-British migrants though who were being considered for the extension of the Reception and Training Scheme. During the CIAC meeting for August 1950, proposals had gone a step further. It was argued that British migrants should also be obliged to stay in allocated jobs if using Australian government-provided accommodation, such as the Reception Centre and the hostel system. 13 This would be the case with all Commonwealth nominated or unsponsored British migrants arriving under a new agreement negotiated in 1950. 14 In the context of the function of Bonegilla as a Reception and Training centre, specifically established for "DPs" and to counter the problems of "assimilation" as well as of "absorption", the decision in 1951 to accommodate British migrants there, and make them party to a form of labour direction, was an aberration of policy rather than an example of it. But in regard to Bonegilla's major function as an employment allocation centre, the introduction of the British through its processing procedures ensured that they could still be allocated to employment areas chosen by the Department of Labour and National Service. While the principle of non-separation of families and recognition of trades and skills may have differentiated the situation of the British migrants from the non-British, their obligation to accept allocated employment while utilising hostel accommodation meant that the


same principle of exchange of labour for accommodation was operative, even if not formalised in a specific two year contract. In this case the "training" service was not part of the exchange, since "Australianisation" was not deemed necessary for the British, nor was it necessary to stress this aspect for the public's sake. The benefits of "control" which the Reception Centre offered in the case of the British migrants were purely pragmatic and emphasised the priority that employment had over "training" in Bonegilla's actual function.

At one stage in 1951, it was thought by the local Bonegilla administration that the British would entirely replace the Displaced Persons in the Centre, but by late 1952, after only about twelve months of the scheme, Bonegilla had seen the last of the British migrants. This was despite the improvements in camp conditions which had been provided

15. In the CIAC report for 26th September, 1950 (Item 48) estimations were made of numbers which would pass through the Reception and Training Centre for 1951. While the computing is inaccurate, it gives a good indication of the direction in which the Immigration programme was seen as going: D.P., 15,000; Dutch, 25,000; Italians, 15,000; Volksdeutsche and German, 25,000; Others, 4,000; British and Commonwealth Nominees, 30,000.

16. WMM, 15th May, 1951, p.2. Dawson had been interviewed on the question of European migrants continuing only until the end of June: "He said he had received no information regarding future developments, but had been officially informed that a number of British and Dutch migrants would arrive at Bonegilla in the near future. I am unable to say whether or not European migrants will continue to come to the centre after June, he stated". This misunderstanding could have been due to earlier official directives in 1950 which did imply that eventually it would be British immigration which would account for the largest number of migrants at centres such as Bonegilla. AA MP 1722 49/23/2001. Pt.1. See Appendix E.
specifically for their use. The eventual failure of the British scheme, at Bonegilla at least, and it supercession by a general reversion to wholly assisted non-British migrants, was probably due to the combined effects of the minor recession in 1952, when it was becoming increasingly difficult to place migrants from these camps, and the negative press that was being generated by the British migrants within the hostel system who had a greater voice in terms of responding to their circumstances. The non-British migrant, up until 1952 at least, had been more manageable and manipulable.

By 1952 the temporary cessation of the Commonwealth Nomination Scheme for British migrants coincided with a resolution to the problem of co-ordinating non-British immigration on an international level. In 1951 countries such as Australia, with continuing immigration needs, had contributed to the establishment of the "Provisional Inter-Governmental Committee for the Movement of Migrants from Europe". The scope of this organisation was no longer, as IRO had been, purely interested in refugee

17. AA CRS A445 220/14/12. Department of Immigration visit to Bonegilla by Messers Harris and Schroder on 1st and 2nd September, 1951. Centre No. 1: British and Dutch all huts cubicated and painted - capacity 2,000; Centre No. 2: Holding Centre - 3,000; No. 3: Italians and others - 3,000. See also Appendix.

18. Stories of British discontent featured in the national press from 1950 onwards. Because they were located in urban hostels they were also more visible.

19. AA MP 598/421. B.45. ICEM. It became known as ICEM in 1952.
settlement, but instead was overtly created to solve the manpower problems of industrial societies. Migrants arriving under this scheme would, like the "Displaced Persons", pass through Bonegilla from where they would be allocated to employment. By this time agreements had also been negotiated with individual countries outside the ICEM scheme, namely Italy (1951) and the Netherlands (1951). Their nationals, by arriving on an assisted basis would also have their reception arranged by the Australian government, in exchange for which they were again obliged to sign a two year labour contract and agree to make use of the "English language" services provided by the government.

In March 1952, the only other major Reception and Training Centre to survive the Displaced Persons's "rush", Bathurst, was closed on a caretaker basis. The focus was placed back solely on Bonegilla and non-British migrants. The Reception and Training Scheme, based on the direction of specifically "Displaced Person" migrants' labour and on the provision of an Australianisation course had, due to assumptions of its "success", become "routinised". That "routinisation" itself was legitimated through the association of the acceptance of non-British migrants with their ability to contribute to the Australian economy without challenging the social and economic positions of "native Australians".

20. The programme eventually extended its services to the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Malta, Belgium, Greece and Spain and the continuing reserve of refugees in the post-war world.

21. Australian Treaty Series: 1951, No. 11, Netherlands Assisted Migration Agreement; No. 12, Australia, Italy Assisted Migration.

22. Ibid.

23. SMH. 27 March 1952, p.3. Officially, Bathurst was to close not because of a slowing down of policy, but because of a policy decision to bring in more workers and families, "with the result that less accommodation is needed in camps".
Within that legitimation the migrants' own "responses" could be quite comfortably ignored. These "responses" would be acknowledged only in so far as they posed a threat to the representative "success" reading, itself based on assumptions of control and the effectiveness of absorption and assimilation procedures.
CHAPTER 6
Confrontation? The 1952 Riots

Despite the official reading of immigration as a "success" in economic terms, the path of the Reception and Training ideal, as I argued in Part II, had not yet run smoothly, particularly from the perspective of the migrants involved. The local administration had suffered their own setbacks as well, dictated more generally by the conflicting aims of the Reception and Training purposes of the centre, the pace of arrivals in the 1949-50 period overtaxing the system, and more specifically by the coal strike in 1949, during which for the latter half of that year it was difficult to place migrants in jobs or to move them out of the centre in any totally efficient capacity. With the arrival of the assisted migrants under new contracts from 1951 onwards, the deprivations of family separation both in the centre and in the work place were also continued as practices due to the very nature of the system established around the use of Holding centres and workers' hostels.1 Under these now routinised conditions there had been few collective vocal complaints from the migrant population at Bonegilla.2

1. See Chapter 3.

2. While the papers had since 1950 regularly carried stories of complaints made by the British in the hostel system, it was only in 1952 that the first non-British voice of protest was heard on any significant public scale. There had been a "riot" in the Cowra Holding Centre, November, 1950. This involved only women who flew a black flag as a symbol of mutiny and went on strike over the quantity of quality of food being rationed for their children. While the event made page one of the SMH it did not attract the kind of widespread and continuous sensationalism of the Bonegilla riot, and has been largely forgotten. SMH, 19 November, p.1; 20 November, p.1, 21st November, p.5.
In 1952 the Australian economy experienced a temporary economic "recession" and consequent rise in levels of unemployment. The CIPC report for February had noted an employment downturn in vacancies for the unskilled, and, by July, registered vacancies for Australia as a whole had declined by 67.3 per cent in comparison with the peak at the end of August, 1951.3 While jobs were still available, they were mainly in skilled work areas, which meant that migrant groups, whose qualifications were often not recognised, or who had been selected specifically for unskilled work, would be among the hardest hit. The largest group of assisted unskilled voluntary migrants arriving were the Italians.4 By June 1952, 5,325 Italian migrants had arrived since October 1951 on an "assisted" basis with debts to the Australian government of around ninety pounds for passages.5 Unlike the other groups passing through Bonegilla, (the Dutch, Maltese and D.P.'s), all were men, all single, and between June and December 4,527 more were to arrive, this time including sixty-three women; all incurring debts and expecting jobs.6 Because they had paid a portion of their own passage, these voluntary migrants believed they had certain priorities in regard to

3. CIPC, 10th meeting, 22 February 1952. Ag. 9. Employment Trends. Vacancies fell 27% between August 1951 and January 1952 in all the major industry groups except primary production affecting unskilled workers. The "General Observation" in the same report concluded: "The point will...be reached when the shortage of engineering tradesmen will, unless remedied by an intake of migrant tradesmen, make difficult the absorption of unskilled migrant workers". Also 11th meeting, 15 July 1952. Ag.17. Employment Trends. Trade testing facilities had been set up in Bonegilla in 1951, but made little impact on job opportunities for the migrants.

4. 3,456 Dutch migrants had passed through Bonegilla and Bathurst mainly in the period June 1951-52. During the same period only 4,928 D.P.'s had arrived, and 1,537 Maltese under the new scheme. Australian Immigration Consolidated Statistics, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. See Table 1.

5. Taped interview, Zamagni (1984). The first party of Italian migrants had gone straight to BHP with no Reception and Training stage because there were only twenty-four of them. AA CRS A445 211/1/5. Italian Migration Procedures and Instructions.
gaining employment placement. Most, also, would not have had a shared experience of camp life. But they not only had the strange conditions of the Reception Centre and a new country to come to terms with, they began arriving at a time when their major expectations of work and some financial success would be frustrated.

In the face of predictions early in the year regarding a downturn in employment opportunities, the Government's initial response to the situation had been to argue that no cutback in immigration could be contemplated because of the need to maintain good relations with Europe. By June, though, conditions were critical enough for the Immigration Department to consider its own quiet strategies to defuse a potentially "uncomfortable" problem. It was advised that directable migrants should be moved out of Bonegilla, (as the main reception centre whose capacities were limited in the face of continuing arrivals), to other hostels and holding centres, even if no employment could be found for them. The Department of Immigration also made attempts to negotiate with the source countries, concentrating on the Italians. In a letter to the Australian Migration Officer in Italy in June, Heyes asked that no more skilled workers be selected due to the problems at the Australian end of gaining acceptance.

6. They differed from the Italians already passing through the Bonegilla centre in that the latter were officially recognised as Yugoslavian nationals, despite their affinities with "Italian" language and culture. They were there under the IRO Scheme as Displaced Persons from towns which had since the war been incorporated into Yugoslavia. The "new" arrivals in contrast classed themselves as "voluntary" migrants.


"Bonegilla had been a prison camp, we heard that the huts were built by Italian prisoners of war from Africa. They had tin ceilings and walls and in the day they were boiling hot, in the night freezing cold. And we weren't used to the food...And we had nothing to do all the time". Interestingly, the same type of story regarding Bonegilla's origins was circulated in 1961 before
of trades and to the economic climate. By July, the Department of Immigration asked the Italian government to take some cutbacks in quotas, but Italy declined, arguing that unemployment difficulties were Australia's responsibility, and that those difficulties were aggravated through Australia's failure to accept Italian qualifications. In reply the Acting Secretary of the Immigration Department cabled its Italian office desiring that "you should request Italian authorities to warn all migrants before departure that they may have to remain in Reception centres for a number of weeks before being placed in employment". But it was too late for those already arriving or having arrived. The "number of weeks" stretched out to months. In contrast to the still touted official commentary of non-perturbation, within this Italian correspondence the Department admitted that the Italian migrants who would not find their employment expectations immediately fulfilled would be frustrated and face major problems:

...we wish to avoid the situation of migrants not being readily placed in employment and become discontented because of their inability to meet their financial commitments both in respect of their dependants in Italy and repayment to ICLE.

7. (cont) the riots, but be retold by a German migrant, who described Bonegilla as a camp for German soldiers where they were maltreated. Taped interview. Boettcher.
9. CIPC, 11th meeting, 15 July 1952. This was the same strategy which had been pursued in 1949. The movement out of Bonegilla, even if to other camps was of necessity a way of making more room at Bonegilla for expected arrivals.
12. AA CRS A445 211/2/2. A.L. Nutt (A/g Secretary Immigration) to Secretary Department of External Affairs. Cable to Italy Office, 2 July 1952.
13. AA CRS 445 211/2/2. A.L. Nutt, (A/g Secretary Immigration) to Secretary Department of External Affairs. Cable to Italy Office, 2 July 1952. ICLE - Instituto Credito di Larurare Emigrazione.
At Bonegilla itself the effects of the recession, as this warning suggested, were immediate in the changes they brought to life there. While short term arrangements were being made to the programme to deal with the situation at the local level, this was only in regards to unskilled Dutch and Italian migrants. They would be allowed to move out of Bonegilla on their own speed under certain conditions - if they had a job to go to and/or accommodation. But if they did leave the centre under such circumstances, they could not expect to be re-admitted. The two year employment contract itself still stood, and the migrants who took up the chance to find their own work could be transferred to more essential industries later.

The migrants, meanwhile, were taking steps to alleviate their own situation, outside of the Departmental decision making process. The Italians there had set up for themselves a formal avenue for complaints so that they would not feel completely powerless and as if they were being neglected. This took the form of "Block Commissions", representatives from each Block working in the interest of its inhabitants. These were effective not only in gaining small improvements to services and conditions in the camp, as regards to food etc., but functioned to lift morale, as the instigator of these Commissions within the camp wrote:

14. AA CRS 445 211/1/5. Italian Migration Procedures and Instructions, 26 June 1952. A.L. Nutt A/g Secretary Immigration to Commonwealth Migration Officer all states. This excluded rural workers and metal tradesmen.

15. *Ibid.* Mr Smee, from the Department of L&NS visited the camp in June in order to explain the employment situation to the migrants. M. Hill, "The Bonegilla 'Riot', July 1952, Honors Thesis, 1984, University of W.A., p.50. This thesis was only received after my own work was in final draft stage, and offers a more comprehensive account of the "riot".

As regards employment, the migrants seem now to understand the necessity of patience, and a certain calm has set in. Many migrants have submitted to the Employment Office gang-lists for the cutting of sugar cane, and when told that only at the end of July that type of work is available they said they would wait until such time. What brings more calm is the fact that the first arrivals are now gradually leaving.  

But such calm was evidently short-lived, and the frustration of being unemployed found out other avenues of complaint. Migrants banded together their "benefits" to send letters of protest to Italy and the Italian consul. As "Giovanni" expressed it, "We didn't know what was going on, why our contracts weren't being honoured and we want to find out." While the Immigration Department suggested that the Italians and others be allowed to move out of Bonegilla, the Department of Labour and National Service continued to pursue its policy of not encouraging independant employment searches on the part of the migrants. Because there were so many people in the camp there were not even enough English classes to keep them constructively occupied, and the boredom and discomforts of winter were added aggravations.

17. *ibid.* In June the Italian population at the camp was 1,442 c.f. 380 "DPs", 358 Dutch, 186 British and 237 in the Holding centre and hospital. Hill, "The Bonegilla 'Riot'", p.56.


19. *ibid.*

20. AA CRS A445 211/1/5, Nutt 26 June 1952 c.f. 1949, above p.70.

In the meantime, the disconcerting economic auguries had provoked a shift in the official rationale for the immigration programme itself. All mention of panic was rejected and a positive front displayed within immigration ranks by downplaying the association of immigration with manpower to the theme of population growth in general. Three days before the Bonegilla outburst the CIPC resolved that the problem facing the Committee, and Australia, was not that of questioning the value of immigration, merely the form which it would take. Immigration had become institutionalised as a necessary element of Australian economic and national survival, even if its benefits were now not so obvious in the short term. It had developed its own impetus and self-legitimating function, apart from immediate contingencies. To halt immigration in the face of a minor setback, it was argued, would be to deal a blow to Australia's future, not even a protest from a number of the migrants themselves would alter that accepted premise. The argument itself also prescribed a certain recalcitrance in regard to the system and policies according to which it operated: assisted non-British immigration was worthwhile only while it could be put into effect through an organised reception and accommodation system. It is this context which provides the constraint within which not only the migrants took action at Bonegilla, but the official response to those actions in terms of immigration policy would be pre-determined.

22. CIPC, 15 July 1952, 11th meeting.
23. Ibid.
On the morning of July 19 1952, the BMM led with the startling story of a riot threat at Bonegilla.24 The day before, it claimed, the army had arrived from the nearby Bandiana army camp, in case the threat was translated into action. Little was stated except that the migrants were demanding "work or repatriation" and only Italians were involved, albeit two thousand of them. While, by some coincidence, Harold Holt, Minister for Immigration, spoke with migrant representatives only miles away in Albury, an army convoy of 200 fully armed troops and some squadron cars were claimed to have been "exercised in the vicinity of the camp for two hours in the afternoon".25 The paper reported that most of the migrants had been in the camp for up to six weeks,26 not an extraordinary period if one considers Calwell's initial outline of a "training" period of four to six weeks, but the expectations of the Italian migrants had been disrupted: "We have no money to spend for clothes or even soap to wash with...when we left our homeland we were promised jobs in this great new country - now let the government find us jobs".27 More simply, they felt that a confidence trick had been played on them, "trouble was we knew we were going for a few weeks,...instead some stay four or five months...was no work for anybody".28

24. BMM, 19 July 1952, p.14. The date of the riot is open to dispute. Hill remarks that Dawson and Holt refer to it as occurring on the 17th, (p.62 ff). The discrepancy can be explained if it is seen as occurring over a few days, rather than as a single isolated event.

25. ibid.


27. ibid.

Speculation about motivations for the "threatened riot" were rife, but it is more difficult to discern what actually happened than why. The lack of contiguity between some versions makes the whole affair even more peculiar. Even for those involved, the episode could amount to little more than a few stones being thrown, as for one of the Block Commissioners who "witnessed" the event:

People sick and tired of promises, promises, promises...until one day they went to main office, civic centre...they asked well when we go to work...no answer could be given...the manager of the camp didn't know anything...so somebody get mad say let's start to break all the windows and see what we can do...so that's what happened.29

For "Eros" that was where it began and ended.30 The local officials were as paralysed in what they could do to control events as the migrants themselves. But then, as a Block Commissioner, "Eros" had some liaison with staff, and some understanding of the system into which he, as an assisted migrant, had been introduced. If, as he says, he later led a delegation to Holt, he also would have felt less than powerless in the face of economic circumstances. But there were other reasons for underplaying the event. "Pino", who had left just prior to the riots, but whose sister had been there and recounted the story to him, believed it was a matter of cultural misunderstanding:

29. ibid.

30. Although when heading the delegation to Holt after the riot, he says he warned Holt that he could have a "revolution" on his hands if some steps were not taken to improve the situation.
...after a few months of unemployment, try to create some unrest. One day got upset, start pushing, shouting, police arrive, decide in Italian style to hold demonstration, over reaction of police, only a normal protest, want a job, but never occurred in Australia before, Australians over-react. 31

But the personnel at the camp also underplay the affair, preferring to blame its acquired status on press sensationalism, community relations, "and anonymous agitators". 32 This is the resident social worker's memory of the event:

The threatened riots were in the middle of a winter when employment was difficult and migrants were frustrated about being held too long sans jobs. They then complained about poor food and other things. We on the staff thought that the local press exaggerated the whole affair. In 1952 our relationship with the local community in Wodonga and Albury was not as good as later. I can't remember whether social services increased their employment benefit then. I think that there were a number of agitators in Camp at that time, but there is no evidence of this. 33

The official version of events laid similar stresses on the role of the weather in precipitating discontent, and on press sensationalism. 34 While it included a denial of the presence of the army at the camp, this was not the only point of discrepancy in the available accounts of what occurred: "Eros" envisions the numbers embroiled in the riot as as high as "ten thousand", an administrator makes reference to one thousand, but according to migration statistics only two thousand Italians could have

31. Taped interview, "Pino".

32. In a private interview, Pastor Meutzelfeldt intimated quite significantly that it was the administration who at the time over-reacted to the event (1985).


34. AA MP 1722, 52/47A/4684. Cabinet Committee on Migrant Employment. 21 July 1952. "...There was a leak to the Press through the Army and that was the beginning of the exaggerated press publicity. The Army were never called in".
been there at that time.35 More frequently, the migrants actually working in the camp, (not directly involved but accommodated in nearby blocks), as some Australian personnel, did not even know of the riot's occurrence, or of its public significance, citing the size of the camp as the reason for their non-recognition of the event.36 A disturbing discrepancy occurs also between the two most polarised descriptions of the riot, both of which are "recollections". The more generous version, which considers the nature of the camp itself, was related to me in a letter by Pat Smith who had been an administration officer at the camp, while "Giovanni", an Italian voluntary migrant, describes, in a collected edition of migrant stories, a more substantial riot than even the Press reported, with the burning of two or three huts and a church, and the menacing presence of four tanks with machine guns.37 Both versions are worth recounting in full, not so much in order to locate a medial path of "factuality" between their accounts, as to gain an intimation of what may have incited those differing impressions.


36. Interviews, Mrs "K", Mrs Kotov, Mrs Steiner, Catling.

37. Pat Smith (1984) : With Courage in Their Cases, p.48. This latter account has become definitively associated with the '52 riots, having been co-opted into general immigration histories such as Dugan & Swarcz, There Goes the Neighbourhood, (MacMillan, 1984), p.154-5; and Wilton and Bosworth, Old Worlds and New Australia, (Penguin, 1984), p.172.
"Giovanni" begins his account by describing conditions in the camp. Like the "DP" migrants' accounts of their arrival and reception, the tenor of the recollected experience is often startlingly one of being left in ignorance and disorientation, of existing in a world alien to the understanding of the administration.38 But according to Giovanni, the Italians arrived under different circumstances to the other migrant groups:

In the camp the Italians, all single men, were separated by a road from the families, Yugoslavs, Dutch, German, and other nationalities. We were not allowed to mix with them, not allowed to cross the road. Why? No-one ever explained to us. We were all family people, we left our families in Italy...Many of us had family commitments, they wanted to send money back to Italy, others were unemployed in Italy and only came here to find work. Of the five shillings a week, after you bought cigarettes and sent a letter to Italy, you got nothing in your pocket. Some young men hanged themselves because they were demoralised being in a foreign country in a camp without family, without money. The authorities said they died of natural causes but we knew the truth, they lived near my block.

We organised a rally and protest march to the authorities to ask for a job or be sent back to Italy. The camp manager told us there was no work and he couldn't send us back because he got no authority. We started to revolt. We burned two or three huts and set fire to the church, not because we didn't like the church, but because the Italian priest there used to say, "Have patience, God is on your side", and we were fed up with him. There were police there and they couldn't break up the demonstration because we outnumbered them. We had no intention really to burn anything, we just wanted to show the authorities

38. These conditions, it might be added, like the account of the riot, are not verified by any other oral or written sources, particularly in regard to the extent to which segregation was enforced between nationalities. Yet the Italians, who were mainly single men were seen as a threat to order by the supervisors and other male married migrants, and it is this which may have engendered suspicions and some resentment on both sides. Hill uses this account in her own thesis and supports most of its statements by recourse, to photographic evidence of a tank near the camp and the "vividness" of Giovanni's narrative. She does admit though that there is no evidence to full prove either the presence of tanks within the camp, or the actual burning of buildings. op. cit. Chapter III, passim.
we mean business, give us a job or send us home. We marched towards the main office to plead with them to give us jobs but before we got to the administration block we saw four tanks with machine guns on top in front of us. They must have come from the army camp at Bandiana. The eldest of us would be about twenty-two, twenty-three, and we were a bit frightened. Some of us ran, I was one of them, I never saw a tank in my life...

Soon after this the Italian Consul arrived and people went to hear him. The first thing he said was, "You are fortunate to be in a country like Australia". After three months unemployed! No sooner he finished these words than people rush on the stage and nearly killed him. His car was burned, the hall where he spoke was destroyed and the policy had to come and rescue him through the back door. And that was the Bonegilla revolt of 1952....39

While the more violent and conspiratorial features of his account have not been corroborated by any other migrants' or camp personnels' accounts I came across, the "Giovanni" description presents more forcefully the frustrations felt by the migrants involved. The cumulative vision is of Bonegilla as an ex-military camp, of enforced segregation, of suicides, of unsympathetic clergy and consuls, and of an alien social and political world to which the obvious solution was planned demonstrations, and spontaneous revolts. It gains in intensity when read in juxtaposition with the calmer, more composed recollections of Pat Smith. While influenced by a sympathy with the migrants' plight, Smith's recounting cannot capture the fear in Giovanni's perspective, of being kept ignorant of the forces operating around him and directing his life:

39. With Courage in Their Cases, p.49-50. According to Mrs Sinelli, President of the Italian Migrants Welfare Committee, the Consul did not go to Bonegilla until two weeks after the riot, when there was a second threat. Taped interview (1984).
Yes, it was sensationalised, but it did happen and was the fault of no-one. At this stage we had about 1,000 Italian migrants in Bonegilla as I remember with little prospect of moving out since the employment situation had dried up in the outside community (not only for migrants but for everyone).

As soon as the new migrants arrived from week to week by ship into Melbourne word spread like wild fire. Early in the situation we had informed Canberra and all departments had alerted their Head Offices. Immigration Canberra made representations to the Italian government representatives in Sydney and Melbourne.

They were well aware of the situation and its causes and immediately sent out diplomatic staff to help explain and smooth out the situation. Part of the facilities at the central Control Centre was a large cinema building with a seating capacity of 2,500. This was normally in constant daily use with a staff of projectionists, cleaners etc.

Diplomatic and Immigration officers addressed noisy meetings on several occasions and as the long columns of Italians moved to and from their accommodation areas to the cinema some stones were thrown at windows, mainly at the CES offices. Very little damage was done. Most men understood the situation and whilst not happy realised that the centre was not responsible but naturally some hotheads prevailed hence the incidence of vandalism. It only lasted a day or so but the Italian authorities left several of their diplomatic staff at Bonegilla for a while to assist us to explain the situation to some of the less understanding of their countrymen.

The main problem seemed to be that most of these young single Italian men were unemployed in Italy and were supposed to be coming to the land of work and plenty of money (comparatively).

When this was dashed it is quite understandable that they were a bit put out, mainly because they felt that their own government who had encouraged them to migrate had let them down and that we (Australia) had let them down also. I couldn't say that they were highly educated and probably the fact that they found difficulty in understanding the situation, plus their highly emotional normal nature, plus a bit of "whipping up" by the hotheads, plus the fact that their families in Italy were relying on them to remit some of their earnings home, which naturally wouldn't materialise.

The press had a field day...we all used to gather to either laugh or curse the rubbish and inaccuracies, sensationalism which had been dished out to their poor unsuspecting readers in the outside community...Sure it was a serious situation and called for pretty swift constructive action. We personally couldn't create three or four thousand jobs but we did get the right people together who were in a position to get something moving and in the meantime we had to keep the people talking rather than acting wildly under the influence of hotheads and believe it or not political agitators.40

40. Letter from Smith. The reference to "their highly emotional nature" is one which reinforces the stereotype of Italians as rebellious and prone to violence.
As Smith suggests, the position of the Italians is not so difficult to understand. The Italians who arrived under the new scheme arrived under circumstances peculiar in some instances to themselves, and, as Giovanni describes it, they saw themselves as an isolated group, firstly from Australia at large, then from the other groups in the camp, unless they were in a more influential position, like Eros, and had some direct contact with the administration. The divergences in the accounts lend themselves to an impression of the gap in understanding between the administration and migrants of each others' circumstances, the different frames of reference and significance which governed/governs their reading of the event. This in itself may have contributed to the outbreak, showing up a lack of co-ordination between policy, programme, and the migrants' own expectations and needs. While the riot can be read as just a response to immediate economic conditions - the Reception system and the structure of Bonegilla, its administration, in operating according to processes of action and response routinised apart from the immediate needs of these new migrants, can be considered as catalysts to the riot episode, whether one wishes to read it in Giovanni's manner, in that of Eros, or of Pat Smith.

41. After the riot at Bonegilla there were sporadic outbreaks of confrontation in other areas, but again mostly involving Italians: July 28th - Maribyrnong Hostel, food trays were hurled; July 29th - Two Hungarians smash windows of a department store as a protest against no jobs; August 8th - sixty Italians at Maribyrnong go on a hunger strike and try to march on the Footscray Employment Bureau; October 12th - ninety-one Italians demonstrate at Central Railway Station, Sydney, against no jobs and being constantly shifted about; October 25th - 450 Italians meet at the Italo-Australian Club demanding immigration be stopped; October 30th - 200 Italians riot outside Consulate at Sydney, most from the Villawood and Matraville hostels. SNH, 22 November, 1953, p.3.

42. See Appendix A, "Oral Sources".
The issue, though, did not end with events of that first day. The migrants wanted to have discussions with Holt, who was to talk with Menzies about their grievances. If there were to be no jobs, they wanted release from their contracts and repatriation, since it was quite plain to them that the Australian government had not upheld its half of the agreement. The labour commitment had been agreed upon with the expectation that the Australian government had bound itself to placing them in employment, not to merely provide Australia with convenient manpower sources. Holt finally responded publically to the migrants' criticisms and demands by claiming the event had been sensationalised by the Press and the circumstances exaggerated by the migrants. He denied the extent of idleness, arguing that most migrants had only been there for a few weeks, but admitted that placement was more difficult because Bonegilla was a country centre. He also denied that the army had been called in. By the 23rd, Holt must have decided that the issue was urgent enough to attempt to relieve the unemployment situation, and had come up with a solution based on sustenance work. But it was only to be instigated for the group who had been most vocal in voicing complaints. The idea was to supply temporary employment


44. **SMH**, 22 July 1952, p.4.

45. **SMH**, 22 July 1952, p.4. Hill claims that enquiries were also made over the next few days by the Police Special Branch and "an Organisation of the Attorney-General's Department regarding the possibility of "Communist agitators" being active in the camp. The report rejected this hypothesis for more simple casual factors - money and employment. **op. cit.**, p.69.
for the Italians in various hostels and in military camps working at
unskilled duties for a period of sixteen weeks. The stopgap, similar to
that applied in 1949, could only be accounted a short term solution, and
within the camp it acted only to heighten group rivalries as Italians
gained the foreground in the public eye, and in employment priority,
because they had now become the most "visible" migrants.

"Hans H.", who arrived with his wife from the Netherlands a few weeks
after the riot, recalls that there was still a lot of friction in the air,
and news of the riot continued to be passed on to incoming migrants. The
administration at Bonegilla did not seem to take too kindly to the
continued complaints made by Italians about their situation:

During the present week, upheavals of a various nature have
occurred daily. On several occasions, the Officer in Charge of
the Commonwealth Employment Service and his staff have been
subjected to minor demonstrations of wildly gesticulating and
table thumping Italians, who more or less desired to dictate the
policy to be adopted by the CES in allocating them to
employment.

46. In an unreleased press statement Holt elucidated the particular
problems:
"Their placement presents special difficulties as they are in a camp
in a country centre, and very few of them are able to speak English.
They obviously could not be let at large to fend for themselves as
they have no personal contacts in this country nor private
accommodation...". CRS A445 211/2/2. Australian/Italian agreement.
Press statement by Hon. H.E. Holt, n.d. Between July 1952 and
February 1953 5,100 Italians were given emergency work, and only
1,250 were placed normally. Hill, op. cit., p.74.

47. Taped interview, "Hans H.". This was despite earlier accounts as to
ignorance of events as they occurred. Rumour seems to have been
more effective within the transient migrant circles than within
the permanent residents in the camp.

48. AA MP1722 52/47A/4684. Dawson to Secretary, Department of
Immigration, Bonegilla, 8 August 1952.
The assistant Director, Dawson, went on to describe the demonstrations occurring in various blocks, usually against the food, or grievances regarding personnel being moved to employment out of priority. A "mob of 200 rowdy Italians" even marched and demonstrated at the Director's residence frightening his family, allegedly over the quality of the food, even though Dawson considered the quality and quantity of food to be adequate. The picture of the Italian migrant particularly could no longer, in private correspondence at least, be considered "controllable". Even though the reason for the subversive activity itself was put down to Communist infiltrators into the camp, the Italians were further accused of vandalism and degenerate activities. They had become the culprits instead of the victims of a situation to which the only answer was seen as the forced restoration of order and "normal patterns of behaviour". Dawson assumed that appeasement was no longer feasible, ASIO should be called in, police permanently installed, and troublemakers immediately deported. The confrontation had, in Dawson's case at least, inspired a widening of the rift between the Italians and the administration by challenging the premise that the migrants should react passively, if at all, to their circumstances. It only acted to reinforce his assumptions, not to question them.

49. ibid.
50. ibid.
51. ibid.
52. ibid.
53. ibid.
Nerves were fraught all round, but the Italians were lucky that at least up until September it was they who were the target of efforts to alleviate the unemployment situation, even if along with being the focal point of the local administration's recriminations. The "DPs" and the Dutch, in contrast, were referred to by Dawson as model migrants, voicing no complaints, despite the former's obvious and dire need of clothing and other resources.54 But in September that too changed as the DPs gave their own voice to their plight by staging a demonstration.55 Although Dawson was more sympathetic this time, the event did not reach the Press, and perhaps because of this, the Central Employment Office relegated their demands as of little consequence:

It is not intended of course to move any more Displaced Persons from Bonegilla, either to hostels or to emergency work, as it is felt that they are better off at Bonegilla than they would have been had they remained in Displaced Persons camps in Europe, which would have been the case had the Commonwealth not stretched a point to bring them out here at the tail end of the IRO scheme.56

It was a well-worn rationale already, but effective for its purposes. The Dutch though were better considered by this stage and some had been moved out regularly, as the Australian government was subject to pressure from their own government representatives;57 the "DPs" in contrast felt, and were left, helpless,

54. MP1722 52/47A/4684.

55. ibid.

56. AA MP1722 52/47A/4684. "Emergency Movement Ex-Bonegilla", 29 July 1952. Nevertheless Heyes had received some notice of a plea for more equal opportunity of placement from the camp itself arguing: "that D.P. breadwinners should be allocated to employment in the same priority as is accorded to Italian migrants" - Memo Heyes to Director, Bonegilla, 7 October 1952.
...they had representatives of their countries you know to fight for their people, but we had to take what was given to us that was the difference.58

While events at a local level seemed to have had little impact on the form of responses at an official or administrative level, the Bonegilla riot put pressure on the Australian government in other ways. It now had to be seen as dealing constructively with a situation which could no longer be projected as totally within their control, or, in the immediate situation at least, as a "success". At the August budget session, the Minister for Supply accordingly announced the new immigration programme.59 While the government tried to pass off the amendments as part of the "flexible" nature of immigration which made it so worthwhile and successful an institution, it was accepted by the Opposition as a sign of defeat and mismanagement: The migrant quota was to be halved to 80,000, not because of the riots it was adamantly stated, but because of financial and economic reasons.60 Only 20,000 assisted non-British migrants, under already negotiated agreements, would be allowed for. These would include Dutch,

57. AA MP1722 52/47A/4684. The number of unskilled Dutch workers at Bonegilla, even after unskilled embarkation was stopped altogether, was 600 around July. While they were not given the same treatment as the Italians, R.A. Smeke wrote on 29 July 1952 that the Dutch authorities would eventually demand similar treatment to the Italians, suggesting that something more substantial would have to be done.

58. Taped interview, Mr & Mrs "M" (1984).

59. APD, 7th August, 1952, p.131-133, Mr Beale.

60. In a statement released by Holt on 24 July 1952 the significance of these cutbacks was strongly underplayed: "This decision might be regarded as a 'breather' to enable us to digest more comfortably the very substantial intake of post-war years. The reduction will operate while we are forming a clearer picture of the shape the economy is likely to take after we have passed through the present difficult stage. Our national requirements of security and development which have dictated our programme of large scale immigration remain". CIAC, 18th meeting, 19 September 1952, Item 2.
Italian and Maltese immigrants, but only one quarter were to be workers, who had skills so that they could be readily absorbed and likely to assist in creating employment for unskilled workers. The other three-quarters were to be dependants, securing the "long term" future of the Australian population and manpower needs. These modifications to the programme within, and in order to ensure its continuity, did not pass completely unchallenged and provoked their share of political criticism and accusation, but the question of Bonegilla itself and its function was not taken up. Instead debate centred on the army involvement in the riot, to which the government repeatedly answered that nothing of significance had occurred. Everything, as Smith intimates, was still portrayed as being under control, including the migrants. Holt, as Minister for both Immigration and Labour and National Service, continued to protest the over expectations of the migrants, the improving economic situation and the localised nature of the malaise. At present, it was claimed, only ninety-one migrants in the Reception centre had been there for more than three months, including sick migrants confined to the hospital. Yet the

61. *ibid.* The Italian flow was however disrupted until 1955.

62. It was taken up in one instance by the member for Gellibrand, Mr Mullens, who eulogised their plight in a highly sentimental yet effective manner, and was taken little notice of except as a calculating means of attacking the budget: "It was a distinct and devastating shock to learn that there were 2,350 Italians in the immigration camp at Bonegilla. These immigrants are personalities. They have souls with the same aspirations as honourable members of this House, and with the same hopes, fears and anxieties...", ad nauseam. *APD,* 12 August 1952, p.218.

63. *APD,* 14 August 1952. Questions Mr Mulcahy to Minister for Army.

average stay at the centre had now increased from two or three weeks to eight weeks. The riot was no longer any talk of this being an "educative period"; although "training" was resorted to to keep the migrants occupied where possible, employment placement retained its priorities for migrants and officials. In the context of the immediate economic climate, the question of "assimilation" was secondary to that more urgent one of efficient "absorption". If this was not achieved in the short term, the long term ambitions of the immigration programme, along with its routinised form, could concurrently be challenged.

Rather than de-emphasise the need for immigration, or suggest a new system of reception or employment policy, the effect of the "riot" acted also to increase concern that numbers for the future would taper off due to the generation of negative publicity overseas, which again would affect those long term ambitions. Reassurances were sought so that in August, the same month as the budget announcement of cutbacks was made, an agreement for assisted migrants was signed with Germany, again with a provision for a two year labour contract as a guiding principle and the same exchange rationale of accommodation and English lessons. In

65. According to a Cabinet Committee on Migrant Employment held on the 21 July 1952 (MP 1722 52/47A/4684) on the 17 July 1952, the day before the riot, there had been 2,177 Italians at the camp and eighty-five Dutch. Of the Italians one had been there twelve weeks, six for eight weeks, 467 for six weeks, 422 for five weeks, ninety-five for three weeks and 1,196 for one week. Of the Dutch, sixty-eight had been there four weeks, three for six weeks and fourteen for eight weeks (The figures do not exactly tally).


67. AA MP 1722 52/47/4684. Holt to Menzies, 16 October 1952: "There will probably be bad overseas publicity given to these episodes as well as unfavourable political reactions for the government inside Australia". Holt's fears were echoed in Parliament (5 November, p.4140, Mr Ward, East Sydney), and in CIAC which the following year included collected overseas press items on Australian immigration as part of gauging the damage which had been wreaked.

68. CIAC, October 1952, Article 14.
contrast the Italian unskilled workers were stopped from arriving under any renewed quota negotiations. The Liberal Ministry was still faced, at the end of October, with the problem of what to do with the Italian migrants who were gradually terminating their emergency work.69 Deputations from the Italians were again being received, and Holt wrote to Menzies arguing that further "episodes" could occur if something positive was not done soon.70 The suggestion by the Italian Minister that unemployed migrants be allowed to return to Reception and Training centres was rejected on what seemed fatal grounds to the continuing credibility of Bonegilla, and was ironic considering the absorption and assimilation purposes for which it was operating. Once again the weaknesses in the system, to which others had already pointed, were invoked:

Your suggestion would, if adopted, result in the aggregation of large numbers of migrants in centres distant from employment opportunities. In my opinion, this would not only tend to produce a fertile breeding ground for discontent, but also delay their assimilation into the Australian community.71

In the light of Holt's statement, it is difficult to understand how and why Bonegilla's general reputation survived the riot relatively unscathed. Such an acknowledgement of the flaws of the Reception and Training Centre acts instead to reinforce the idea that its advantages were regarded in terms of the control over the migrant offered by its isolation, and suggests the extent to which its routinised role in relation to immigration policy and programme had become firmly entrenched.

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69. Ibid. and AA MP 1722, 52/47A/4684.

70. Holt to Menzies AA MP 1722, 52/47A/4684.

71. AA MP 1722, 52/47A/4684. Holt to Italian Minister, 7 October 1952. See also footnote 46.
The 1952 "riot" occurred on the threshold of a need to reassemble attitudes towards immigration programme and policy. It had brought to the fore the period of transition of the Reception and Training scheme's function as it focused on a voluntary rather than a refugee immigration programme. It had compelled, briefly, a confrontation between the migrants' expectations and those of the administration; between policy, objectives and programme organisation; between the representative association of Bonegilla with the "success" of the programme, and the inadequacies of its actual operation. But the riot's ultimate failure to bring about any real change in employment policy as regards direction and the recognition of qualifications, or in the general assumption of exercising control over the migrants, also emphasised the completeness of the system's routinisation, despite the changes in external factors. The Holt who in October could argue Bonegilla's isolation and anti-assimilation processes, could also in December resume his task of finding greater sources of migrants to pass through the Bonegilla system. The reductions to the assisted immigration targets were to be only temporary; as soon as circumstances permitted the Department of Immigration and Labour and National Service wanted to be sure they had the available migrants.72

CHAPTER 7:

"Migrant Camp Blues": 1953 - 1960

This happy immigration experience of our last five years heartens us to move forward more ambitiously again. Having reduced our intake and paused for a "breather", during a period of temporary economic difficulty we are now in good shape again for a programme which, both in size and composition, is more in keeping with our national needs.1

By 1953 Bonegilla was the only major Reception and Training Centre still in operation.2 Despite the decrease in its own capacity to 7,619 persons, and the closure of seven Holding centres with the cessation of the "DP" scheme, the placement of three other centres on caretaker basis reflected the insistent hope that immigration could or would increase at any stage and the accommodation system had to be ready for such an expansion.3 Setbacks such as the 1952 riots were to be read in the context of the longer term benefits that immigration as a manpower and population programme promised the country's future. Despite the real difficulties which immigration had posed, the fate of "perishing" could still be invoked with some persuasion, but with a revision of the means of avoiding such a fate.4 In a speech entitled, a "New Phase in Immigration Planning" at the CIPC meeting for August, 1953, Holt summed up the situation:


2. Holden, W.A. had been retained as a Reception centre with a capacity of 850 catering for labour recruits in that area.

3. Greta, Scheyville, Wacol, Benalla and Woodside were the only Holding centres still operating. CIPC, September 1953, Min. 252.

4. Haylen, A.C.C., 1953, p. 12: "We appreciate that migration has now passed out of the flowery stage of folk-dancing on the lawns and speech-making under floodlights. Today we are face to face with detained problems arising out of our need to populate and develop this country because we know that unless we do we shall perish."
We must recruit migrants without the help of the former stimuli of fear, persecution, displacement and unemployment, with the exception of refugees from East Germany and limited numbers in Greece and Trieste, the migrants being sought are no longer from among the homeless or the unemployed. Instead people who have homes and jobs, at least some land, must be prepared to give these up and take a chance in Australia.  

Such a reading of the changed availability of migrants suggested that certain modifications would need to be made to adjust to the new situation, and to entice the migrants themselves. The very "routinisation" of the form which the programme took for assisted non-British migrants could only continue to be effected through complementary invocations of "change" in that programme's image. Immigration had to be seen as adjusting to the needs of these "new" migrants, but only in so far that the immigration objective of manpower as well as population could continue to be maintained in a particular form. So that what was being adjusted was the representative value of Bonegilla, the image it was to project now being concerned with the potential migrant as its audience as much as the Australian public. At the same time, in the new scheme of events for assisted voluntary migrants the elements of the original "DP" programme which constituted its "actual" function, its routinised form, would be retained: the two year labour contract, the processing of migrant settlement through an integrated and segregated system of government provided accommodation, and the attempt to assimilate the "culture" of the migrant to that of the Australian "norm", all consolidated to some extent in the Reception and Training concept.

5. CIPC, September 1953, Agenda 27.

6. Because the emphasis was placed on appealing to the potential migrants, and the scheme itself had become routinised, the reference to "training" was increasingly dropped when referring to the Bonegilla centre.
As new agreements were signed with individual European countries and with ICEM, there was a gradual expansion in the "type" of migrant arriving, reflected in the composition of the Bonegilla community on a social as well as national or ethnic basis.7 Refugees still remained a constant in the population makeup, coming from camps in Italy (1954) and Austria (1955), and from Hungary (1955).8 But the waves of non-refugee groups were most prominent after 1952, although the proportion of non-British settlers arriving on an assisted basis between 1951 and 1961 fell to less than 59 per cent of the total number of assisted arrivals.9 That 59 per cent was made up of nationals from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Rumania, and Yugoslavia. These migrants were still being recruited mainly for rural work, along with the labour needs of the basic secondary industries and essential supporting and service industries.10 Their representativeness though was varied, with German and Dutch migrants making up the largest numbers arriving on an

7. In September 1954, the General Assisted Passage Scheme (G.A.P.S.) was also initiated to recruit U.S., Swiss, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish citizens. Commonwealth Year Book, 1957. See Table 1.

8. Consolidated Statistics No. 12. Table 14. "During this period (1951-51), refugee migration fell steeply away to 70,000 in the ten year period: the last 5,000 of the 1RO Scheme, 15,000 Hungarians fleeing after the unsuccessful revolution of 1956, some 30,000 Yugoslavs and Italians leaving Yugoslavia, 7,000 white Russians leaving Communist China, and a variety of groups of other refugees". Price, "Overseas Migration to Australia : 1947-1970", CHOMI, No. 411, p.4. See Table 1.

9. ibid, p.5.

10. ASD, 10 November 1953, p.9, Governor-General's speech.
assisted basis. The proportion of women to men also increased with the new stress on dependants to meet targets where workers could not be absorbed. 11 Despite the quite modest targets which had been set, the numbers for the 1953-54 period recorded an all time low for assisted immigration since the Reception Scheme had come into operation. 12 While those numbers would pick up substantially in the following year, they would still be below those of the peak years.

By 1952 only about two-thirds of assisted non-British migrants were passing through Bonegilla, and fourteen of the twenty-four blocks which constituted Bonegilla lay empty by 1953. 13 The remainder had been rearranged since the days when the administration had been decentralised into three centres: now staff were housed in Blocks 19, 20, 23 and 24, the Greeks were grouped with "new DP's" in Block 5, Italians also with "DP's" in Block 12, Germans having 13 and 21 to themselves, and the Dutch in Block 14. 14 Block 15 had been retained temporarily as a Holding centre for Dutch, German and "DP" migrants. 15 While Holt had indicated that the immigrants would no longer be considered as one group uniformly defined, in the way that it had been assumed that the "DP's" were, other just as misleading assumptions were put into play, pointing to the new "image" for Bonegilla's operation:

14. AA CRS A445 220/14/25. Ibid.
15. While the grouping of hutsments was flexible and now always strictly associated with nationality, the official categorisation of certain areas to be shared with other suitable groups reflected the continued grouping of southern Europeans, as a general rule, apart from western or northern Europeans. See Table 4.
...in the earlier post-war years we were dealing literally with "mass migration"; people were available in large numbers and they were accustomed to moving en masse and occupying camp and other emergency accommodation. Today the task is more difficult because we are dealing more with people as individual cases.16

In terms of the system instituted in and around Bonegilla though there was little to differentiate those groups who had been accustomed to "moving en masse", and these "new" more "sophisticated" migrants, who were to be treated as "individuals". Some changes for the better were initiated, but environmentally rather than structurally. The new emphasis on dependents merely aggravated the old problems of accommodation. While in 1953 it was suggested that the non-British should not be discriminated against in the breaking up of family units, the system was still structured mainly around the principle of allocating breadwinners to employment and accommodating the rest of the family in Holding centres. "John", who arrived in 1955 as a child of fourteen from Germany still remembers with some bitterness the desolation his family felt, and the breakdown his mother had, as the eldest son and father were sent off to work in wool mills and he and his mother were shepherded to a Holding centre.17 Any developments in policy were slow in realisation and hardly in keeping with Haylen's announcement that the "euphoric" phase of immigration had now been put aside in order to


17. CIPC, August 1953, Ag. 37; Interview, "John L".
combat the "real" social and economic challenges that Australia and migrants faced. The emphasis remained on getting the migrants to Australia, and fitting them into the routinised processes of reception and employment placement.

For those who resided at Bonegilla on a more permanent basis the atmosphere at the centre had, since the "DP" rush, become a healthier one, as more facilities were provided for them and Bonegilla grew increasingly self-sufficient and more stable as a "community" with a continued future, acting and responding according to, by now, routinised ideas of the role of the centre's operation. Dawson had replaced Kershaw in 1952 as Director, but amidst some controversy and accusations of corruption was himself ousted in 1954 by the arrival of Colonel Guinn. Things seemed to be on the improve. The Department of Immigration was seen to have refined some of its rougher edges through experience, and the improvements were in turn reflected in the running of the camp and a reduction in corruption, as the staff were provided with more amenities. During the Guinn period of administration the boundaries of Bonegilla's experience were being more positively demarcated as outside communities were drawn in through social activities and sporting rivalries. Guinn himself believed "we were more

18. See footnote 4. In the same way publicity methods had to be re-examined: "No longer can Australia enjoy the conditions of the early post-war years when prospective migrants were offering in large numbers, and when publicity needed only to be concentrated on the "service" type of information - advice on Australia and how to emigrate - and on the "assimilation" type". CIAC, 28th meeting 1955, Ag.21.

19. Interview Pastor Neutzelfeldt. See Appendix F.


21. Interview, Catling. Letter E. King. See Appendix F.
or less an ordinary town and functioned as such" and tried to foster better relations with the outside communities of Albury and Wodonga. The sense of "experimentation" was already associated with a past era; the novelty of the programme had worn off, and even the "outside" communities had become more blase about the centre's existence, as migrants began to settle down in the adjacent country towns.

How much these attempts at cultivating a "community" feeling may have been translated into the experience of the transit migrants is difficult to gauge. Improvements for these migrants revolved around more material gains, yet even then there was still a lot left to be desired in camp conditions at Bonegilla. In 1954, Guinn's arrival at the centre left this impression:

When I arrived at Bonegilla in July, 1954 I was amazed at the little that had been done to make the place more attractive and the living and feeding quarters more comfortable. It was still an army camp, few odd gum trees, some old army huts (a few had been painted). No heating — cooking arrangements — old wooden stoves outside boilers — army deep pit latrines — unlined Mess halls — (bitterly cold in winter).

But a different picture was painted in a 1955 review which the CIPC issued detailing accommodation facilities, stressing their expansion and improvement and the quality of the migrants' stay at Bonegilla. It

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22. Letter, Col. Guinn. See Appendix F.

23. This is evidenced by the lack of reports on Bonegilla in this period in the BMM, and the increasing appearance of non-Anglo-Saxon names within its pages.

24. Letter, Col. Guinn (1954). The first thing Guinn did was to organise the installation of sewerage and to improve hygiene conditions in the camp. Letter, E. King.
during the time migrants and their dependents are resident in immigration centres everything possible is done to make their stay as pleasant as possible.  

But many of the services and facilities it listed were again not relevant to the transient migrants, who in the period up until 1957 would have averaged only a two to three weeks stay, but only to the more permanent community or migrants who had gained jobs in the centre.

The staging process into which the new migrants were initiated had changed in so far as it had become less chaotic. The days of "mass movement", as Holt had described them, were already in the past, as shiploads arrived with more manageable numbers. As a result of this, and despite the continued policy of a directed labour agreement for assisted migrants, employment placement also became more flexible in practice. Bulk requisitions were rare, but the demand for migrants workers remained consistent, if in particular areas only.  

The areas of employment for women remained domestic services, "rural production" and food processing work, while in 1954 the largest group of non-British males had been placed in rural work, as had been the pattern in the "DP" era. This work was mainly seasonal so that secondary placement was usually necessary; sixty percent of relocations being found more permanent positions in

25. CTAC, 26th meeting 1955, Ag. 26. Listed were the cubicking of sleeping quarters which now boasted a wardrobe, dressing table, chair, bedside mat and curtains. Special menus were now provided for children and additional items for pregnant and nursing mothers. Creches were upgraded as were pre-school facilities, and transport provided to high schools. The YWCA had huts in the centre which held hobby classes, and boys could attend local Police Boys Clubs in some localities.

26. Price regards the period 1951-61 on the whole as, "...a period in which the economic and social structures and resources of Australia could absorb and integrate those already arrived, as well as those arriving, and yet keep the labour force and home market expanding at a rate sufficient to satisfy all but the most impatient developer". "Overseas Migration", p.6, c.f. discussion of post 1956 period in this chapter.

27. See Table 2. CTFC, 17th meeting, June 1954, Ag. 6.
manufacturing industries. In 1954 also there had been a 40.3 percent increase in vacancies in this sector, mainly in metals, motor vehicles, agricultural machinery and implements, and food processing. Yet the continued domination of rural employment needs and construction work in placements of migrant labour, as part of official policy, meant that Bonegilla's employment allocation function remained vital. Even without the imperative of "dispersing" migrants for employment reasons, "decentralisation" itself continued to be justification enough, the Immigration Department encouraging "special drives" to place migrants on farms.

"Training", too, still had a role to perform. Classes were held in the centre and adjustments were made for the new migrants, particularly the Greeks, who had a totally different alphabet as well as a lack of spoken English. While reduced numbers in the camp should have meant that education in the English language was made available to a greater cross-section of the migrants, the more common case was that knowledge of the classes' existence was an arbitrary process, and there was no longer even the emphasis on the part of the administration to enforce the migrants' presence there. Nevertheless, education reports were optimistic about their efficiency. Nor were the goals of assimilation forgotten:

28. ibid.
29. ibid.
30. ibid, Ag.6, 31 May 1954. Department of Labour and National Service, Melbourne. "The most urgent demands will continue to be for tradesmen, rural work and unskilled labour for basic industries and construction work in remote are as...it is essential that the Department continue its policy of allocating them to the key points in the economy...".
31. ibid.
We try to work in as many other activities as possible to help in the assimilation of our immigrants; the regular visits to afternoon tea, parties given by the CWA Albury, the running of our very popular library, assistance by the whole education staff as marshalls at the children's Coronation party sports meeting.34

To an extent the "training" process had also become routinised, so that the pressure on its own "success" rate was relieved. But what relieved that pressure even further was the agreement signed by the migrant, which included an obligation to partake of government provided education services, stressing the continuation classes in the "outside communities".35 Since the assisted immigration of non-British migrants was now accepted, the Department of Immigration could afford to be more complacent about the achievements of "training" in the short term period. For the migrants themselves, their own experience of "training", as of the camp in general, was dependant on the amount of time spent there, which in turn was becoming increasingly associated with the amount of resources one had, either in terms of money or contacts.

"Joe", who arrived in Bonegilla in February, 1954 at the age of twenty-one as a Yugoslav/Italian refugee from Trieste with a free fare and a two year labour commitment, spent only eight days in the camp because a friend who had arrived earlier had found him a job on a cattle station.36

33. "Apart from the evening Continuation classes (for staff) we are teaching 18 Adult Day classes and 3 children's classes daily; all are of 2 hours duration except the three classes for Greeks who receive four hours tuition daily (morning and afternoon). Adult Migrant Education Report, Bonegilla, 24 June 1953. AA CRS A445 220/14/25.

34. ibid. See Appendix F.

35. See p.81 above. Australian Treaty Series, "...to use every endeavour to learn the English language and to attend regularly the night classes which are conducted for all migrants at the Commonwealth government's expense for the purpose of teaching them the English language, 1957, No.4.

While he was optimistic and felt in no way constrained by the labour agreement and looked forward to beginning a new life, those that did not have jobs after a few weeks soon became restless. Life in the camp itself for him revolved around already made friends, and self-contrived recreation such as rabbit chasing or swimming in the weir. There were drawbacks though. Despite his eagerness to learn English he never knew of the existence of classes, and food was often less than appetising.37 His remembered initiation into Australian life consisted of a warning to be on his best behaviour as police were omnipresent and just waiting to pounce upon misbehaving migrants. His friend Louis, who arrived the following year, knew of English lessons, but was ignorant of why he actually was at Bonegilla, except that he had "to wait".38 There was no employment interview as such, just a "market place like" selection for a fruit picking job at Shepparton, after which he found his own work. Mrs Mezinee, who arrived at the camp in 1955, also underplays the more negative or frustrating aspects of camp life.39 Slovenian from Triestan camps and with some financial resources of her own, she remembers it as a good experience. Although everything was in military style, married couples were given their own cubicle with two beds. Camp life was picked up very easily and "in

37. A meal of chops replete with maggots drove him to throw his food and plate against a wall, a "crime" which would be billed against him after he had left the camp.


truth it wasn't all that bad, we had our freedom, they gave us a little bit of money".40 Although the food was not great her family had enough money to supplement their diet from private sources and they paid frequent visits to Albury to pass the time in the month that they were there.

Impressions of camp life differed though, just as they had in the "DP" era. The camp could retain its stigma of association with frustration, two year contracts, (despite the greater flexibility), and isolation.41 What contributed to this in the latter half of the fifties was the shift in factors dictating the pace and scope of operations at Bonegilla. By 1956 the manufacturing sector was more ostensibly dominating the employment sphere.42 The main shortages in manpower were now occurring in skilled metal and electrical trades, and the demand for unskilled non-English speaking migrants became temporarily restricted.43 Greater attention was to be given to the "placement of migrants with smaller organisations in a wide variety of industries".44 Despite the growth in the manufacturing sector, the CIPC was not optimistic about the economy's ability to absorb the immigration intake.45 The general level of employment had been steady apart from seasonal fluctuations (usually downturns), but there was no evidence of a future expansion in employment "consistent" with the growth

40. ibid.
41. See Appendix F.
42. CIPC, July 1956, Ag. 45, 53.
43. ibid.
44. ibid., Ag. 45. See Table 3.
45. CIPC, September 1957, Ag. 46.
of the workforce. Such a reading of the economic situation had its more practical grounding in the state of operations at the level of the Reception and Training Centre, as was also observed in the report:

...considerable difficulties have been experienced during winter months in placing migrant workers in employment within a reasonable amount of time after their arrival. It can be expected that these difficulties will continue for some time, though in a less acute form, notwithstanding the seasonal expansion in labour demands. An early and definite expansionary trend in economic activity seems to be necessary to enable the migrant workers at present in Reception and Training centres, as well as the new arrivals, to be placed in employment with reasonable speed on a continuing basis.

In contrast to the invocations of 1953 for attracting new migrants, since 1955 the small scale assistance programmes had been reduced and sponsorship categories for southern Europeans tightened, in order to concentrate efforts on increasing the proportion of British skilled workers in the immigration intake. But such steps had not relieved the seasonal stress on centres such as Bonegilla.

In July 1957 there had been 1,468 migrants waiting for longer than twenty-two days at Bonegilla, out of a total of 1,697 who had passed through, in contrast with 101 out of 501 in March, and 909 out of 1,001 in September. While the majority of those waiting for prolonged periods were Hungarians, the figures indicate that in the latter half of 1957 a

46. ibid.
47. ibid.
49. CIJC, September, 1957, Ag. 46. This had coincided with the wave of Hungarian refugees who were escaping the unsuccessful revolution of 1956 and had found asylum in Australia.
significant proportion of migrants across the board were at Bonegilla for longer than three weeks before being allocated to employment. The figures for the April to August period of that same year indicate that the forty-six percent of male migrants were being placed in manufacturing industries (1,723 out of 3,742), while only twenty-one percent went to primary production and twenty percent to building and construction. Females continued to be recruited mainly into domestic work (fifty-eight percent) but were also used in manufacturing (twenty-six percent) and primary production (four percent). Despite economic downturns, the government preferred not to cut its targets unless some drastic event occurred. Certain concessions would be made though to attract skilled migrants and thus serve changing employment needs. Yet despite the recognition that migrant centres, being generally in remote country areas, "are not close to any significant areas of essential industry or to demands for skilled workers", there would be no change in the basic approach to the reception and placement of migrants as far as policy was concerned. What changes were made were not expected to disrupt the essential routine: the programme created around the Reception centre was still to exercise control over the movement of the arriving migrants.

50. ibid.
51. ibid.
52. ibid.
53. ASD, 10 November 1953. Governor-General's speech, p.9.
54. CIAC, November 1957, 34th meeting, Item 23.
In 1957 it was decided that migrant centre accommodation in general should be opened up to unassisted migrants in order to encourage skilled yet unsponsored migrants to take up the empty accommodation. This was to be made available for the dependants of workers until private accommodation could be arranged and for workers and their dependants if they worked nearby. As a condition of such widening of the centre franchise it was intended that "they be taken to a Reception centre in the first instance before proceeding to employment and/or to Migrant centres". Since policy had not adjusted itself officially to the shift in the area of employment demand, this stipulation acted to reaffirm the role of the Reception centre in distributing migrants to allocated employment, even if not under a contract, and also to other accommodation areas specifically set aside for migrants away from permanent residential areas. Despite the stagnation of policy, Bonegilla did, on a local level develop a role in feeding employment to secondary industry in rural and urban locations. Even though it may not have been as practical and efficient in doing so as more suitably located hostels, its function in terms of securing the dependency of the migrant was seen to be just as useful.

Although Bonegilla's franchise had been widened in order to increase the significance of its role, in 1959 not only was a portion of Bonegilla being returned to the army because it had gone unused, and thus decreasing its capacity to 4,000, the Assisted Passage Scheme also underwent general revision. The desire to attract skilled workers caused age limits to be broadened for non-British migrants in skilled occupations, and the two year labour contract, the focus of which had been largely unskilled labour, was dealt a blow:

55. ibid.
56. ibid.
57. ibid.
58. CIAC, April, 1959, 38th meeting, Item 4.
It was considered that the stage had now been reached where this particular undertaking not only no longer serves a worthwhile purpose but also might possibly be a deterrent to potential migrants of the kind being sought. 59

This alteration in policy though did not immediately affect the routine of the Reception centre employment allocation programme. In 1959 the employment contract was merely replaced with two new undertakings which, while they increased the migrants' options, combined with the mechanisms instituted in the accommodation system, particularly Bonegilla's very isolation which increased the migrant's dependency on the local CES officers' advice, again allowed "direction" to continue in practice if not in principle:

Assisted passage migrants are required to sign two other undertakings. They must agree to repay the amount contributed towards their passage costs in the event of failure to remain in the Commonwealth for two years and to endeavour to learn English. 60

The crucial role of the Reception and Immigration Centre was also reaffirmed, as was the retention of the migrants at various localities in order to promote "even distribution" and to cope with "excess capacity", 61

59. ibid.

60. ibid. As late as 1967 the employment allocations process was described as,
"Migrants are interviewed, employment offers are made, and on acceptance of such an offer, the migrant is moved at Commonwealth expense to the appropriate area". P.P. No. 207, Joint Committee on Public Accounts, 94th Report, p.157.

61. CIPC, May 1959, 30th meeting, Ag. 27.
"...since July, 1956 most European migrants have disembarked at Melbourne and have been initially accommodated at Bonegilla Reception Centre. Workers go direct from the centre to employment arranged by the Department of Labour and National Service or, in some cases, to employment arranged for them privately". During 1 June 1958-31 March 1959, 11,964 assisted migrants had moved on arrival to Bonegilla, 5,943 being workers.
The continuing practical effectiveness and "representative" significance of the Migrant centres, including Reception centres, were summarised in the "Draft Report on the Five Year Plan" that the Immigration Department initiated that same year:

At present 94 percent of non-British assisted migrants are eligible for centre accommodation, of those eligible, 70 percent go direct to centres and the remainder go to private accommodation. In our opinion the migrant reception and holding centres fulfill an essential function as a staging point for non-British assisted migrants - an opinion which is supported by the large proportion of eligible migrants who avail themselves of those facilities. We have noted, with satisfaction, the general shortening of the average period of residence in centres. Overall about 90 percent of those entering centres move out within four weeks. It follows from this that some capital expenditure on migrant reception and holding centres will be necessary on a long term basis.62

Such a positive view regarding the efficiency of these centres and their validity not only to policy objectives but to the migrants' needs also, does not accord with the figures for 1957 nor with employment observations and predictions for the tail end of the fifties.63 Even the greater employment turnover in manufacturing was not incentive enough to forecast the redundancy of these centres. Instead they were relegitimated according to their "representative" role: but the concentration on the staging function was expressed through the function of "hostels" in general rather than the actual Reception centres in particular:

63. This contrasts though with the picture presented in Facts and Figures about Immigration, 1959. (Department of Immigration, Canberra). It claimed that as at 30 July 1959, of 1,530 migrants at Bonegilla awaiting initial placement, 1,520 had been there less than four weeks: 68 Austrians, 34 Dutch, 602 Germans, 53 Greeks, 81 Hungarians, 56 Italians, 478 Yugoslavs, 102 Finns, 34 Danes, and 14 "others". "That this has been possible is evidence of the policy that the selection of migrant workers both as to numbers and by occupational qualification shall, so far as possible, be in accordance with the prevailing demands of the Australian economy". See also AEP, 13 March 1959, p.289. Mr Townley and CIPC, May 1959, Ag. 27 - all of which claimed movement out was steady and efficient.
We regard the hostels as fulfilling a permanent role in Australia's immigration programme, regardless of developments in the overall housing situation. They provide a much needed staging point for migrants and their families while they are settling down in Australia and deciding on, and arranging their permanent accommodation. Even if it were feasible in a rapidly expanding economy to have houses held vacant for migrants to enter on arrival in Australia, it would impose a heavy financial burden on the community, and would be quite uneconomical. Moreover, Australia offers such a variety of settlement opportunities to migrants that it would be impossible to plan far enough ahead and with sufficient accuracy precisely where these migrants would finally settle. The decision is after all theirs and not Australia's.64

Despite what seems the naivest of conceptions of the demographic and economic pressures which would force most of these migrants into fairly predictable settlement patterns, the "Five Year Plan" foresaw much that was to occur, including the eventual supremacy of the urban hostel system over the Reception and Holding centre tradition, and the usurpation of this role to fit with changes in economic strategy.65 But that was not to be for another decade. Even with the changes in circumstances surrounding the immigration programme, the "new" type of migrant, the changing employment needs of the Australian economy, and the shifting emphasis of the education programme, Bonegilla as the Reception Centre retained its prominence and

64. CIPC, November 1960, "Draft Report".

65. In 1952 a limited company, Commonwealth Hostels Ltd, was formed to take control of the hostels formerly administered by the Department of Labour and National Service. Initially workers' hostels near centres of employment were adapted to accommodate family units. There was a concurrent reduction in the number of "migrant centres" in use. Commonwealth Hostels were mainly reserved for British migrants at this time though, and were located in urban centres.
its status with minimal alterations in the routines of its function on a local level. Changes were of a superficial and peripheral nature in their impact on the basic modes of control which had been initiated for the "crisis situation" of the "DP" arrivals, even if for a decreasing number of assisted non-British migrants. It was what Bonegilla represented, and for whom, which had been affected. Even Holt's optimism in 1953, after the 1952 riots, struck a reminiscent chord in his 1959/60 budget speech, as he stridently argued "Expansion must go on",

for that reason amongst others it is important not to restrict our view on these matters solely to the problems closest at hand. We must strive for a longer perspective, looking backwards from time to time to see what experience can teach us and looking forward to identify and assess the problems that will face us.66

But "experience" would teach little except that perhaps history had a way of repeating itself while those "problems" remained intrinsic to the routines of the reception, accommodation and employment programme.

66. CIAC, 1959, 39th meeting, Item 5. Holt was now Treasurer. A. Townley had replaced him as Immigration Minister from 1956-58, and then A. Downer from 1958-63.
CHAPTER 8:
"Camp Without Hope"- 1961

You cannot conduct migration like a Rotary meeting with soft
drinks and crackers and the best of all good things in this best
of all possible worlds. The biological necessity for migration,
the hard fact that you squeeze a European into the Australian
scene does not make for his immediate happiness.1

In 1961, nine years to the day after the events of 1952, another riot
broke out at Bonegilla.2 The circumstances and the actions taken were in
this case to be indisputably read as a "riot" and its significance was also
accepted as less ambiguous. Yet, the very drawing of parallels between
these two episodes underlines the consistent role of the Reception and
Training centre, or of Bonegilla specifically, in manifesting attitudes and
aggravating conditions which led to the riots. As I outlined in the
preceding chapter, although changes in the availability of migrants suited
to the shifting needs of the economy had caused some shakeup to the
ostensible aspects of immigration policy, this had not altered the basis of
the programme operating out of Bonegilla.


2. Other riots, demonstrations against the employment and accommodation
arrangements had occurred in the meanwhile. The British had held
protest marches in November of 1952 against the eviction of British
migrants from Brooklyn hostel; in February, 1953 Italian fruit
pickers had clashed in Sydney and marched to the Italian Consulate
from Villawood and Matraville demanding work or repatriation, but
none of these events received the same amount of notoriety or
publicity as the Bonegilla episode has since come to have.
The slowing down of economic expansion had already become noticeable by the late fifties, its repercussions being felt in the pace of movements in and out of the Bonegilla centre. But it was in 1960 that government economic policy took its disastrous tack. In order to cope with "a continuous drain on overseas reserves and the build-up of inflationary pressures", new measures had been introduced to create a more stable economy "from which future growth would develop". 3 The immediate effect was a tightening of the labour situation, even in the manufacturing industries which had been absorbing an increasingly significant proportion of migrant labour since 1956. 4 For the financial period 1960-61, fifty-two percent of the Commonwealth Nominated and Assisted Passage male migrants had in their first employment been placed in manufacturing work, only thirteen percent had been found work in rural production, twenty-two percent in building and construction, while females had mostly gone to domestic work or had been retained in the camps. 5 But as the reports in the latter half of the fifties warned, not even the manufacturing sector was expanding at a rate comparable with the expansion in the working population. 6 The labour market was difficult enough for those persons


4. In the 1960 "Draft Report to the Minister for a Five Year Plan for Immigration" it had been claimed that by 1965 employment opportunities in manufacturing would expand by more than 200,000 or more than 40% of the likely increase in the work force during this period. Yet despite predictions that the primary industry workforce would not increase, it was also argued that migrants were still important to this sector of the economy: "Their reinforcement of Australian rural population, with its implications for decentralisation is too important to be ignored". This was based on the assumption that migrant labour was more "mobile" which in turn assumed a certain amount of directability despite the fact that they were no longer under employment contracts as such.

5. CIPC, 36th, 2 November 1961. Ag. 25.

6. CIPC, 26 September, 1 October 1957. Ag. 46.
forced out of certain job areas seeking alternative employment, let alone the newly introduced, often unskilled, and non-English speaking migrant. Yet even in the face of the "Credit Squeeze" (as it was tagged), there was still a resistance in the CIPC and CIAC to the cutting back of immigration for reasons echoing those invoked in 1952: migration, it was argued, was "one of the fundamentals of our growth", to cut back targets would be to alarm investors, to generate a lack of confidence in the country. Accordingly, the target was to be maintained at a gross intake of 115,000 a year: "the way ahead for Australia [was] to remember than a nation depends for its strength for its spirit and its lifeblood upon people". The immigration "ideal" involved more complex considerations than just the adjustment of targets to immediate "absorption" rates and the question of the "long term" could continue to be usefully co-opted to complicate the possible responses.

The concept of "long term" needs was never to be taken though as an indication of the actual application of foresight. During the 1961 ACC, held in January, Gough Whitlam, as deputy leader of the Opposition, attacked the Government's immigration policy, denigrating it as unplanned.

7. Little progress had been made in the recognition of trades since 1951.


9. ibid.
and too "ad hoc". 10 Despite the "long term" undertakings of the "Five Year Plan" and its optimistic conclusions, another speaker added almost prophetically, but not too urgently, the current deterioration of the economy could spark problems. 11 It was only in May though that Alexander Downer, the Minister for Immigration, responded publically to the Opposition's warnings: He would maintain the immigration target, and it would in all probability "exceed" all expectations. 12 As for employment "the government is always keeping a close watch on employment opportunities", which was why it had "operated so smoothly and successfully". 13 The rhetoric was familiar but again remained effective in its reassuring capacity.

In June the first public signs of discontent that may have been generated by the social backlash of these policies were reported by a Sydney Sunday paper. 14 The report brought Bonegilla back into the headlines after almost a decade of virtual absence in the national press. As in the early stages of the 1952 riots, the grievances centred on complaints about a monotonous and bad diet for the inhabitants at Bonegilla which had driven 500 Germans to sign a petition. Although the food seems to have been considered bad by quite a large number of the migrants, and


11. ACC, 1961, Professor Morren Brown.


13. ibid.

it is this feature which dominates their memories of life in the camp generally, this grievance, it seemed, was merely a secondary sign of a more general frustration, as the Immigration Department admitted that finding employment was taking longer than usual.15 By the beginning of July it was lack of available jobs which took the fore as a public issue, and for the migrants.16

For those who had reason for venturing along the approach road to Bonegilla on July 11th 1961, it would have been difficult not to notice the intrusion of disturbing elements in the usually peaceful and fairly uneventful landscape. Some migrants had taken the unusual step of setting up signs along the roadway: "Camp without Hope" read one sign, "We Want Work or Back to Europe" read another.17 The grievance, as in 1952, was unemployment; the only posited alternatives, a job, or repatriation. But according to camp officials the work situation was improving and all was normal inside the centre. The population of the camp was 3,461 out of a capacity for 4,000, and placement in jobs was up from previous weeks, when only forty to fifty men and women had been placed, to 133 that week.18 The administration seemed not to want to know of the signs' existence.

15. ibid.
16. SMH, 17 July 1961 - On 10 July, though, 200 Greeks and Italians had a meeting at the Sydney Trades Hall to demand return fares, work and housing, increases in unemployment benefits, free medical and hospital treatment. Letter from "Jose": "...apart from the food which was very, very bad, some things were okay, like the people in the camp were very nice, I found that they were always pleased to see new families arrive, and we did have a lot of fun amongst us all, and listening to them, apart from that we could be thankful that we only had to spend four weeks at Bonegilla, as for a lot of families had been there for many weeks and months, some as long as a year, still not being able to find employment". Jose was only thirteen when he arrived at Bonegilla with his parents in May of 1961. This was his impression of the atmosphere leading up to the riots as he remembers it.

18. ibid.
In response to the signs being erected, on July 12, a *BM* journalist reported on his visit to the camp. His sympathetic attitude towards the migrants' plight did not influence his more optimistic claims. Not only was there no sign of rioting "as rumoured", there was also little evidence of dissatisfaction amongst unemployed migrants, although he did admit that they were "disappointed". 19 His report focused on the largest ethnic group of migrants there, the Germans; 20 of those whom he had interviewed some were amongst the most skilled personnel in the camp and had been there for three months. 21 Yet there were no disturbances and the journalist himself was quite confident that "there will be no rioting among German migrants at Bonegilla, of this I am sure". 22 The notices, though, stayed on the road despite an order to remove them.

As with the riot of 1952, the exact circumstances of the 1961 "riot" have eluded detailed documentation. It is claimed to have been sparked off by "rumours" that the administration at Bonegilla was going to set up a meeting for the German migrants in order to gauge what could be done to alleviate their situation. 23 The prominence of Germans in official eyes was obviously tied to their numbers in the camp and to the room given them


20. It was the Germans who had also featured in the June article, again because of their prominence, which in turn would have placed the focus of interest upon them.

21. The Rev. G. Saunders, who was Lutheran Chaplain at Bonegilla was trying to find work for the men, but contrary to the official picture, was having little luck. There was no report of the migrants taking any steps of their own collectively as in the Commissions of 1952, nor at that time of the administration implementing any temporary means of alleviating the situation. *BM*, 12 July 1961, p.1.


in the press as having problems separate from the many different
nationalities at Bonegilla. Once the Italians and a smaller number of
Yugoslavs heard of this they assembled a protest march against the apparent
show of favouritism. 24 Yet Gerry Catling, an employment officer at the
time, and living only about 200 yards from the employment office where the
disturbance took place, recalls no actual "riot", nor the immediate
circumstances which might have led to it:

They did march at/to the employment officer demanding employment
and they did throw stones or bits of brick or something. But
really, had it reached a stage of importance it would have been
clear in my mind but it is not. 25

Nevertheless, the national papers reported that 200 Italians began the
march soon being joined by others. 26 Placards bearing slogans such as "We
Want a Job" and "Your barbaric system is only worthy of the stone age" were
carried and stones thrown at the employment office which was later more
fully vandalised. 27 A local police officer ended up in hospital with a
dislocated shoulder and suspected internal injuries. Guinn "suffered minor
cuts and bruises in a scuffle with some of the migrants. Other officers
were threatened". 28 This time instead of putting the army on alert, the
Melbourne CIB branch had been notified and had responded immediately by
sending its own men to the Bonegilla scene. 29

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24. This story is substantiated by press reports which describe
Yugoslavian and Italian migrants as shouting "claims that German
migrants were being favoured whenever jobs were available". SMH,
25. Taped interview, Gerry Catling.
29. ibid.
By six o'clock that evening a second riot was reported to have broken out during which windows of the canteen were broken, and twenty policemen were harassed with stones, which in turn provoked an en masse baton attack by the police against the migrants involved.30 What was initially regarded as a lone spontaneous demonstration prolonged itself to a third outburst on the second day. On 19 July, street lamps were smashed in order, the Press claimed, to provide cover from the police presence which had also continued to grow substantially.31 On the third day a curfew was declared and no more than two migrants were permitted to talk together at a time, and police patrolled the streets at night.32 The reports by this time claimed that there were 3,550 people in the camp of whom 1,050 were unemployed. Although a large number had only been there for three weeks, they may have been frightened into action by the spectacle of those resident since March and before, estimated to be at least one hundred. 33

The fate of the general population at Bonegilla was of less immediate interest to the Department and the local administration than discovering the actual protagonists of the riot. In contemporary press reports Guinn identified Italians as the ringleaders and pointed to the role of the men whom he thought were "Australian Communists" in inciting the migrants.34 But his account twenty years later lacks the intensity, or sensationalism as he would argue, of the contemporary press reports, and he treats the riot as a single isolated event which did not reflect the feelings of the majority of the migrants. Emphasis instead is placed on his own control over the situation:

31. Ibid.
32. BMM, 20 July, p.3. TT.O Doubletake.
34. SMH, 18 July, p.1. This explanation echoed the emphases placed by Dawson on his own interpretation of the 1952 riot. Hill op. cit. Chapter III.
The 1961 riot as you term it, was a storm in a tea cup. A few Italians and Yugoslavs commenced a procession through the centre finally ending up at the Employment centre. One or two with pieces of timber commenced banging the side of the building. At the time I was having lunch, when advised of the trouble I made straight to the Employment Office, stood on the verandah and defied them. At that moment, the Victorian policeman on duty came and stood with me and advised me that the Albury Police Station was sending a number of police. He, not knowing exactly what was happening, acted on his own initiative. Within a few minutes a dozen NSW police in uniform arrived. The crowd dispersed after I advised them to do so.

That night twenty police cadets from the police barracks arrived and took up duty for the night. At midnight the men who were the troublemakers were organising another procession. The cadets moved in and the troublemakers sore and sorry went to bed.

The following morning a few men heavily bandaged called at my office to complain. All they got from me was "serve you right" and ordered them out.

That was the end of the disturbance. The Employment Office acted quickly and sent them to a firm who were prepared to employ them.

Prior to their leaving they called at my office and stated they were sorry for the problem that they had caused. I accepted their apology and wished them a happy future. So much for the riot that our Press boys created headlines throughout the world (sic).

Throughout all my years in the Immigration centre if any trouble arose I moved straight to the spot and in all cases that is where it ended.

Guinn's recollection, like that of the administration generally, reflects the points offered in the official report which purported to present the "true perspective". It claimed that of 800,000 migrant workers only 1,504 were at Bonegilla, and of those only a small number were involved, the police in fact only charging eleven people:


36. CIAC, September, 1961. Item 7. cf. Guinn who claims only the troublemakers apologised. The apology itself was used to negate the significance of the riot for the general population of migrants.
Despite the efforts of other migrants to dissuade them, on Monday, 17th July, about twenty migrants, obviously prepared to create trouble, began demonstrating outside the CES office at Bonegilla. A large group gathered to watch the demonstrations and some of these also became involved...A deputation from one of the two migrant accommodation blocks concerned called on the Director of the centre Col. Guinn, to apologise. They stated quite plainly that the majority of migrants were appalled by the disturbance and wished to disassociate themselves from those responsible.37

The CIAC version was a highly watered down account, compared with the newspaper sources and TT.0's account of subterfuge and espionage backed up by the evidence of Det. Sgt. Warnock, who was involved in events at the time.38 It focused on the abnormal nature of the breakdown in the system by way of apology and the limited number of migrants involved, arguing Bonegilla "was never intended as anything but a transitory staging camp".39 Yet even if the riots were immediately sparked off by what seems incited rivalry, conditions in the camp were fairly uniform for all transient migrants and there were more general and consistent reasons for the frustration which affected its inhabitants.

37. ibid.
38. Interview, TT.0 Doubletake.
Newspapers reporting at the time of the riots had carried stories of migrants who "all complained strongly that they had been deliberately lured into leaving their homelands by assurances from immigration officials that they would have no difficulty in obtaining work".40 Most were living off their savings from the "old country". One German found himself a job in Western Australia after three months at Bonegilla, but could not afford the fare; a Yugoslav student had been there for four months, an Italian three months waiting for his family and watching his savings dissolve; all suffered boredom and a feeling of having been duped:

They say of us we have everything made easy and we should not complain. They think we had nothing in our own country and have come here to get something. This is not true.41

These individual representations of conditions in the camp and prevalent moods undercut not only legitimations of the whole reception system in terms relative to the assumed backgrounds of the assisted non-British migrants, but also underlay misunderstandings integral to the official

40. BWM, 18 July 1961, p.4.

version of the riots, that is as expressions of individual selfishness, or as the product only of isolated political agitation.42

42. "There are Yugoslav youths whose only work has been a few weeks fruit-picking in eight months of the camp; there is the Spaniard whose wife awaits their third child, who had only a few weeks at Mildura in all his nine months here; he said he would like to return to Spain, where he had regular work even though he was poorly paid. Camp officials say that all those Spaniards remaining in the camp refused jobs in Australian Iron and Steel, but these men have never been anything other than rural workers. There is an Italian enamel sprayer who has been in the camp with his family over six months because of the depression in the motor-car industry. He says the first he heard of Australia's recession was in Fremantle. Even then he was told that work would be found for him, even if not in his own trade within three or four weeks. It was not found, and then he was told that it might take a couple of months; at the end of that time he was told that things would pick up after the end of the financial year...He is somewhat sceptical about the further promises which have been made to him. There is a young German miner who was interviewed in September last year just before the credit-squeeze and sailed in February without being told that the economic situation had changed since his interview. He has not had a day's work in his seven months at Camp. Asked what it was like living there, he levelled his hand at his lip to indicated just how far up he was. He said he felt excluded from society, that is as if he and his family were being held as prisoners. This man had regular work in Germany but came to Australia because he believed he could make more money out here. He felt, as did a number of others, that he had been tricked, that he had been brought here under false premises". This account, written up in the Bulletin almost four months after the riot, indicates the severity of conditions for a wide (if not unquestionably representative) section of the Bonegilla population, conditions which had not disappeared overnight, but had prevailed since the early month of 1961. Bulletin, 11 November 1961, p.12-14; c.f. Taped interview, Boettscher (1984).
The situation at the camp itself had been aggravated not only because of the length of the migrants' stay at Bonegilla, but again because of the debts into which many had placed themselves as assisted rather than free passage migrants. 43 Despite the fact that some had English and claimed to be skilled tradesmen the administration had been unable to find employment for them unless they were classed as "troublemakers". As in 1952, it was as much what Bonegilla stood for that was being rioted against, as the conditions at Bonegilla itself: deliberate misleading by the Australian government; the failure to take into account the migrants' own needs; the system operating out of Bonegilla which placed them in a social category which denied them any independance, all compounded by the lack of jobs. Bonegilla added to their frustration and to the impossibilities of their situation by its isolated location, which meant that it was difficult to seek work independantly, and by its introduction of camp life to those who had no memory or experience of such conditions. 44 While the issues of unemployment, of false advertising, of provocation, were taken up briefly by the Press, the Department of Immigration continued to deny any widespread discontent, and it was proposed that there was no significant

43. Pending a formal investigation by the New Settlers' Federation, it was further claimed that a few had been there since December, the food was bad, there was serious overcrowding, and again was stated the factor that remained unacknowledged by the official accounts, "they had left good jobs to come here". SMH, 18 July 1961, p.1.

44. A concentration of migrants was not a situation unique to Bonegilla, only the size of that concentration, other centres or hostels were usually smaller concerns. But the fact that you had reached a hostel usually went hand in hand with gaining placement in a job, or at least meant that you were more practically situated to find your own employment.
problem, at least not in the "exaggerated form claimed by the migrants and
distorted by the Press". 45 Instead Downer responded by promising "firm
action", not in regard to easing the unemployment situation, but in order
to punish the migrants responsible. 46 Responses had changed little from
those in 1952, just as the migrants had found themselves seeking a similar
avenue of redress.

Less than one week after the riot, and after intense detective work,
the police had their men. 47 Eleven main protagonists were uncovered and
remanded on riot charges in contravention of eleven counts of Victorian and
Commonwealth laws of assault and damage to property. 48 Frank Galbally, a
prominent Melbourne lawyer, was brought in by the Italian Consul to defend
the Italians who were up against some of the charges. Years later, upon
first seeing them at court, he described them as "most very poorly
dressed...but generally they were typically Displaced Persons...with
literally just about everything they possessed on their back". 49 But the
migrants he had defended were voluntary migrants, whose condition, if it
had deteriorated, had been because of the time spent in the Reception
centre which had made them "Displaced Persons" of a different sort. Such a
characterisation points to the association Bonegilla still had with its

45. The *SMH* for 19 July did carry an editorial which attacked Downer:
"Deplorable as it is, the Bonegilla incident did serve to focus
attention on a very real problem which will not be solved by
Ministerial pretences that it did not exist".


47. The police had maintained their strength at the camp at 30,
including CIB and special duties men. A search had been conducted
of the camp for the riot leaders, and interrogations undertaken in
order to discover the culprits. TT O Doubletake. Interview with
Sgt. Warnock; *BMM*, 20 July 1961, p.3.


49. TT O. Doubletake. Interview with Frank Galbally.
early history and which could be used to categorise those who passed through its gates. But the riot's significance was also extending the representative potential of Bonegilla in respect of an alternative "migrant" reading of its history, even if still constructed by a "non-migrant". Three days after their arrest, Jim Cairns, who had stood bail for the German migrants brought before the court, proclaimed that the riots at Bonegilla did not pale in comparison with events at Eureka. 50 Although he later agreed that this claim may have been exaggerated, he believed that the '61 riot was the first real sign of any political action taken by migrants in the post-war period. 51 But the Australian public in general still did not understand the demonstration as a mode of political action in the hands of migrants, just as they had not understood the smaller scale demonstration in 1952. The stereotype of the expected migrant response remained one of passivity, even if that passivity had to be enforced in order to uphold "Australian values". 52 In this case the value attributed was "non-violent" action. 53

Meanwhile at Bonegilla, outside migrant representatives were called in to appease the disillusionsed men and women. 54 The Opposition, quick to

50. *SMH*, 31 July 1961, p.4:  "The provocation at Bonegilla was not so great as at Eureka, but neither was the action so violent".

51. Interview with Jim Cairns, *TT.O. Doubletake*. Such significance for the migrants themselves, would only be given such a collective consciousness years later. See Appendix A.

52. The stereotype itself co-existed with the notion of non-British migrants, particularly southern Europeans, as having greater proclivities to crime and violence.

53. *APD*, 17 August 1961, Downer, p.177. The rioting charges were eventually withdrawn, "for want of prosecution" and those under the Commonwealth Act were adjourned. *CIAC*, September 1961, Item 7.

54. Taped interviews, Mr Pimpini, Mrs Sinelli. *SMH*, 20 July 1961.
realise the political implications of the issue, also sent down three of their own MPs to inspect conditions while Guinn was absent on annual leave.55 The problem of unemployment was found to be further exacerbated by the non-recognition of trade qualifications of most of the migrants, especially the southern Europeans. On the tail of the MPs came Downer himself. His visit was a surprise, but his conclusions were more predictable: "thinking people will realise that the present setback to some migrants is only temporary".56 In this context it was decided by the Department of Immigration that the situation could be somewhat alleviated if migrants were just diverted from Bonegilla, and sent to other centres.57 It was a less than positive alternative though because of the number of destitute migrants who had been out of camps for quite some time but found themselves suddenly in distress and, upon the requests of social workers, were attempting to gain readmission.58 The requests themselves were recommended on the basis that at least while at Bonegilla the unemployed migrants might pick up some English. On a level of policy, "training" could still be referred to as a function of the Reception centre in terms of offering not only a neat solution to the process of "assimilation", but

55. BMM, 21 July 1961, p.3.


even to the very employability of these migrants, or at least of occupying them usefully, and away from the public eye:

Considerable emphasis was therefore placed on the learning of English as one method wherein they could improve their chances of congenial employment and of easier integration into the community. 59

At a programme level, certain innovations were introduced to cope with the increased numbers in the camp and the diversity of English standards. Rather than increase staff numbers it was decided to enlarge the Film and Study facilities which had been opened in May 1961. 60 Daily screenings of films, lectures and the viewing of colour slides as well as special classes for instruction in English were instituted. 61 The subject matter had also become more general but with a continued stress on "knowledge of Australian customs and habits". It was also decided that the Commonwealth Office of Education would take over the adult school at Bonegilla, after having relinquished that duty to the states in 1952. 62 While, in the short term, the riots had reinforced the "training" role of Bonegilla, they also initiated the form of its eventual undermining. The Film and Study Centre was part of a new plan which was afoot to make English language training more efficient and able to keep up with changing pace and form of non-British immigration:


60. Ibid.

61. Ibid. "Some 400 to 450 migrants have attended the four sixty minute sessions of film screenings each day. Each film is preceded by an explanatory talk in graduated English, and when screening is completed, questions are invited to provoke discussion...There is no doubt that the migrants who have enrolled at the Film and Study Centre leave Bonegilla better equipped to compete in the employment field and with their chances of successful integration considerably enhanced.

Now after ten years, it is to revert to the Commonwealth, and according to Mr. Steiner will be used mainly as a "turning round" for ship educational officers. Previously, these education officers worked solely on migrant ships, but from December they will be allotted periods of shore duty.  

For Otto Steiner, Chief Instructor since 1952, this change heralded major reforms in education strategy which meant he could no longer feel useful at Bonegilla, so he left the following year. By taking the emphasis off the teacher and the particular Bonegilla environment the education project was given a new lease of life but not in a manner that would associate it particularly with Bonegilla or with the idea of concentrated assimilation prior to entering the community.

By August, with little real change in the economy, the government succumbed to external pressure and a new strategy was developed for the Budget. After initial statements that adverse publicity generated by the riots would be enough of a deterrent to numbers, the programme was to be cutback after all. But as in 1952 there was no intent of marking this change as a sign of the Government's defeat on the issue. The relevance of Bonegilla and the significance of the riots making more visible to the public at large the inadequacies of the immigration programme, not only because of the "rampant" migrants, but the aggravated employment situation, were ignored. The new policy was instead defined as "an adjustment of existing policy on migration, not a retreat from it." Downer, too, was loathe to admit defeat on his own grounds. When questioned by Cairns in Parliament in regard to the riots and his response of wanting the migrants

63. ibid.
64. Taped interview, Mrs Steiner (1984).
65. ADP, 15 August 1961, p.95.
66. See above, p.114.
punished, he argued that his harshness was justified by the behavioural expectations that all Australians held for any intending citizens.68 But if Downer had done little to aid the cause of the migrants, even the most well intentioned of political speeches could do them more harm. On August 31, the Labor member for Shortland spoke up for the disadvantaged newcomers and, in the vein of Galbally’s own description of the migrants, the effect relied upon the stereotypical image of the "DP" migrants, for whom the centre had first been created:

These people have come to us from war-torn and devastated countries. They have vivid memories of the destruction and devastation of war and the tortures of concentration camps. Many of them live with the memories of what happened to their families. They came here on the propaganda of the government believing they were coming to the Promised Land. They were led to believe that work and homes were plentiful for everybody. I suggest that the recent riots at Bonegilla provided an outlet for their feelings.69

Not only had the accommodation system become routinised, but the concurrent stereotypes which had legitimated its existence thrived alongside of it. The Europe which the migrants of the ’61 riots had largely come from was no longer the "war-torn" Europe of the early fifties, but the economically optimistic world of the newly created EEC. Yet the terms in which the immigration programme had meaning could still be related to the immediate post-war world.

68. APD, 17 August 1961, Downer, p.177.
By December, the riots had taken a more practical toll on Bonegilla's programmatic function, if not its official reputation and significance for policy. Staff were being dismissed and the camp population had been effectively halved by transferring Germans and Italians to hostels in Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, Wollongong, and Brisbane.70 In November, when O'Grady wrote his article on Bonegilla he cited the camp population as being around 1,800, of which 931 were transients, 753 staff and dependants and another 99 migrants worked in the district and lived in.71 While the local administration and outside community had become more nervous about the extent of control that could be exercised over the migrants' behaviour, Bonegilla's continued existence and operation went officially unquestioned.72 In terms of policy objectives it would briefly continue to fulfill a representative as much as programmatic function based on its association with the "successful" days of the immigration programme, rather than the riots, and on the basis of the assumptions regarding the role of non-British migrants in Australian society. The following year when Italy refused to renew the migration agreement with Australia, it was because Australia refused to agree with their demands, asking that not only should Australia take responsibility for finding employment and immediate


71. ibid.

72. On 1 September, the mere rumour of a disturbance at Bonegilla summoned fifteen to twenty police, even though nothing was actually wrong. *MM*, 1 September 1963, p.3; *MM*, 6 November 1961, p.2.
accommodation for arriving Italian migrants, but it should accept Italian qualifications, and assist the unskilled; after all it was that very non-recognition of skills which contributed to the employment placement problems during the economic recessions of 1952 and 1961.73 Such demands, though, struck at the roots of the system of legitimation which had been constructed around the immigration programme. To ensure such guarantees, the government protested, would be unegalitarian, it would be seen to be granting "preferential" treatment and could threaten the balance of absorption and the public's own response to the immigration programme in which its continued acceptance was assumed to rest.74 Such assumptions were echoed generally in the manner in which the government bodies dealing with immigration responded to assisting migrants affected by unemployment:

As members know, it has always been a cardinal principle that there should be no discrimination between migrants and the community generally. This principle cannot lightly be abandoned. To do so would be to jeopardise the acceptance of migrants by the community. The Minister has stated publicly that his duty is to consider not only the short term interests of some of our migrants, but the long term interests of them all.

It follows that any action taken on behalf of migrants must be within the context of overall action for the community generally.75


74. CIAC, 43rd, 15 September 1961. Ag. 6.

75. ibid.
The riots had again pressured a response by confronting the "success" reading with the migrants' own perspectives and the practical situation, but their own needs and expectations continued to be only acknowledged in so far as they affected the prime objective of immigration itself; projected in this case as being in the interests of the "community", and in line with basic principles of "egalitarianism". It is midst the social and political context of such routinised assumptions that Bonegilla's survival takes on its significance. It continued to serve a dual purpose, providing the material conditions under which assisted non-British immigration could take place, but also serving as a means of projecting an image of "control", even if within the paradoxical and compromising circumstances of the riot with which it had also now become infamously associated.
CHAPTER 9:

No longer is Australia the land of plenty beckoning the underprivileged. Australia's appeal has changed its character; the advantages of coming here are not so immediate, nor indeed so evident as they were in 1947. Today's potential migrant makes a far more sophisticated judgement.1

If we were to interpret the 1961 riots as ringing a death toll for Bonegilla it would offer a neat point from which we could begin to locate the demise of an era in immigration. After all, it not only caused an immediate drop in Bonegilla's population, reducing it by half, but, combined with the effects of the recession, it was thought than an even more substantial amount of damage had been done to the image of Australian immigration, thus drastically decreasing the number of arrivals.2 Yet Bonegilla itself continued to function as a Reception centre for another ten years, if in a reduced manner. As for the recession, Price argues that it was "relatively short-lived and settler migration quickly recovered".3 The Immigration Department had itself never given up hope that immigration numbers could be kept up despite "short-term" adverse economic conditions. At the ACC convention for 1962 the riots were only briefly alluded to, and


2. ACC, 1962. G. Whitlam (Deputy Leader of the Opposition), p.10-11, "In the last year...the most extensive publicity which Australia's immigration policy has received overseas has concerned the riots and disorders at the Bonegilla Reception Centre. They would have been very small affairs in the general history of any country". As a measure of its effect, it should be noted that the Immigration Publicity Council was created in the wake of the riot.

instead the theme was the immigration programme's "continuing success", in conjunction with the routinised processes of reception and accommodation for assisted non-British migrants.4

In 1962 the Holden Reception Centre was reopened in Western Australia and its capacity increased in anticipation of a rise in numbers in the near future.5 As targets reasserted their ambitiousness, the number of assisted settlers arriving increased as well, but more significantly for the British migrants than non-British, the latter staying well under the 20,000 per year quota.6 Emphasis continued to be placed on long term employment in the manufacturing sector rather than primary industry for these assisted migrants and isolated Holding centres were being replaced with an expanded hostel system located on the fringes of urban areas.7 Of the Department's own centres, by 1964 only Benalla and Bonegilla were still operating.8 Yet, if the practical and to an extent programmatic, shift was being made from rurally concentrated employment to manufacturing, there was no

"What counts is the general momentum, the steady flow, over a range of several years".

5. CIAC, 46th, August 1962. Ag. 11. Its initial capacity of 300, was increased to 800/900 by the end of 1962. There were only five "Migrant Accommodation" (Holding) centres operating including Holden, but there were 29 migrant hostels scattered in various states, with total capacity for 26,000 migrants.


7. This was in relation to the increasing demand for labour in manufacturing industries.

concurrent shift in the rationale of official reception policy. The Immigration Department did not question the need for a reception centre for non-British assisted migrants isolated from Australian communities, and Bonegilla retained its function of being the major "representative" focus of such a policy.

In 1963, the Department of Immigration purchased Bonegilla from the Army at its decreased capacity of 4,000, after running it on a lease basis for the previous sixteen years.9 It was to be put to more use with special non-assisted cases also being allowed in, and the camp itself was undergoing further beautification treatment.10 These were not the undertakings of a Department which no longer had faith in the Reception Centre concept, or in the viability of Bonegilla. That same year it had made a film featuring Bonegilla and entitled Arriving in Australia. As the title suggests, it provided the migrants with preliminary information as to what they could expect.11 Bonegilla was promoted as it always had been, and the perspectives on immigration as well as the role of the migrants in this process had changed little. Its reputation thrived on evocations of past successes and its routinised manner of "preparing" migrants for the "outside" communities. "Bonegilla", migrants were told, was Aboriginal

9. ibid.

10. ibid. "Special" full-fare migrants, eg. Armenians from Egypt, were to be allowed in.

11. National Library Film Collection. The film was made in French, German, Greek, Dutch, English, Italian and Spanish, and intended to be shown to migrants on the ships before disembarking.
for "meeting of the waters", and their time there would mark their "first step towards [their] settlement in Australia". Upon arrival they would be given an identification card and a key to their own furnished room.12 Guinn played his role as the welcoming Director who personally oversaw the progress of his transient community; information was given as to payments and services they could expect, including the role of the CES which would help them to obtain work as soon as possible. Like all Australian residents they would be X-rayed for TB, and they could share in the delights of swimming and sunbaking. There were other pastimes to be taken up: in the creative leisure centre, or the YWCA clubrooms; or English classes where migrants learnt "Silent Night" with German as the featured language.13 It was stressed, as it always had been, that Bonegilla was a transit centre and "when you leave Bonegilla you will be entering the Australian community". Rather than change the system of reception or close down operations at Bonegilla, the Department was aiming to give Bonegilla's image a new lease of life, by ignoring the history of its association with riots, and instead emphasising the official representative value of Bonegilla, and fusing it with the material expectations of these new migrants.14

12. ibid.

13. ibid.

14. Some criticism was still being voiced. At the ACC 1963, a Mr Miller representing the National Youth Council of Australia, argued that "...the larger the reception centres, the less chance there was of migrants coming into contact with the Australian environment". p.58.
Despite the consistency in operations at Bonegilla in terms of its absorption process, and the significance of its role as a stable reference point in the immigration "ideal" through its connection with "success" (even if this "success" had a limited reading), a change in "emphasis" was being effected outside of the control of operations on a local level and to which those operations did have to adjust, particularly so in the sixties.\textsuperscript{15} Perhaps a good place to begin to examine this "changing emphasis", is to look at the more conscious level on which it may have left an impression on those involved in the operation. Pat Smith, whose own career at Bonegilla spanned the period 1949 to 1955, returned to Bonegilla in 1964 to take over as temporary Director for a few months.\textsuperscript{16} In this written reminiscence he compares his time there in this later period with his early days when he was employed as the camp's Administration Officer:

In 1964 the place basically was still the same layout, the same basic function, some of the original staff people stayed a bit longer came in not so large numbers airflights not so much shipping people arrived better dressed with more luggage with greater demands for more selective higher grade type of employment, more general English was spoken and whilst no-one liked being in a "camp" there was a more relaxed type of atmosphere and generally the Employment Service since the numbers being dealt with were less they were able to devote more time individually to a particular migrant.

There was more flexibility in the whole system of moving out to private accommodation without first having jobs, migrants came with their own funds the Banks...had either opened or upgraded their offices. This whole thing was in 1964 spelling the demise of Bonegilla. It was too far from where the capital cities, employment and accommodation were located. The Dutch migrant service had practically claimed Scheyville (capacity 800) to be kept open and one of my last duties was to close down Scheyville in December 1964 before I transferred to Commonwealth Hostels...Bonegilla was only kept open on a token basis as after 1964 the main threats of incoming migrants came direct to private accommodation under sponsorship schemes, or to Commonwealth hostels which in a smaller way performed much closer to capital cities exactly the same function as Bonegilla...

\textsuperscript{15} The terms "Changing Emphasis" are from Snedden's 1968 ACC speech, p.13.

\textsuperscript{16} Letter, Pat Smith
I don't know what the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council thought about Bonegilla but briefly it had outlived its usefulness and was a waste of money to keep open, and should have been closed years before it was. With changing people, administrative systems, costs etc, etc, it was redundant by then as I said early to mid 1960's but no-one was going to take the decision and say - shut it [sic].

Smith centres the turning point in the viability of the Bonegilla scheme around his own time there and his departure for "Commonwealth Hostels". He also sees the introduction of airflight travel (servicing still only about 50 percent of migrant intake in 1965) as the major reason for making Bonegilla a less practical operation - airflights meant that arrivals came in smaller groups in the capital cities in the matter of a few hours from their source countries and could be more efficiently handled by an urban hostel system. Added to this was the actual decline of non-British assisted migrant arrivals who had no contacts at all; such factors provide definite themes which are integral to understanding Bonegilla's demise, but also its continued existence. Its place had become so firmly entrenched into the immigration programme and had been an actual and symbolic focal point through its greatest successes and even failures that the question of its future, in terms of its ceasing to function, did not arise within Immigration Department ranks.

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17. Letter, Pat Smith.

18. In 1967/8 more than $3,500,000 was to be spent constructing and improving Commonwealth Hostels in urban areas, P.P. 207. Public Accounts Inquiry 1967.
At the same time, it is argued that the early sixties in general inspired reflection on the "problems" associated with immigration, and as experienced by migrants themselves. A highly self-conscious social awareness was marking itself as various committees associated with the CIAC and CIPC took off in search of answers to questions about "assimilation" and the now preferred concept "integration," "Non-confrontation" and "dispersal" were still being touted in some circles as valuable principles, but they, like Bonegilla's role, had grown problematic since the many years during which assisted non-British migrants had been completing their employment contracts and moving into metropolitan areas. In the process they had set up their own ethnic support groups which were now officially interpreted as being able to proffer assistance for the migrants' adjustment to the "Australian way of life." If the growing importance of terminology, (reflected in the anguish over the appropriation of the term "integration" to replace "assimilation") is any indicator, the social and moral implications of a policy which was mainly considered a manpower scheme, and its associated programme, became a relative sore spot for the Department. Yet such was the influence of Bonegilla's representative function that it was still possible for government officials to reflect on the glories that immigration and Bonegilla had achieved.


20. These Committees were offsprings of the CIAC; for example in 1962 the following were set up: 1. Committee on Australia's Established Migration Policy; 2. Committee on Migrant Women; 3. Committee on Naturalisation; 4. Committee on Social Patterns; 5. Committee on Conduct of Migrants.


22. In 1964, the "Assimilation Section" of the Department of Immigration was changed to "Integration Section".
Various MPs made visits to the Albury area and returned to Parliament with glowing reports, reaffirming the centre's value in the scheme of things past, present and future:

This centre has handled 250,000 people of thirty different nationalities over the last fifteen years. During the whole of this time there has never been an outstanding problem in the centre, except of course, when a few fellows went berserk some years ago...I might mention that immigrants are taught English at the centre...Within the Reception centre there is an employment centre. The job of Mr Reeves, the Officer in Charge of the Employment Centre is to obtain employment for the immigrants after they have had time to settle in and when they are ready to go out and take jobs. On one day when I visited the centre the Chief Personnel Officer of the Broken Hill Proprietary Co. Ltd. was there, interviewing tradesmen for prospective employment in our great steel industry.23

According to Mr Holten (addressing an audience of Australian Parliamentarians rather than migrants) things were occurring at Bonegilla more or less as they always had been. Although the Directors were due for a change in line, now being recruited from the established ranks of the Immigration bureaucracy rather than the military, migrants were still being recruited into specific areas of the Australian economy, even without the added insurance of a two year contract.24 In fact the presence of representatives from large industrial concerns was made even more obvious within the allocation process and education was still also featured as a significant part of Bonegilla's role, preparing the migrants before they were ready to "go out". In this way the past could be reinterpreted to dismiss the significance of the 1961 riots, and to totally ignore any other disturbances such as in 1952, and the history of Bonegilla continue to be

23. APP, 22 August 1963, Holten (Member for INDI), p.437.

24. Guinn was replaced in 1964 by Mr J. E. Hawton, an Australian of Danish background who had been stationed with the Department for four years in the UK and Sweden.
read, from the perspective of Australian long term economic gain, as a "success". Bonegilla could still be used as a representative example of how well absorption and assimilation could be put into practice, even if now under the more palatable title of "integration".

By 1965 immigration numbers were up but so was the departure of settlers. As a result of competition with the more attractive European guest worker schemes and the prosperity of the EEC, a decline was feared in real settler numbers. In that year Hubert Oppermann (Minister for Immigration) made an inspection tour of Bonegilla. His reaction was reported as being one of "almost surprise" because Bonegilla "admirably [met] its objectives of providing an adjustment period for newly arrived migrants". That "surprise" puts into question the representativeness of the more confident note of the visiting MP: Bonegilla's practical status was seen by Oppermann as less certain. Although Oppermann's visit coincided with the news that the migration programme was to be stepped up, there were no major plans in the wings for upgrading Bonegilla:

25. Exactly the same themes underlined a visit the following year by Mr Pettitt (Hume) as though this constituted the accepted formula according to which Bonegilla was to be appraised: ie employment placement, assimilation through "training". APD, 14 October 1964, p.1910.

26. In 1967 a government inquiry into the Departure of Settlers (CIAC) was published, as a sign of the concern over this phenomenon of returning migrants.


Mr Oppermann said his department had undertaken large scale projects at other centres, but that these were different to the Bonegilla centre. "the other centres are hostels, with migrants going to work returning home to the centre: Bonegilla is unique in so far as it is only a transition centre. Migrants only stay here till they obtain employment", 29

Oppermann's remarks are surprising when one considers the plans to expand the whole accommodation programme, though not when considering the actual numbers at Bonegilla. While Bonegilla retained its especial representative place within the Departmental scheme, that year its population had hit an all time low, with a maximum of 835 at any one time and a minimum of 328.

30 Half of the camp was to be given back to the army at the end of the year in order to set up a School of Military Survey, separated from the migrants only by a cyclone fence. 31 But as though to further confuse Bonegilla's status, at the same time that half the camp was being relinquished, the Immigration half, contrary to Oppermann's remarks, would acquire a swimming pool, and 1,000 pine seedlings were to be planted as wind breaks. 32 The inconsistencies in appraisals of Bonegilla's role and status relate to its place in the wider context of changing patterns of immigration and employment, the discrepancies between what it was to represent and for whom, and its practical role. They become even further confused when considered in the context of the second half of the sixties. 33

29. ibid.
30. "Migrant Camp Blues", Bulletin, 11 November 1961. O'Grady, p.14. In 1966 they reached a "peak" of 1,100 migrants, an event recorded in the BMM as the highest number for four years (31 December 1966 p.25). This was despite the fact that the nationalities had also diversified to include even North and South American groups, such as Chileans, arriving under the Special Assistance Passage Programme.
32. BMM, 17 November 1965, p.22; 11th December, p.5.
33. The period which Price alludes to as being a "major factor in the reassessment of 1970/71", "Overseas Migration", p.7.
It was in this period that even Bonegilla's representative function was being compromised by external attacks on its place within the immigration programme. In 1966 the first comprehensive academic study of the Australian immigration programme since the war, written for a general audience, was published. In *Arrivals and Departures*, James Jupp, a political analyst from ANU, set out to critically evaluate that programme and its place in Australian society for the migrant as well as native Australians. 34 Within this setting Bonegilla took on a significance of its own:

An even more rigorous enquiry could be directed towards Bonegilla, the Commonwealth migrant reception centre. While nearly all the hostels housing British migrants are in the suburbs of the big cities, Bonegilla is 200 miles from Melbourne and 350 from Sydney. Its closest centre of migrant employment was the Snowy Mountains scheme. As that contracts the retention of Bonegilla becomes less and less defensible. Bonegilla perpetuates the practices of fifteen years ago to a greater extent than other hostels. Migrants can still virtually be drafted into the first available job. They are still housed in encampments, however much they have been improved. Anxiety to become independent is at its maximum in this isolated setting, strengthening the incentive to take any employment. 35

Implied in Jupp's critique were some rather damning accusations against Bonegilla, and the values it continued to reinforce through its representative as well practical status; particularly that it continued discrimination against non-British migrants by means of segregation, and a policy of economic absorption. Based on the direction of their labour, the latter had remained effective six years after a labour contract had been deemed inappropriate for Australian society and for migrants themselves.


While it could be argued, as Smith points out, that the system had become more flexible and networks of ethnic group support had established themselves so that many migrants (about 35 percent) could go on from Bonegilla to private accommodation, and a substantial few could also miss the Bonegilla stage, Bonegilla's very existence stood as a potent signpost directing the manner in which the issues of immigration and migrants themselves were to be approached and responded to, by its very institutionalisation of discrimination between British and non-British migrants.36 In terms of its actual function, even Calwell, in a review which was hostile to Jupp's book and which argued that the system was better than the "Displaced Persons" had deserved, admitted that "living conditions have improved throughout Europe and the days of hostel accommodation for migrants in Australia, except for use as emergency short term housing, should be terminated".37 The scaffolding of legitimations which had sustained the routinised approach to the immigration of assisted non-British migrants, and supported Bonegilla's own existence, was gradually, if not inevitably, being dismantled through a focusing on the assumed expectations of potential migrants, as opposed to their actual needs once they arrived.

36. This was despite claims in the 50's that no discrimination between the two groups should be practiced. Nevertheless, since 1952, the British Commonwealth Nominees had continued to be placed immediately into hostels, while assisted non-British passed through isolated Reception centres. See above Chapter 7.

Even though migrants themselves had more opportunities open to them upon arrival at Bonegilla than perhaps their earlier counterparts, the system could still be fraught with frustrations arising out of policy and programme inconsistencies. "Branka", now a social worker with ethnic groups in Melbourne, recalls her own family's arrival as late as 1970 from Yugoslavia.  

38 They had been encouraged to come to Australia because her father was a skilled labourer - a fitter and turner. They knew very little about Australia, but had been shown the advertisements concerning jobs, houses and sunshine, and realised that the Australian government offered to take responsibility for their after-care upon arrival. They were brought to Bonegilla not realising that after-care meant isolation in what seemed a remote part of Australia. She remembers it as a time of great "fun", with nothing to do and everything taken care of. The situation was different for her parents though, particularly for her father, who like so many migrants before him found himself "qualified" only for production line work, and not the work in which he was trained and had believed he had come out to do. Although everyone assumed that Bonegilla was just a "passing through" stage, from there you were again sent on to another hostel, and that "was even worse".  

39 The new system of "control" related to "new" patterns of employment, while seemingly more flexible, operated out of a combined experience of reception and hostel accommodation. The urban hostels set up their own limitations of work placement, encouraging the placement of migrants in highly industrialised employment areas.


39. Taped Interview, "Branka".
But there were other more familiar patterns of arrival and settlement. "Slavia", also now an ethnic welfare worker, did not herself pass through Bonegilla. Although an assisted migrant, like many others in this period she was arriving to accommodation provided by relatives. But in her work she had come across Yugoslav migrants who themselves did pass through Bonegilla in the last few years of its operation. She regards certain themes as being constant in their memories of their own experiences and the appraisal of "reception" and "after-care", arguing that most felt strongly about being kept ignorant of the system through which they were "processed". Once they arrived in Sydney or Melbourne they may have been told they were going to a hostel out of the city area, but the actual distance was as frightening for them as it had been for those early "DPs", and perhaps in their case seemed even more absurd. The feeling was that they had been sent out there in order to encourage their settling in the area, through "initiation" rather than force. Although they were free to leave, they did not always realise that they could do so, "it was almost like they were being looked away even though they were not". The sense of being coerced or manipulated led to a stronger rejection of the system, making some of them desperate to establish outside contacts so that private accommodation could be found rather than continuing through the hostel system. The only complaints about services at Bonegilla itself centred, much as they always had, on the "camp" organisation and food; most would


41. Yugoslav migrants constituted a large portion of migrants passing through Bonegilla in its last years. Although it was not until 1970 that an agreement was signed with Yugoslavia, emigration to Australia had increased from 5,400 a year 1961-66 to 13,000 a year 1966-70, while immigration from most other European countries experienced a decline. Price, "Oversease Migration", p.10.
have preferred to cook for themselves, rather than share communal meals. It was the system of dependancy and manipulation which revolved around Bonegilla which was resented. In this way responses had changed very little indeed, as "Slavia" summarises:

That's the crucial point - they came to Sydney and they were told that they go to hostel in Bonegilla, but assumption was that it was a few kilometres away from Sydney without preparing themselves mentally for that distance...that created negative feelings of being taken away, or locked away...that was something very hard. 42

Bonegilla in these two cases was serving different employment objectives, promoting decentralisation and then feeding another hostel system. That system could cater for migrants directly upon arrival with facilities which, like those offered at Bonegilla, included "training", and the ability to a lesser extent to control their absorption. While Bonegilla had always been riddled with contradictions, it had remained generally effective in regards to the absorption objectives of the immigration programme though its isolated location. Now Bonegilla was becoming an obstacle in itself, not only because it merely postponed the introduction of the migrants to the urban areas for which they were destined, but it was effectively harming the immigration image, despite its official "success" stereotype. The attack was being mastered from the outside. The gap between practical exigencies and the system of legitimations built around Bonegilla's specific crisis character had become problematic and could no longer be so easily closed.

42. Taped interview, "Slavia".
I have been arguing that, generally, for the migrants passing through, little had changed in the experiences to which they were made a party if they were absorbed into the accommodation system: the forced segregation from outside communities; the isolation and the seemingly unnecessary postponement of their initiation into work and Australian society; all in a political context where the notions of non-confrontation and dispersal had not only become impractical, but absurd. But external pressures were being exerted by autonomous departments in the government which did not all have the Immigration Department's "interests" at heart.

The year in which Jupp's book was published also saw the Commonwealth Office of Education institute changes in the "training" programme in order to attempt to make access to it more equitable amongst assisted and non-assisted migrants.43 This was to be done by placing the emphasis of English language training on the pre-embarkation stage. Once in Australia training would be provided for the "migrant who has already taken up employment and is living in the community".44 A recorded English course with audio-visual equipment was recruited, along with radio and correspondence courses.45 It was also recommended that lessons in Australian "industrialism" be provided on the job.46 This would serve the purpose of replacing the old "Australianisation" course with the "industrial integration of migrant employees through English classes"; "industrial integration" being defined as understanding "his responsibility towards employers and unions", which would lead to recognising "his

43. CIAC, 55th meeting, 1966, Item 12.
44. ibid.
45. ibid. Item 12(b) and (c). CIAC, July 1967, Item 7.
46. ibid.
responsibility as a citizen". This was the manner in which the new migrant was to be politically as well as socially integrated, even if the syllogisms upon which it was based were insidiously ambitious. More importantly, for Bonegilla, these new ideas were based on the now official assumption that "integration" and language training were no longer a matter of three to four weeks, but, instead, terms of twenty-four months were being suggested; instruction was thought of as essentially a "long term" project. Bonegilla was to play an officially diminished role in education policy, as it had been in practice for most of its operation. If the centre was now mentioned in education reports, it was merely as an extension of the shipboard course which continued in some cases to be provided. Presumably, these changes indicated an acknowledgement that the old system had just not worked, and there were increasing social pressures demanding some more visible recognition of concern for the quality of the migrants' new life. The more immediate and urgent incentives to actually seek alternatives to the anachronisms of Bonegilla's other functions also came from outside the Immigration Department, but were not inspired by considerations of the migrants' own responses to the system.

47. "If he recognises his responsibilities towards employees and unions he recognises also his responsibilities as a citizen. If he can be helped to establish relationships with fellow employees, based on accepted norms, he will also establish social relationships for himself and his family". There is little evidence that this strategy was followed through in any significant manner.

48. CIPO, 60th, 19 November 1969, Item 10. "The programme in Australia has been directed to the migrant who has already taken employment and is living in the community...spread over a period of twenty-four months".

The key document in relation to Bonegilla's official function after 1967 is the "Joint Committee Inquiry" into the Department of Immigration, tabled in that year by the Auditor General's Committee.50 While part of the Committee's recommendations included the closure of Bonegilla it did so out of financial considerations. At the same time it confirmed that the Immigration Department itself had no intention of closing Bonegilla, even though Benalla's closure had been announced by Mr Snedden that same year.51 Bonegilla's function and relevance remained obvious to Departmental ways of thinking in terms of its status within the history of the immigration programme and its representative function as a Reception centre. As the last of the Department's centres it also meant that the Department retained some vested interest in the migrants once they had arrived in Australia. But the Auditor-General's Committee differed in its appraisal of Bonegilla's usefulness.

The Inquiry's rendering of its argument for the closure of Bonegilla emerged from its examination of the various facilities offered at Bonegilla and their economic viability. General overheads at the camp were also increased by its isolation and therefore added to transport costs.52 The hospital services still existed for example, and although its bed capacity and services had been reduced, excessive funds were spent in its day to day running, as also with other special services such as creche facilities. It was difficult to recoup any losses from charges made to migrants

50. ibid.
51. ibid, p.143.
52. ibid. A detailed calculation of the weekly per capita costs at the Bonegilla and Benalla migrant centre were provided to substantiate the claim that they were an unwarranted financial burden on the Department. At a cost of $19.19 per capita per week at Bonegilla only $3 per week was recovered. p.142.
because as transients they had a short stay, and the first week of accommodation free. It was also concerned at the "poor" standard of accommodation towards which all this expense was being directed, arguing that converted wartime huts were inappropriate twenty-two years after the war had elapsed. The Committee went on to applaud Snadden's announcement to close Benalla by December "on the ground that the need for the type of accommodation provided there has declined progressively as private and hostel accommodation has become more readily available in Australia".53 Despite the Immigration Department's plans for Bonegilla, the conclusion was unambiguous in its demand for the closure of Bonegilla on all grounds, and in its place would be undertaken the construction of "new hostels" while others, not including Bonegilla, were "improved in quality".54

In the Hansard reports of the presentation of the Committee's findings, Senator Fitzgerald, who had himself been on the Committee, confirmed the points already mentioned adding only, "we felt that this action could well have received earlier scrutiny within the Department".55 It seems that already by this stage all the dice were being loaded against the continued operation of Bonegilla: the Public Accounts Committee thought that they had a case for the closure of Bonegilla on financial grounds, the Commonwealth Office of Education had withdrawn virtually all major support for its education function, and even Oppermann in 1965 had denied any further plans to renovate Bonegilla, and half the centre had been returned

53. ibid. p.146. Benalla was still used as a Holding centre.

54. ibid. p.

to the army. But, at the same time, Bonegilla had retained its Departmental status in the face of major changes in the manpower orientation of the immigration programme itself. It is this factor, the employment function of Bonegilla, so integral to its operation, which gains least attention in all the reports ensuing the Committee's findings. It is only considered indirectly in another report issued by the CIPC Long Term Committee (the same year that the Joint Enquiry was tabled) concerned with "Estimating Future Labour Needs" and which noted the shift of labour away from primary production:

The proportion of the workforce in primary production is decreasing, as are the actual numbers employed in the industry, despite the 32% increase in the workforce from 1947-1961.56

While this analysis constituted an official legitimation of a trend which had been affecting employment allocation on a local level at Bonegilla at least since the latter half of the fifties, the direct connection between this move and Bonegilla's absorption function was never made in any official report. For the "Long Term Planning Committee" Bonegilla's role had become suspect, but its specific redundancy was related in rather an oblique manner to an improvement in the general housing situation and the concurrent replacement of Reception and Holding centres with improved accommodation to attract preferred migrants.57 The accommodation argument was the vein in which most explanations of Bonegilla's limited viability were summarised. It was an argument, encapsulated in Snedden's own framing of the "changing emphasis" in 1968, which the Department of Immigration

57. CIAC, March 1968, Item 17.
had itself been using since the termination of the "DP" scheme but which
had wrought little actual change, although the aim was now to "eliminate
the old unfavourable image of hostels" so that the attack was being
mustered as much against the representative value of Bonegilla as the
manner in which it functioned.58 Those elements which constituted the
basis of its routinised form were becoming the basis for arguments
advocating its demise.

In 1967, over 10,000 migrants had passed through Bonegilla.59
Although it had already been decided that Bonegilla was to be closed, in
the CIPAC report for March 1968 it was reported that the Department was
examining the possibility of phasing out the "staging camp" period for
non-British migrants.60 The rationale behind the decision was "that this
would remove any suggestion of discrimination, the immediate effect would
be to reduce the use of the Bonegilla centre and ultimately might lead to
its closure". Considering that the Committee report had already been
accepted, as well as the proclamation of the closure of Bonegilla in the
"Long Term Planning" report, the lack of co-ordination either in themes or
acknowledgement of other decisions is, at least, curious. Even though all
roads seemed to be leading to the assumption that somehow Bonegilla was now
an anachronism, in theory as well as practice, and an embarrassing one at
that, one might wonder about the reintroduction of this rationale, first
proposed in 1953, and its inspiration, particularly when in June the CIPAC
reaffirmed the Department's faith in the general system which had until
then been used for accommodating assisted migrants:

58. ibid.
59. ibid.
60. ibid, c.f. 1953, CIPAC decision, above p.133.
...the migrant first needs initial reception accommodation, then temporary (but long term) low rental housing while settling down, and finally permanent housing on the same basis as the community in general.61

This was not so much advocating radical structural change, as hinting at the need for structural differentiation to cater for practical requirements or more economic considerations. These were in turn based partly on the changing nature of manpower needs and on immigration's need for a new image, catering increasingly for the potential migrants who were recognised as making more "sophisticated" choices.62 So that the changes which were to be instituted in the new urban-centred accommodation system were promoted as countering some of Bonegilla's occasionally acknowledged negative aspects, helping to remove the sense of frustration which inevitably rose with newly arriving migrants whose stay in Bonegilla became protracted whilst they awaited employment placement.63

— By 1969 it was widely accepted that Bonegilla was all but closed, although it in fact remained open until 1971, catering for the few who could still not be provided for within the new accommodation system.64 The arguments were conclusive. Its place in immigration policy and programme had been economically and socially, practically and representatively, usurped.

61. CIAC, October, Item 11.

62. ACC, 1968, p.13. If this was the basis upon which the new accommodation system was to operate, catering for both British and non-British migrants, without any show of "discrimination", then the hostel system would merely be taking up where Bonegilla had left off, this time in an urban industrial rather than rural setting.

63. CIAC, March 1968, Item 17.

64. IPC, 3 September 1971, 21st meeting, Item 13. Its capacity had decreased to 150. The IPC had been formed in 1962 (Immigration Publicity Council).
The last few years of Bonegilla's life were quiet and passed by almost unacknowledged. Migrants did not stay for very long, and, for the staff, life continued as it always had, the routines remaining much the same, but having long lost their urgency and sense of significance. Bonegilla's imminent closure incited the barest of governmental commentary, and even then it was spared little sentiment: for the Federal Immigration Minister, Dr Forbes, Bonegilla could now be depicted as "redundant and obsolete". The Press, though, had their own epitaphs to offer, and in October, a special article appeared in the Melbourne Herald declaring "Little Europe Closes its Doors". This was the picture it drew of Bonegilla in October, a few months before it was to close, finally:

No more than 1,200 migrants have passed through Bonegilla this year. Only 110 newcomers are there at present. The staff is down to 46 and most of them preparing to close down in December.

...In the camp recreation halls storemen are stacking furniture and fittings ready for disposal. Mounds of bed springs, mattresses, mirrors, chairs, cots, baby baths, bedside lockers, mats, curtains, pillows stretch from floors to ceiling.

The camp's last director is Mr John Carroll. "It's a sad job closing down", he says. "I've been here five years and met hundreds of interesting people and made lots of friends. I'll be sorry to be leaving"...Social worker Eugenia Martek gives out an issue of free clothes to a newly-arrived Yugoslav family and says: "Many migrants have found it tough here at first. Everything was so different here. They missed the city life they knew back home."


66. DMW, 18 December 1971, p.2. It was also recorded that 320,000 migrants had passed through the centre since it had opened.

But most of them get over it quickly enough. They got busy with English classes and started fishing and swimming. Bonegilla was good for that..."The final groups of migrants is expected at Bonegilla next week. Meantime, talks on the future uses of the centre are still going on".68

The centre was to be handed over to the Department of Interior, and some of it let out as grazing land.69 Somewhat fittingly in the minutes of the Immigration Publicity Council meeting of September it was noted as the final official word, "that Bonegilla had served a worthwhile purpose".70

By midnight of Friday 17 December, the last of the migrants had passed through.71

68. ibid. Carroll had been Director since 1966.
70. IPC, 3 September 1971, Item 13.
CONCLUSION:

"Little Europe Closes Its Doors"

Bonegilla was a babel of different tongues, an uneasy simmering of passions, hopes and fears, a psychiatrist's case book of problems, a romantic novelist's dreams of loves that lead to weddings in a foreign land.

It was a little Europe in a bleak, improbable setting of 1941 army huts and gum trees under the hot southern sun... (The Herald, 2 October, 1971).

We now have ethnic capitalists as well as Anglo-Australians. But whatever the life experience of individuals the bulk of our immigrants have gone into working class jobs and remain there in an ethnically segmented and stratified labour force. M. de Lepervanche, Indians in White Australia, p.194.

When two Herald reporters came to write an article in 1971 depicting Bonegilla as a "little Europe", in the tradition of media approaches before them, they associated its significance with a "romanticised" interpretation of the "migrant experience". Bonegilla was by that time seen as representing a whole period of attitudes towards, and experiences of, immigration programmes which was now, with Bonegilla's demise, at a close. From an even later perspective, that demise could be read as coinciding with the eve of "multiculturalism" and an assumed recognition that migrants' "equal status" in Australian society was not so much a description, as a prescription which had to be achieved through special policy measures. Immigration policy, in search of renewed stability and credibility, would be portrayed as having matured, as having gone beyond

the stage of self-questioning and as having emerged wiser for the experience. The history of Bonegilla, in comparison, would serve only as an embarrassing reminder of a certain naiveté, better forgotten. As the period during which Bonegilla operated became incorporated into the assimilation era of Australian immigration history, so the effect of its role on shaping the nature of the "migrant experience" for those who had passed through its gates was increasingly underplayed or forgotten.

This thesis has tried to pick up the threads of the Bonegilla story. It has assumed that its history is integral to our understanding of post-war immigration in Australia and the present status of what has become known as the "migrant experience". Within the limitations of an analysis of assisted non-British immigration and the Reception scheme from 1947-1971, Bonegilla's significance to these themes has been traced as though proceeding through certain phases.

The first phase is implicit in Parts One and Two of the thesis. That is the origin and development of Bonegilla's role in expressing as programme an evolving immigration policy which had begun in a limited way in the Displaced Person's Scheme. That policy aimed to maximise the economic benefits which the "DPS" offered by applying a rationale which sought to minimise the assumed social threat which they posed. This policy of "non-confrontation" and "dispersal" for "assimilation" purposes, represented and actualised by the Reception and Training Centre, came to conveniently suit the rural and public works basis of urgent "absorption" needs. Yet Bonegilla's own status within immigration planning was gauged according to its "representative" as well as "actual" role; that is, in terms of its association with the idea of "control", apart from assessments of its practical operation.
The second phase, considered in Part Three, takes us beyond, to a Bonegilla which, in continuing to perform functions similar to those for which it was initially created, had taken on a "routinised" role in immigration policy for assisted migrants. This routinisation was grounded in the continued official reading of Bonegilla's "success" in relation to absorption and control purposes, without taking into account the migrants' own responses to their circumstances, or the changing patterns of immigration and Australian economic growth. The period from the latter half of the fifties to the sixties was one during which not only Bonegilla's internal contradictions became more obvious, but the tension between its immediate contingencies and the role for which it was first created, was increasingly strained. Its very source of legitimacy, whether employment, "training", or accommodation orientated, became problematic as a result of external influences being imposed upon the immigration programme. As manpower needs were gradually shifting their emphases from the rural and public works sector to manufacturing and heavy industry, "training" and accommodation programmes were concurrently also being modified, no longer focusing completely on Bonegilla as either unique or indispensable. Although Bonegilla still maintained its "representative" status for the Immigration Department, internal conflicts (of which the riots are more visible examples) intensified the problematic associated with its continued operation. Out of the rift between Bonegilla's actual and official representative functions more damaging versions of its representative status were constructed. But these would only come into active play once Bonegilla's fate had already been decided by government groups with interests outside the Department of Immigration.

In terms of effectiveness, the interest that the "riots" have since generated distracts our attention from the more consistent, if relatively
mundane, everyday role of Bonegilla. It is this role which left its indelible imprint on the lives of the majority of the migrants. It also provides the key to a further alternative appraisal of Bonegilla, in the context of de Lepervanche's understanding of the social and economic position which the majority of immigrants found, and find themselves in, an "ethnically segmented and stratified labour force", and of the place Bonegilla had in realising and reinforcing that situation.

A reading of Bonegilla's history which considers the development and persistence of assumptions and stereotypes in and through the routinisation of the immigration programme, has implications for a wider understanding of immigration policy during this period. To an extent, Bonegilla's history, as presented in this thesis, supports the more obvious assertion that non-British assisted immigration was devised and continued largely in association with manpower objectives, feeding first the demand for labour on the land, and then in the factories, so that as Bonegilla became less practical to operate, an alternative system of urban migrant reception and accommodation was expanded to suit those industrial needs. While such an argument, organised around a labour supply and demand thesis, has implications for explaining why immigration was so frenetically pursued by succeeding governments, it needs to take into account the anomalies in the relationship between policy and programme, and the self-legitimating impetus of the Immigration bureaucracy.2 Other kinds of explanations need

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2. Although I have privileged economic considerations in this thesis, a more intensive analysis of this aspect would need to recognise what Weber termed the "relative autonomy" of politics and the economy, the role of the inherent inertia of public institutions.
to be sought as to how an "ethnically segmented and stratified labour force" could, and does, persist. In this thesis I have argued that this social process is firmly anchored in institutional structures, through mechanisms of "association" as well as "action" - through the "representative" as well as "actual" value of Bonegilla.

For the assisted non-British migrants who passed through, Bonegilla exercised a determining role over their lives. This "control" remained, to differing degrees, a constant feature of its "actual" function; through its physical isolation and through its employment allocation service, even when not in conjunction with a directed labour commitment. Yet this control was also made manifest in other ways. Even if Bonegilla became more flexible in performing its absorption and assimilation role, and the "crisis" element lost some of its urgency after the "DP" period, at the very least it continued the basic discrimination between non-British and British, northern and southern Europeans, assisted and non-assisted migrants. It institutionalised assumed public responses in terms of who the public feared and why, and then gave credence to those fears and resulting prejudices by putting into action programmes which operated by basing themselves on those assumptions. It also operated according to the assumption, and gave that assumption validity, that when certain services were offered to the assisted non-British migrant an exchange was due, usually in terms of labour or economic contributions, in which the unassisted or British migrants could not be so readily assumed to participate. In this context it could also be argued that Bonegilla helped institutionalise the "type" of work which certain ethnic groups of migrants were expected to do:
The direction of labour had established that European migrants were destined for heavy industry, the public utilities, rural labouring and menial domestic and hospital work. Unfortunately this tradition seems to have carried over into free migration and to have established a belief that skilled workers and professionals come from Britain and manual and unskilled workers from Europe. (James Jupp, Arrivals and Departures, p.46).

The programme, built in and around the Bonegilla experiment, reproduced certain responses; firstly through the very processes of reception, training and employment placement, in other words its actual operation, and secondly, means of association, that is what it represented. Bonegilla not only became notorious for its definitive association with a certain "type" of migrant, the "typical Displaced Person", but the effect worked in the reverse as well. The stigma of "DP" status, its connotations of displacement, poverty, desperation, which were so unpalatable to a "threatened" society, were transposed as part of the legitimatising system for Bonegilla's continued existence. It was convenient that those who became associated with the centre were liable to be associated with the "DP" situation, for then further legitimations could be invoked regarding the nature of the governmental response to their situation, as well as the migrants' own responses to those efforts.

What became routinised along with the programme were the stereotypes and assumptions according to which the programme was initiated. Bonegilla, along with the directed labour scheme, gave reinforcement to "traditional" expectations, as well as creating precedents regarding the assumed place of non-British migrants in Australian society in relation to their economic contribution, the amount of control that the Australian government could exercise over the direction of their lives in order to realise those expectations, and the role of the migrant as one of passive acceptance. Bonegilla functioned less as an arena for knowledge exchange between the migrants, local administration and representatives of policy, and more as a
means of "insulating" that knowledge, or lack of it. The boundaries of Bonegilla served to reinforce the parameters of the dominant society, providing clear and convenient points of demarcation according to which that society could define its "official reality". It could be further argued that even Bonegilla's gradual replacement by a less concentrated system of reception still operated according to basically unchanged assumptions about the role of migrants and immigration within Australia's society. Such an hypothesis is, of course, partially outside the scope of this thesis, but has important implications for our understanding of the ostensible development of immigration policy from "assimilation" after the war, to the era of "multiculturalism" coinciding with Bonegilla's closure.

The final, or at least "present" metamorphosis of "Bonegilla" demands other kinds of questions, as "Bonegilla" has been appropriated as an occasional and indefinite symbol by "migrant" groups and individuals. Whereas once it served a representative function for the Immigration Department, its representative value has now undergone some displacement. No longer having any significance for the immigration question in terms of its "success", "Bone/gilla" (as it was pronounced by Immigration officials) is now used, particularly in the context of the riots that took place there, as a symbol for challenging such readings. "Bo/ne/gil/la" (its "migrant" re-interpretation) does not stand for any one specific feature of the "migrant experience" but at times is used as a point of reference in the liturgy of the individual's victory, or defeat at the hands of the "system"; as a representation of a general oppression, or as a contrast to present "success". Depending on the preferred "fiction", "Bo/ne/gil/la" has been co-opted into the realm of immigration myth, as well as constituting a major part of the immigrants' reordering of their reality, much as the Immigration Department itself had used it. Yet that
significance has largely remained dormant on the fringes of an historical discourse which has still to fully co-opt an alternative history of immigration within, and not on the peripheries, of the official or mainstream construct. I believe that this thesis contributes more to our overall understanding of that past/present relationship by placing that "migrant history" within the social and political context which largely shaped and directed the nature of the post-war "migrant experience". Although by categorising this thesis as "historical", it might be assumed that the implications of the role of that myth have been avoided, I do not deny that my very acceptance of Bonegilla's significance to that history may have its own role to play within that present metamorphosis.

Postscript:

That "present" metamorphosis, it seems, is about to pass into a further phase, as the Department of Immigration has decided to create an Immigration "museum" from the few remaining "migrant centre" buildings on the Bonegilla site. The project has been timed to coincide with the Australian Bicentenary celebrations. Such co-opting of the past into another bureaucratic framework is not without its own implications. For the Department of Immigration it can be seen as part of a self-historicizing impulse, creating a present identity against the outlines of a past in which it is no longer seen as participating because of the distance which can be evoked once that past has been relegated to the status of "artefact" or "relic". From another point of view, the reappropriation of "Bone/gilla" as part of the Department's own official identity can also be read as an attempt to "de-politicise" "Bo/ne/gil/la's" significance for the "migrant". What this latest development indisputably confirms is that "Bonegilla's" (Bone/Bo/ne/gilla?) political significance
may come to have as much, or more, resonance in the future of Australian Immigration history than it ever had during its actual period of operation.
APPENDICES

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Bonegilla, Nelson Bay,
the dry-land barbed wire ships
from which some would never land.

In these, as their parents
learned the Fresh Start music:
physicians nailing crates,
attorneys cleaning trams,
the children had one last
ambiguous summer holiday.

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(from "Immigrant Voyage",
Les Murray, Ethnic Radio)
APPENDIX A : SOURCES

"What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking".

1. Oral History

The approach road to writing a "history" of an Immigration centre such as Bonegilla is one littered with potentially critical obstacles in regards to sources. To begin with a basic narrative needed to be constructed which would constitute the "core" of that "history". But because the period covered was from 1947 to 1971, much archival material was inaccessible under the thirty year closed access period regulations. This meant that the bulk of close detail in my thesis would tend to be concentrated on "Displaced Person" years, for which the closed access does not at the present time apply. This did not affect my overall aims though, since I could partially compensate for the later period by ravaging newspaper sources, local and national, and records of CIAC and CIPC meetings. From the use of official documents and the media, it seemed an obvious and necessary progression to make use of the ample "oral sources" available, in the form of "migrants" and "Australians" who had participated in the Bonegilla operation. But again, my canvassing of ethnic newspapers and cultural societies resulted in a greater emphasis on the early period and it became quite difficult to track down people who had passed through Bonegilla in the late fifties or sixties. As with Wendy Lowenstein's research for *Weevils in the Flour*, the principle of "scientific sampling" was impossible:

I interviewed people I knew, people who responded to newspaper publicity, and people to whom I had been passed on by other informants... (p.xiii).

So that there was no question of their testimonies being representative in any tangibly cross-sectional or numerical manner. Of the "migrants", it was usually those who were more established who came forward to proffer information; of the "Australians", it was more often a matter of chasing them. Even then, in both groups, (more usually the "migrants"), there were those who did not feel certain of the wisdom of speaking with me on the topic of their early lives in Australia, or of their role in the Bonegilla operation. Bonegilla's significance in Australian immigration history was more obvious though to the "Australian" personnel involved, who often encouraged me in my endeavours to construct its history, albeit varying versions of that history. While the value of the use of "oral sources" has become more widely accepted and conventionalised, their use still predicates difficulties of a theoretical as well as practical nature which demand at least a brief commentary.
"Oral sources" is a somewhat ambiguous and misleading title for the diversity of forms in which the sources that were not officially documented came into my hands. Most interviews were taped, but some were recorded from memory into writing; other responses to my general questionings occurred in the form of letters or as "literary" recollections, (i.e. consciously "poetic"). Added to this were the already published collections of "oral accounts", and, in this present era of burgeoning "ethnic" literature, there were novels and short stories to be considered - or even films. I automatically grouped all these "sources" together because of what I distinguished as a shared "autobiographical" element, which not only provided an indication of how they were to be dealt with, but which also made it seem pedantic to initiate a "sub-group" around the taped interviews as distinctively separate. What they have in common is the quality of being constructed from memory; they are reflections, usually from an acute distance, rather than participatory dialogues, or perhaps participatory to the extent that they are involved as much with a present as a past. They are constructs of "popular" as well as of "private" memories. As part of a contemporary consciousness they have more in common with the products of historiography, than with "artefacts". This is often seen as a potential problem when turning to oral sources to fill in the gaps in a narrative of events. For example, when referring to oral sources in my thesis for "empirical" detail, I was not always able to double-check preferred details, so that a certain amount of "trust" was, of necessity, operative, much in the way one "trusts" a written document to offer up a certain accuracy and factuality regarding such details. Where possible it was also often simple enough to subject them to a test of "common sense" and consistency, and they became invaluable jumping off points for further research. The problems arose really only when I wished to go further, demanding emotional or critical commentary. Such an endeavour was hedged off, as with any form of autobiography, by the complex interweaving of consciousnesses attempting to reorder the chaos of the past, giving it significances that may not have existed "at the time". Although the warnings which need to be heeded in the face of conventional historiography are multiple, they should not be construed as particular to "oral" sources (defined either as the spoken source, or the recollected source), or to the "migrants" manner of seeing the world; the patterned means through which the "other" is comprehended; the self-deprecating process through which the self is often made comprehensible to the "other"; all ways of reading the world are governed by forms of conventions. The problem is one of discovering, or deciding whether one can discover, the form that the convention takes now, as distinct to that which may have been ordering their sense of the relationship between the past/present forty years ago.

In this thesis what I have taken as of interest is the manner in which the "migrants" particularly were caught up in social structures and processes which were largely outside of their control or alien to them, yet which managed to determine the shape of their lives for at least those first few years in Australia. In this context, what is even more intriguing is the manner in which the significance of Bonegilla is often blithely set aside as inconsequential. Because of the short period of time spent there by most of the transient migrants, (except those who arrived during the recessions, or who were employed in the camp), the effect of the camp is often minimalised, and conditions relativised, to that time factor. Significances can be deconstructed in other ways. An emphasis on the general relationships between the migrants, administration and policy
makers, although of interest to my overall theme, and of interest to the reader, can be easily disturbed by the "migrants'" own dismissal of such significances in favour of more vividly pungent and continued concerns with the quantity and quality of food at the time. Most often, for the "DPs" particularly, the mutton provisions, which made up a large part of their diet there three times a day, were intolerable, dietetically as well as aesthetically. With the tenacious nature of its pervasive smell, the imprint mutton made on many migrants' minds retains its significance over other less memorable features of the monotony of camp life. It gains in significance for them as well when understood in the context of the "social" standing of mutton in Europe - the cheapest, least preferred, and usually not eaten type of meat - and to the general food obsession which dominated the "DPs'"existence in those war years and in "DP" camps afterwards.

Some of the migrants whom I interviewed have an active role in keeping the past alive for the ethnic groups to which they belong, therefore were not only willing to offer information, but the information itself was more consciously determined in its emphases. In contrast, for those who wished to forget the "injustices" or discomforts of the past (more often those successful in the present who have no desire to recall such memories), it could be tied in to a more satisfying present day dialogue with righted wrongs, and economic justifications. The patterns are never of course this clear cut, but neither is there any doubt that the remembrance of things past in either of these particular responses is in a way an avenue for reflection on situations present. Even when its significance is denied, or represented in terms of food, Bonegilla acts as a political symbol as much through the vehemence of such denial, as the acceptance of its importance. Similarly, while for the Australian personnel involved their is a different social context to be placed on their reading of their involvement with Bonegilla, it is one which recognises Bonegilla's importance in the scheme of immigration history, as well as its affect on the present status of immigration. So that while their commentary might vary in its attention to "criticism" or "defense", the very need to construct its significance according to such values points to the potency of Bonegilla as a political symbol, potentially alive for them now in ways it may not have been in the past. This approach, of criticism versus defense, is often shared by the migrants, even if in terms of individual effect rather than of their general understanding of Australian society. Such interpretations are, of course, no more or less subject to conventional ways of seeing than this thesis, which is constructed in the midst of a very distinct discourse concerning ethnicity and immigration, and without which the interest of Bonegilla to that history might seem limited at the very least. But at that point of recognition it is of more value to attempt to pull apart the patterning according to which those oral sources themselves are constructed, than to deconstruct the validity of an examination of the past. Luisa Passerini in her own work in oral history, has argued that the complex interweaving of past with present as the basis of recollection (even in its more highly self-conscious form of reconstructed academic history) does not mean that we abandon such sources, instead:
We cannot afford to lose sight of the peculiar specificity of oral material and we have to develop conceptual approaches – and indeed insist upon that type of analysis – that can succeed in drawing out their full implications. Above all, we should not ignore that the raw material of oral history consists not just in factual statements, but is pre-eminently a representation and expression of culture, and therefore includes not only literary narrations but also the dimensions of memory, ideology and sub-conscious desires.


Using oral history becomes not so much a matter of attempting to graft its informative capacities onto more orthodox historical sources and narratives, but of re-examining our idea of history and what it is we do when we write history, both being caught up in the complex dialectical relationship between the past and the present. In terms of reading, reinterpreting, reconstructing a history of Bonegilla when there is no pre-packaged narrative upon which to base our reconstruction, only a more general official reading of the immigration programme, such a rethinking not only allows for the integration of an alternative history, but of looking at the migrants’ interaction with the making of that history. This becomes obvious in the analysis of the migrants’ impressions of the centre when contrasted with that of the administrators, particularly in the accounts of the riots in 1952 and 1961, and of the contrasting views within those two larger categories. At another level I hoped that my use of “oral sources”, or autobiographical material, would illuminate aspects of these relationships within Bonegilla, and in turn help to explain the reason for policy pursuing certain directions, and seek some explanation of the confrontations which occurred there: the continuing incongruency between the level of policy and the experience of the migrants themselves, or to discover the very existence of that gap in understanding. To an extent I can only posit a solution in terms of how I have actually incorporated such material into my thesis and arguments, rather than suggest exact theoretical hypotheses. Birner and Wright of the Popular Memory Group, based in Britain, posit their own solution to this problem which predicates a certain manner of approaching the material, and asking the right questions based on clear definitions of memory:

Memory has a texture which is both social and historic: it exists in the world rather than in people’s heads, finding its basis in conversation, cultural forms, personal relations, the structure and appearance of places and most fundamentally for this argument in relation to ideologies which work to establish a consensus view of both the past and the forms of personal experience which are significant and memorable.

("Charms of Residence", *Making Histories* p.256)

It is within this conceptualisation of memory in relation to autobiography that I have incorporated my so called “oral sources” in this text, as a means to a more concise understanding of a certain past, in all its dimensions.
II. The Interview

As a preface to the actual listing of "interviews", (using the term loosely to indicate those responding to my request for information generally, as well as to specific questions on my part) I felt the need to provide some description of the ways in which the interviews took place. While these are summarised below according to the individual "interviewees", I must acknowledge my own role in "directing" the course of responses, eliciting information, and directing the turn of reflections by my very suggestion of Bonegilla's importance to my work, and the type of work I indicated it to be, even if not through a direct questionnaire. But at the same time, during those interview sessions, I aimed to give the impression that I wished to incite the need for my preconceptions to be corrected. I attempted to encourage an atmosphere in which the interviewee was free to construct her/his own significances, without losing sight of my own interests, and more importantly the points at which the two failed to converge. But there are other ways in which the historian constructing a history must recognise that the methods she uses can, in particular instances, distort our conception of that past: For example, my imposition of larger definitions and categories onto individuals and individual circumstances. I have partly tried to rectify my blanket use of the term "DP" by providing a separate introduction as to the possibilities of individual identification hidden by this term, but there are other more basic oppositions between "migrant" and "Australian", or transient and staff migrants, which do not always hold. These categories all have their use, but it should be noted that, as categories, they are general and not always active to the exclusion of other frames of identification in defining the nature of experiences within the camp situation: When Franken tells of evenings whiled away in Brigadier Lemaire's room with port, cigars and classical music, we need to be aware that a relationship has been established on a level other than that of ethnic identity, although Franken's very presence in the camp and in the capacity of Block Supervisor with limited authority within the centre has certainly been predetermined by the wider society's acceptance of ethnic criteria above any other. There is also a problem of setting the term "migrant" as though in opposition to "Australia". While the use of "migrant" would urge us to seek out commonalities of experience, the individual interpretation of that experience, accepting the retrospective nature of the account, often quite effectively avoids notions of consensus, of shared perceptions - "Pino" and "Lajovic" may both arrive in Australia as Yugoslav refugees but the former had only recently been incorporated into a Yugoslav identity, had spent years in "DP" camps, and came from a basically working class background. Lajovic was brought up in Slovenia, had spent only minimal time in embarkation camps, and came from a fairly well-to-do middle class family. It is no wonder, not even taking into account the present divergences between their social status, that their perceptions of Bonegilla are quite obviously at odds: "Pino" considers it a time of alienation, of exploration; for Lajovic it was like a "holiday". The terms "migrant" and Australian also preclude other forms of identification based on gender. The experience of the female migrant was often qualitatively different particularly if married, being "passed through" an alternative system of Holding Centre accommodation (see Appendix D). In this short introduction I can only suggest the possible permutations of identification and
relationships, yet such divergences within the larger category "migrant" warn us also of the dangers as well as the advantages of utilising oral sources. As Janis Wilton so ably tells us:

If, in the future, oral evidence in the study of immigration is used mainly to add more individual life histories and experiences to those already available, then a tower of babel again threatens. If the experiences and recollections are not probed, then there is the risk of perpetuating the image that it is the migrants' lot to struggle and work hard and to suffer discrimination and that the migrant experience can be safely divorced from the politics and power structures within the migrants communities and within the Australian society.

APPENDIX B

The "Displaced Person"

I would like to emigrate to Australia under the above scheme and understand that if I am selected I must remain in the employment found for me there for at least one year and that I would not be permitted to change that employment within that period without the consent of the Department of Immigration.


The "Displaced Persons" who arrived in Australia may have had in common their "displaced" status, which obligated them to sign a two year work agreement with the Australian government, and then assured the "passing through" at Bonegilla or a camp like it, but they represented a vaster cross-section of European society than the blanket term "DP" suggests. They varied in national affiliations, religious, social and political backgrounds. A majority may have shared certain war experiences, (including life in displaced persons' camps, sometimes for as long as four years or more, but not all of them had even been in these camps), but there were individual variations in motivations for deciding, or having it decided for them, that they would settle in Australia, as well as more important factors of class, which cut across national boundaries.

Primarily the term "DP" became synonymous with "Balt", most of the earlier arrivals originating from the Baltic region (ie Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), which itself created assumptions that they were a homogeneous social and cultural group. But "Bals" accounted for only 35,000 of the 182,159 "DPs" who came to Australia in this period and were not representative of the total refugee group, just as not all "Bals" had similar backgrounds:

While Australia saw a massive influx of people with common backgrounds, common language, threatening in their foreign unity, the migrants felt part of no movement, saw amongst themselves national conflicts and personal loneliness and were unable to communicate often, except in camp German.

Richards, "Eastern Europeans in Australia", in Racial the Australian Experience, ed. F.S. Stevens, p.115.

To some extent a certain homogeneity could be claimed for some amongst the earlier groups who were selected to come to Australia. The very fact of their selection usually decided that, despite their recruitment for unskilled labour, a high proportion would be highly educated, overwhelmingly in the working age category, and single or at child bearing ages (Richards, p.114). But even these criteria varied at different times. Racial and social categories were constantly being broadened: by the end of
1947, Ukrainians and Slovenes were acceptable; by January 1948, Czechs and Yugoslavs and Poles also, but on a more exacting basis; March 1948, Balts who had been conscripted into the German army were now allowed in; on August 20, the blanket ban on members of the Jewish race was removed for "exceptionally good cases", and if they agreed to work in remote areas; April 29, 1949 all "European races" were deemed respectable (this would have discluded those still recognised as part of the "enemy" forces ie Italy, Germany). Other categories of selection were also broken down gradually: from June 1948 family units were recruited; by February 1949, widows, deserted wives and unmarried mothers with children were included; and by June 1949, male "DPs" without wives but with young children were accepted. These criteria still excluded those "DPs" with obvious communist or Nazi affiliations, or with physical handicaps. (Markus, "Labour and Immigration 1946-1949", p.80-81).

The national groups under which the "DPs" are listed can be misleading categories. For example, many Italians whose towns had, since the war, been aligned with Yugoslavia, would arrive under the nationality of the latter, despite minimal or no familiarity with the notion of being "Yugoslavian" (the diversification of which itself needs to be acknowledged). In the same way many Belyo-Russians were recognised only as Russian, Australian Immigration authorities preferring to ignore the differences which "belyo" might connote. Socially though, the Polish groups were perhaps amongst the most varied, made up of airmen, and soldiers, POW forced labourers, deportees, internees, refugees to neutral countries and survivors of death camps.

Political affiliations also affected selection in other ways, as Aldis Putnins points out in the case of the Latvian group which he has studied, and who almost exclusively arrived in the "DP" era (ie 1947-51):

This situation was possibly more acute among Latvians than among many other immigrant groups due to the selective nature of their emigration, and immigration. For example, there was obvious selectivity with regard to political orientation, it being more likely for anti-communists to flee the Soviet forces than for communist sympathisers. Also as a result of their experiences during the first Soviet occupation, it was known that those who were identifiable as members of the bourgeoisie were at greater risk with regard to arrest or deportation. Consequently members of the intelligensia are over-represented among the Latvian refugees.

IRO Scheme Resettlement: 1st July 1947 - 31st December 1951

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>19,607</td>
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<td>275</td>
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<tr>
<td>Byelorussia</td>
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<td>Yugoslavia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>427</td>
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<td>Hungary</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>19,601</td>
<td>Not Reported</td>
<td>3,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>10,136</td>
<td>Jewish refugees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>60,308</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumania</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>182,159</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Country of Citizenship: Annex 41, "Resettlement" in IRO, Holborn)

As my interview outline of "DPs" indicates, not all had been in "DP" camps and some came by choice and with some resources - these were the elite, who often also had contacts in Australia. As with most "DPs" they were political "exiles". The immigration venture was assumed to be, for the first years at least, a temporary situation - suitcases were "metaphorically" left unpacked in the belief that the situation would improve and a return would be possible - a situation which often affected their adjustment or lack of it in Australia:

The emigre spirit of political activism which on the one hand is created, and on the other hand sustained, by the hope of a return to the "motherland", provides the refugee during this "midway-to-nowhere period" with stresses and experiences not shared by the voluntary migrant and makes him vulnerable to emotional and health hazards.


It was a precarious situation which was to be attenuated in the camp system set up in Australia to cope with these numbers and reflected in the "DP" response to that system:

The "DP" has no handle with which to pull himself into society and no chain along which he can be passed, as in Britain, once he gets in. He has no inking that the society which he is attempting to enter virtually does not exist by his standards or at least has a very different form from what he expects, and in consequence he will tend to regard his failure to succeed as due
either to social hostility or to personal defects. The gregariousness of European social life has been greatly intensified for him in the camps with their eventually highly complex life of central kitchens and block leaders, work rotas and inspections, mass protests and communal entertainment and though he may long to be alone he has adjusted himself to such a life and has become quite dependant on it. Even if he realises the difference between his old and new social environment he is still very far from being able to fit into the Australian ideal of self-sufficiency or to face the quite remarkable emptiness which greets one as soon as one gets out of the cities. Hence adjustment to Australian patterns of life means a much bigger step than either side realises, and this lack of realisation leads to a suspicion of hostility and thence perhaps to real hostility in its turn.

Murphy, "The Assimilation of Refugee Immigrants in Australia", p.198.

Murphy's pessimism though is not reflected in all the "DP" accounts which are included as my "oral sources". As recollections they harbour different emphases; that of the long term perspective, but even then they are of value for the variety of experiences they offer as much as their commonality.
APPENDIX C

Oral Sources - Taped and Otherwise

1947-1951 - "The DPs"

11 A/B Mr Franken, (& wife). 18/8/84. Albury. Bonegilla 9/6/49 until early 1951. They had spent no time in "DP" camps previously. Franken arrived with an Economics degree from Holland, had been commandeered into the US Army because he spoke four languages, including his native Czech, and finally ended up in Austria. They left Europe for "political reasons". On arriving at Bonegilla he had tried to get his own job in Melbourne through contacts, but was not allowed to accept a major position at the Swallow's biscuit factory because the job was not a priority one for "DP" migrants. He was offered a job in the camp as either a teacher or a Block Supervisor, and accepted the latter with his wife as an assistant, and eventually became the Quartering Supervisor. He established lasting friendships with some of the Australian staff, and can proffer photos of Calwell, Lemaire and Dawson. Provided "One day in the life of a Block Supervisor". Settled in the Bonegilla area.

17 A/B "Rolf" and "Monica". 29/9/84. Cheltenham. Bonegilla 1949 - six weeks. Most of the interview is dominated by "Rolf" who, from a Latvian background, was in Bonegilla for three weeks. Trained as a druggist, he arrived during the coal miners' strike, and was placed in temporary work at Bandiana, his qualifications ignored. "Monica" was in Bonegilla for six weeks with her sick child. From an Estonian background with nurse training she had met her husband in "DP" camps in Germany, where they had both been for four years prior to being selected to come to Australia. They "chose" Australia because it was the first country to open up immigration to the family as a unit. His attitude is a "non complaining" one, despite some criticisms which he proffers regarding the system, he believes that those who complained "would always complain".

18 A "Hans L." 22/10/84. Heidelberg. From Estonia, he was a medical student who spent the years prior to arriving in Australia in German "DP" camps, and then continued his studies until 1949 when he decided to immigrate with his mother, being "sick and tired with the war life". He could speak English and had high expectations. He was at Bonegilla for a month until he got a job as a kitchen hand there and worked for a while on the staff. He then went on to work at a T.B. sanitorium. He was separated from his mother upon arriving at Bonegilla because, as a non-transient migrant, he did not have facilities to accommodate her there as well. He argues
that the lifestyle once employed in the camp was different from that as a migrant passing through, although a certain lack of social contact featured in both. Now active literary wise with the Estonian community in Melbourne, he is also aware of the wider problems with the "DP" programme apart from his own experiences. He also argues that if your attitude was positive and work was provided there was no reason to complain.

20 A/B  Mr and Mrs M.  31/10/84.  Macleod.  Bonagilla, May 1949-1959. Estonian. Both are very critical of their time there, particularly Mr M. Previously the Editor of an Estonian newspaper, she his secretary, neither could resume their careers in Australia. They had both also spent four to five years in "DP" camps while still in Europe. Once at Bonagilla they immediately got married and soon began a family which was brought up largely at Bonagilla. Mr M had obtained a job at Bandiana as an interpreter and assistant to T.U. representatives; Mrs M worked as a waitress at Bonagilla and later, after having her children, in administration. Their greatest criticisms concern the enforced separation from her mother, and the treatment that "DPs" received in contrast with other groups arriving later. The interview was difficult because Mr M was ailing, and much of the tape has information regarding their time prior to arriving in Australia. After the tape was turned off there were some comments made as to being treated as "second class citizens", despite a relatively unembittered response to their time there.

14 A/B  Dr H.  7/9/84.  Ivanhoe.  At Bonagilla 1949-54 first as a kitchen hand, then as a medical orderly. Of Hungarian background he had been enticed to come to Australia with his wife with promises of a job in his profession. The interview focused on the plight of doctors arriving as "DPs". The problems with professional recognition, the inadequacies of the hospital at Bonagilla, and the treatment available.

Letter  Augustus T. Frantz.  26/6/84.  Letter received in reply to an ad in local Bega paper. Of Austrian background he arrived aged 30 in 1950, having spent little time in "DP" camps in Europe. His letter gives little information about his background or the type of work which he had done, or was recruited into. Instead, his account, included in the appendix, is mainly an impressionistic one. See also photo.

Letter  Senator Misha Lajovic.  NSW Senate.  8/8/84.  Written answers to general questions. Born Ljubljana, Slovenia in 1921, he studied at the Commercial Academy, his father was an industrialist. He arrived with his family under IRO in 1951 after living in Italy and having spent no time in "DP" camps. He was trained as an accountant and had worked as an interpreter for the British Army in Padua for three years, speaking fluent English, as did his wife. He stayed in
Bonegilla for three months because he refused jobs where he may have been separated from his wife and son. He finally found a job through a brother already in Sydney, and his wife was allocated to a food processing factory. He argues that the character of the individual, his/her optimism, resilience etc, dictated the nature of the migrants' experiences at Bonegilla.

21 B/C Mrs N. 23/11/84. Hallam. Arrived at Bonegilla in 1950, spending only a few weeks there. From a well-educated, comfortable German background, she came as a "DP" because she was married to a Serbian who was "Displaced". She recalls her experiences with humour yet a sensitivity to her circumstances, the cultural misunderstandings, and inhibiting social system into which she was transported. Willing to recount her own stories, there was no need for prompting.

16 A/B Mr Skabiez, and "Frank". 27/9/84. Altona North. Skabiez is a "Belyo-Russian". His previous background in Europe was mainly "small farming", near Minsk. He spent four years in a German camp, acting as camp leader. He spent only a few weeks at Bonegilla, because he was eager to "experience Australia"; so he took the first job offered, bush logging. Active in the Belyo-Russian community in Australia, he played a prominent role in gaining cultural recognition for Belyo-Russians in the fifties. "Frank", in comparison, arrived in 1951 from Poland, having had kitchen experience in American army camps. Once at Bonegilla he got a job at the Benalla camp as a cook. While Skabiez expected to return to Europe, "Frank" did not. "Frank" though is less able to remember or recall the workings of the system into which he was introduced.

15 A/B Mrs Connolly. 25/9/84. Lower Templestowe. Arrived in 1949 at the age of 18 with her family. They had spent no time at "DP" camps. Instead, from a Serbian background, she was educated at a French college in Germany and spoke English, her father was a Civil Engineer, but ended up in a bottle factory in Melbourne. She concentrated mainly on personal endurance as a deciding factor governing how things turned out for the migrants. She has little recall of what happened to her family or of events outside Bonegilla, her family being sent off to a Holding Centre. After ten days she found a job in the camp in the Finance Department. Eventually marrying one of the camp CES officers, she talks mostly about other Australians in the camp. "...it was mostly a matter of attitude".

8 A/B "Serge". Carlton. Arrived Australia 7th November, 1950 from Fiume, which had been taken over by Yugoslavia after the war (Rjeka). Although Italian by birth, his nationality was now Yugoslav, and thus he was accepted as a "DP" to Australia. He worked as a journalist in Italy. He was only at
Bonegilla for a short while with his wife, when they were allocated as cleaners to a Warburton guest house. Has had close links with the Italian community in Melbourne since, including work as editor with "Il Globo", and is now a respected businessman. In 1961 he was invited back to Bonegilla to report on conditions there after the riots and also to use his influence to calm the Italians already there. While well aware of the political circumstances of his role, he regards a hard work ethic as basic criteria for any migrants' success.

Untaped Mr Kazmirczek. Newport. Tape spoiled. He was at Bonegilla with his wife for two months in 1950. Polish ex-army background and a locksmith by trade, his qualifications were not recognised. His time at Bonegilla was spent separated from his wife; while she was accommodated in a hut, he was allocated a tent.

22 A/B "Ania". 23/11/84. Glen Waverley. The interview mainly concentrated on her time before and after Bonegilla. As for many of the migrants the significance of Bonegilla was seen as minimal compared to longer periods of time spent in other camps or their succeeding life in Australia. She herself was only at Bonegilla for a few weeks (December 1949 - January 1950). Polish background, spent her adolescence growing up in camps, teaching herself to read and write English. Went through the Holding Centre system as well.

5 A/B C/Dmrs K. 13/6/84, and daughter "Baiba". Latvian, she arrived as a widow with two children aged four and five. Her first period at Bonegilla was as a transient (February-March, 1950), after which she was sent to a Holding camp, and was employed as a nurses' assistant for two years. From 1952 until 1965 she was employed at the Bonegilla hospital. Camp life was all that she had known until that time and since the war. She recalls her life there with some resignation. Not mixing much, being busy with bringing up her family, she observed the camp world through her work at the hospital. There is some confusion in her chronology of events. She finally leaves Bonegilla when her second husband, met and married in the camp, dies.

9 A/B "Borris". Interview conducted through letter and tape, prompted by a general question sheet. Borris was at Bonegilla from December, 1949 until mid-1951. Arrived through IRo, but not a "DP" as such. Slovenian in origin, he had been a student in Geneva when he decided he wished to emigrate for political purposes. Multi-lingual, he taught English in the Italian embarkation camp and on the ship, and found a job at Bonegilla as a hospital interpreter. His attitude is generally one of not wanting to complain, regarding his time in Australia as better than anything made possible in Europe. Although he is critical of the role of the military in the camp, he thinks Bonegilla was a good idea. He
himself just stayed in the camp long enough to work off the contract period.

4 A Sylvana. 7/6/84. Altona. Italian by birth, Sylvana left Fiume when it was taken over by Yugoslavia. Before arriving in Australia with her family she had spent time in thirteen different "DP" camps. Her life in Fiume had been city orientated. With her family they were at Bonegilla from November, 1950 until January, 1951, and for the first three weeks were accommodated in a tent with no flooring and kerosene lamps. Most of the time the interview revolved around the situation of migrants being kept in ignorance, the family's disillusionment, their separation.

Letter Janez Primozic. 30/7/84. Queensland. Letter translated from Slovenian. Arrived 1950 and sent to Greta Reception Centre. From well-educated Slovenian background. He arrived with his wife, but was separated from her in the camp and sent off while she stayed there.

6 A/B Pino. 15/6/84. Altona. Arrived early 1952 as a "DP" from Fiume. Aged fifteen he was too young to be contracted, but his father and sister were instead. He is highly critical about the conditions at Bonegilla, and their treatment. His family were separated his older sister being left behind while he and his mother went off to a Holding centre and his father to Swan Hill. In Europe they had been in camp for 40 years, but their reasons for coming to Australia are political rather than economic. Still actively involved in writing about Fiume, and the experiences of those early migrants. Revisited Bonegilla in 1969.

4 B Mrs Kotov. 7/6/84. Interview somewhat hindered by interviewee's lack of English. Arrived in Bonegilla in January, 1951, a widow with a young child. She found employment in the creche there and stayed until 1956, when she was employed at a Brooklyn hostel. Refugee from Ukraine.

The "Voluntary" Migrants : 1952-1971

Letter Mrs Mezinee. South Australia. Letter written 25/7/84 in reply to an ad placed in a Slovenian journal. Left Trieste 21/11/55 from a Slovenian background and married. Had some financial "resources", and friends in Melbourne. She regards her month spent at Bonegilla as a "positive" experience. Her friends were able to guarantee her a job and rent, so that she was not allocated to employment.

Letters E.G. Fuller. Victoria. Two letters written in reply to a local advertisement and my own follow up letter. (27/8/84, 21/9/84). Formerly an engineer officer in the Royal and Merchant Navies during World War II, as a civilian in England he worked for the Watford Gas Company, was supplied with a house rent free, fuel free etc. He arrived with a
wife and child, seeking new opportunities and "space". He was soon disillusioned with Australia, particularly because of the accommodation supplied, and the whole system of attitudes entrenched in that system. He shows some distaste for camp life shared with refugees. After Bonegilla he was sent to the Yallourn SEC where conditions were even worse. He was only at Bonegilla for three weeks though.

Untaped Louis. Slovenian, he arrived under the auspices of ICEM ex-Trieste as a refugee in 1955 and aged 28 years. Non-English speaking he only spent nine days at Bonegilla before being sent off fruit picking. Informal interview, untaped. 14/4/84.

Untaped Joe. Ex-Trieste refugee, he spent two years in "DP" camps in Italy, but was originally from Slovenia. He left for Australia in 1954 single and aged 21 seeking adventure and financial success. He came from a small farming background and had been trained as a joiner. Spent only eight days at Bonegilla having been found a job by a friend who had already been placed on a station in NSW. Worked there as a jackaroo. 12/4/84.

Untaped Gerry Martens. Interview unrecorded, Department of Immigration Canberra, 15/6/84. Originally from Germany, a student of veterinary medicine, he had facility with other languages, and so was employed on the ship over as an English assistant, and then as a Block Supervisor at Bonegilla 1955-1958.

21 A Hans H Oakleigh. 15/11/84. Migrated from Holland in 1952, even though he applied to come two years earlier. As a baker he, and his wife wanted to escape the provincialism of his life there. The fare was only ten pounds, and he could speak high school English. He also recalls events with some resignation regarding the separation he and his wife were subjected to, and the lack of employment opportunity at the time when he arrived (with a daughter to care for). Spent three months at Bonegilla, but periodically took off by himself to try and find work.

19 A/B "Fros". 25/10/84. Mt Waverley. At Bonegilla during the 1952 riots, Block Commissioner, and later found work in the camp for a few months. Originally from Italy, a motor mechanic, he came to Australia "to make his fortune". His perspective on the riots is of one in the "know", with contact with Holt and camp administration, even though his name does not appear in any of the reports. After the riots his account mellows, and he recalls his time there as a "beautiful" time, an adventure. He eventually finds work outside the camp through the Italian Consul. The interview was slightly strained, with him reluctant to divulge impressions beyond short answers. He has since become a highly successful businessman,
Untaped "Janis". Interview tape spoiled. Mrs K's son. Spent some time at Bonegilla helping out in the Accounts Department. Spent his adolescent years growing up in the camp, and going to schools in the local district.

Letter "Jose". 19/8/84. NSW letter written in reply to an ad in the local paper. He migrated from Spain at the age of thirteen with his family in April, 1961. His family left a "beautiful home" and substantial security in Spain, only to arrive in Melbourne during the recession. They were lucky at Bonegilla for only four weeks. He has a sensitive recall of his time there, despite being so young.

21D "Branka". Only a preliminary interview was conducted, October, 1984. Footscray, Migrant Resource worker. Arrived in Australia when four years old from Yugoslavia with her family. Her father was a railway settler, and they left for mainly economic reasons. They were at Bonegilla for two months in 1970, her impressions though are somewhat limited, having been so young, but incorporated into her account, are impressions related to her by her parents.

18B "Slavia". 2/11/84. Sunshine Health Complex. Ethnic Welfare Worker. Although she had no experience of Bonegilla, she has dealt with large numbers of migrants who did pass through Bonegilla around 1970, all Yugoslavian, and can outline important general themes, in her understanding of their experiences.

Untaped "John". April, 1984. Impromptu interview. Arrived from Germany in 1955 as a fourteen year old with parents and sixteen year old brother. The family was separated, brother and father sent off, and he and mother placed in Holding centre. Urban background, father's trade not recognised, given job as labourer in dye house despite the fact that his trade was woolling. Although John expresses some bitterness in regard to the validity of the labour contract, he identifies himself with the "Australian cause".

3 A/B Boettcher. 4/6/84. Richmond. Arrived Christmas, 1960 from Germany with wife and four children. Had been a hotel proprietor and in the German Army. Left for economic reasons. First impressions negative. Arrived during recession, expecting to go to Brisbane but ending up in Bonegilla. Sought own work in Melbourne, paying for own transport. Has English classes and good food in Bonegilla; "Holiday" according to Mrs Boettcher. End up in Maidstone Hostel. Believes Bonegilla used to be a POW camp for Germans. Surprised at his soft treatment by Australians despite his Nazi background.
The Permanent Population (see also previous outlines).


Letter Col. Henry Quinn. Director at Bonegilla 1954-1964, previously at Bathurst. Letter written in reply to questionnaire sent to him, but no reply to follow up letter. Queensland. 6/8/84. In the letter he doesn't reply to all the questions I posed, and rather writes what he believes I should be informed about, including potted history of the immigration scheme generally and its purpose. Has a very distorted idea of chronology though. Outlines attitudes of administration, and relationship with objectives of the Bonegilla "experiment".

Letters Pat Smith, MBE. Administrator at Bonegilla June, 1949, later Chief Administrative Officer until 1955. Temporary Director in 1954. Two letters received. Irish born, from a naval family. Joined the British Army and goes to the colonies, India etc. At the Imperial Service Club in Sydney in 1948 he gets recruited into the Migrant Accommodation Division of the Department of Immigration and is posted to Bonegilla. He is joined by his family there only in 1952. When not working for the Department, he was employed by Commonwealth Hostels. Offers perspective of military administrator, and of all aspects of life in the centre, for the migrants as well as for the more permanent population, with a grasp of the sense of change over time and wider implications of the Reception scheme.

12 A/B Alex Connolly. CES Officer at Bonegilla 1949-mid 1951, later at Bathurst, then Albury. 1/9/84. Transferred to Bonegilla as the youngest employment officer there, bringing few "biases" with him, or the problems of family separation that the other officers had, there being little family accommodation at the camp for the staff in those early years. Had many migrant "girlfriends", and eventually married a young migrant woman who had gained temporary employment in the camp. Regards his time there as a "humbling experience", in regard to the "calibre" of migrants whom he met, the intelligentsia etc. Offers some commentary on the confusion and lack of co-ordination in the system, and a recognition of the limitations of employment policy.

1 A/B Julia Caminer. Teacher at Bathurst, 1948-51. 2/5/84. Castlemaine. Background ex-UNRRA in Greece. Later a Migration Officer, giving information and English lessons in Greece. Sympathetic to the "migrant cause". Critical of both sides
though, frustrations with administration, discussed in the context of the frustrations and moments of reward in dealing with the migrants.

13 A/B/C/D Mrs Steiner. 5/9/84. Blackburn. Teacher, and "housewife" at Bonegilla, 1948-62. Australian widow of Otto Steiner, ex-Chief Instructor at Bonegilla, originally Austrian, but had been in Australia since the twenties (interned during the war). She herself was employed as a teacher for a short while in the camp. Later occupied with bringing up a family. Spent most of her time there though disassociating from "passers through", except those her husband brought home. Was involved with providing leisure activities for the migrants. Willing to relate her own experiences and vulnerabilities, mainly disassociating herself from the Australian administration, and relating to the teaching group as a separate class.

2 A/B E.K. and Barbara. Teachers. E.K. at Bonegilla, 1953, previously at Bathurst and Woodside; Barbara, Bonegilla January - August, 1949. State Library. 28/5/84. Interview conducted under somewhat constraining circumstances, but neither were hesitant in being "critical" of the system. Barbara arrived at Bonegilla as a young Australian girl with no previous teaching experience, and married a "Balt" doctor whose qualifications were not recognised. Has sympathy with the plight of some of the migrants and the system which hindered them. E.K.'s reminiscences evoke instead the depth of her experience in different camps. Both see the teaching group as separate to the administration, who come in for castigation in regards to an abuse of their power and authority.

7 A/B Fred. Teacher. 1948-?. Recalls early days of setting up of "training" at Bonegilla, but concerned about secrecy so that criticisms were recounted off the record. Critical of the limitations of the system, but not specific about the details. June, 1985. Melbourne.

8 A Gail Plumstead. 19/6/84. Her father was a CES Officer at the camp, she lived there at a very young age from 1948-1954. Her recollections about her mother's life there are uncertain, but can recount stories told to her later by her parents.

Others:

Untaped Keith Owen. Present Regional Director of Immigration, Melbourne Office. Secretary to R. Nutt in the sixties, thus occasionally visited Bonegilla. Has some comments on closure of Bonegilla, its status within the Department. Interview conducted informally without recorder. 10/8/84.
Untaped Ian Macarthur. 10/8/84. Informal interview at Department of Immigration, Melbourne. Formerly Transport Officer assisting migrants from ships to Bonegilla, and involved in registering them as well. December, 1950 - October, 1951.


21 D Mrs Sinelli. 18/10/84. Brighton. Italian Consul Assistant in 1952 at the time of the riots. Reports on riots from Consul's perspective and their role in relation to the Department of Immigration.

Untaped Pastor Meutzelfeldt. 21/4/85. Informal interview, Hawthorn. Lutheran Priest at Bonegilla, previously in Albury. Was involved with the administration, Canberra and the migrants, offering an overall and long term perspective.
APPENDIX D : Life In The Centre

1947-1951

"Attention Transport General Hintzenberg...General Hintzenberg...Hintzenberg...Hitzen...". The loudspeakers spluttered, stuttered and crackled from all corners of the huge reception camp and eventually choked on the Germanic surname of the American general whose memory had been preserved in the name of the huge transport vessel that had brought several thousand European migrants to the shores of Australia where it had deposited them at the peak of the post-war migration scheme.

"Attention Transport General Hintzenberg, students of English, Class 12...Attention! Attention!" The loudspeakers started again energetically...

...A few splutters of the loudspeakers and then there was finally a silence. An eerie, strange silence. There were few such moments of silence at the camp, brief respite from the constant blaring of the stammering loudspeakers.

Then the announcements started again;


Once the more formal aspects of processing had been taken care of, all that was left for the migrant "passing through" was to wait - until a place was available in a Holding centre to accommodate them on a more permanent basis. The concept of time seemed to take on a different perspective when viewed from inside a "camp" situation, isolated from the goings on of the outside world, and organised according to its own routines and rhythms. Sofia Kruk, in writing her autobiography on "time" spent in "DP" camps in Europe, described this strange phenomenon:

How long I waited I don't know. Time didn't seem to matter any more. In camp, days or weeks were all the same: there was never anything to do but wait.

The Taste of Fear (Hutchinson, 1973), p.149.

The time in "camp" at Bonegilla was relatively short for most people and therefore is often dismissed as of little significance. Many had become used to the "waiting game", but for others the compounded frustration of leaving a camp and travelling 20,000 miles to go into another was incomprehensible, although there was always the consolation that if employment prospects were good their stay would last no longer than a month.

Prior to their arrival in Australia, and while still in the camps in Italy, some "DPs" had distributed amongst them a Department of Immigration publication (circa 1948) optimistically entitled Gleuck in der neuen
Heimat, (Happy in Your New Homeland). Fifty-five thousand copies of this publication were distributed to PCIRO British and American zones so that some at least of the migrants who eventually arrived at Bonegilla had in all probability read its interpretation of not only their possible new life in Bonegilla, but in Australia in general.

Much like the newspaper stories of the time, it romanticised this "new life" with pictures of lovers wandering through sunset lit landscapes. The time at Bonegilla was to be one of learning about the "Australian way of life", of friendly mingling with the locals in thriving Albury, of swimming, and dancing - "the resort of a lifetime in a happy new homeland". Young women were shown to be occupying small but cosy cubicles, while it was admitted men would be accommodated in dormitory type huts. Religion was a right of all and representatives of churches (Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Presbyterian) were on call. But the hard sell was devoted to "Gesang und Tanz in den Erholungsstuden" (Music and dance in this holiday time). Here one could enjoy dances, folk music and songs, the expression of one's national culture, costumes and crafts, all with the blessing of Calwell, who visited to hear the talents of impromptu orchestras and sopranos. In other words, Bonegilla was also to be the home of great cultural activity, and the free expression of one's cultural background, as displays and concerts for the locals emphasised. Rather than provide practical information about Bonegilla and Australia, the Publicity Department opted for an attractive sell, a situation which was only to be partly rectified in 1949 when the booklet went out of print in favour of a "more suitable" publication. (AA CRS A436 48/5/506).

The initial and crucial impression of Bonegilla was tied up not only with the strange and inhibiting new landscape, but all that that landscape personified: homesickness as well as a new adventure. There were expectations and hesitancies about the form of employment to be received, and when, provisions for the family, fears of separation. If Bonegilla was not Australia, then there must have been some confusion about what Australia was then like. Rachel McLaren who visited the camp in 1950 as a social worker with the Department of Immigration for a few days, also expressed the feeling that somehow the whole scheme was overwhelming, and could not be easily encapsulated:

The numbers catered for at Bonegilla are so great, and the area so vast that it functions almost as a town in itself; one of one's most vivid first impressions is regarding its size, and the regular bus service within the camp is a necessity. As a visitor I had probably a different impression of the camp from that which a New Australian might have on arrival, and it may be that many experienced a sense of isolation in being situated so many miles the nearest town. ...The appearance presented by scores of huts is not prepossessing, but an effort has been made to brighten the Civic Centre and the three centre administration blocks with bright gardens, and in some blocks gardens have been tended around the huts also. The view beyond the camp to the surrounding hills and the weir is a magnificent one and I understand that New Australians have commented upon this feature also. It would provide some measure of compensation for the inconvenience of camp life. ...It is difficult to give anything
beyond a general impression after a brief stay at Bonegilla, for
in so large a camp a considerable time is necessarily spent
orienting oneself. (AA CRS A437 49/6/381).

The problem of orientation, if it was a problem for McLaren, must have
seemed insurmountable to some of the migrants, perhaps even more so in the
context of their expectations, based in some cases on the information which
had been provided.

Meanwhile time still had to be passed, and the manner in which you
passed that time depended naturally on the weather, and your own economic
circumstances. Most, but not all "DPs", arrived with few resources. If it
was summer long days could be idly passed on the banks of the Hume Weir,
with the high incidence of drowning the only obstacle to enjoyment. The
delights of the weir waters were overwhelming enough after the cold
European winter to prevent many from bothering with English classes. The
BMH spared no negatives in capturing the "DPs" summer frolicking as part of
their sharing the fruits of the golden land. But for those who arrived in
Australia expecting the land of perpetual sunshine, and held such faith in
this concept that they sold most of their warm clothing before arriving,
the experience of winter months in unlined huts was a less warming one.
Ablutions were an early morning dash away, showers made of corrugated iron
sheets which left half the body exposed, and deep pit toilets in some cases
with no doors. Winter too meant that there was little to do; alcohol was
banned from the camp (although that did not deter all of the migrants), but
at least one could go walking or "rabbiting" with sticks. The tough
conditions of the early "DPs" became a means of testing each other's
stamina, and the migrants are, looking retrospectively, their own harshest
judges when it comes to complaints:

We took those conditions just as stepping stones. They weren't
nice, they were awful in one way... cold. The only thing was when
the sun was out sitting against the wall of the hut...to get
warm...inside it was damp and cold, and...the hope we get
tomorrow a job...That was all...As the feeding was alright, or
plenty, compared with! There was no complaint. Actually, in my
opinion, who complained would always complain. (Rolf).

There was a certain fatalism in the outlook of these migrants, which
allowed itself only to be concerned with the basics of survival,
particularly food; after that everything else was to be accepted:

There was no point in rebelling. We thought you are here and you
do as you are told...you accept what was given, we never dreamed
of asking for separate rooms. (Mrs Connolly).

The other problem was of course that the avenue for complaints were almost
non-existent, even if you were incited to do so. You could complain to
your Block Supervisor, but he might be loathe to take it any further for
fear of losing the approval of his superiors, and if you could not speak
English, you could not really understand the system.
So people tried to make the best of their new circumstances. If you were married you could spend time trying to devise ways of obtaining moments of stolen privacy. Mock rooms were set up in the dormitories with blankets acting as partitions, and stories were told of the wife sneaking off to share her husband’s tent, so that privacy could be obtained, and bedclothes doubled up on (Kazmirek). The problem of the cold could also be solved by ingenious methods, like the man who, for two successive weeks, continued to check into the Bonegilla hospital every evening as “sick” in order to sleep warmly, and left every morning on the pretext of taking a walk (Eros). Or, the man who found an old disused copper under his bed and procured camp firewood to keep it stoked until found out (Hans L.). As one social worker noted, all kinds of problems were aggravated in the winter as people’s patience was soon worn out in the rather dismal atmosphere.

Stories sometimes got out into the national papers about life in the camps. One such example was the publishing of some translated extracts in the SMH written by “a German” (who had been in Bonegilla in 1949), to a German periodical. The grim pessimism of the story was one of the highlighted features related in this mainly paraphrastic report on the article:

On their arrival at the Bonegilla camp there is a loudspeaker (“that eternal ordeal which has tormented us on our journey out”). What comes over it is said in “imperfect English and still more imperfect German.”

When inquisitive Australians ask whether the newcomers like Australia they are given unfavourable replies. “The Australians, smug, complacent people, swallow this pill without an effort and with a smile. ‘When you have been here for some time you will get used to it’. This is their stock phrase”.

Then a grievance crops up. Students of English who have studied in their own time at home are detested for fatigue duties, as there is not such an urgent need for them to learn the language. They have to peel the potatoes, deal with the garbage, and chop wood as a reward for their earlier efforts.

Eventually they get some instruction from an amiable young woman who couteanises their questions with “heart-warming liberality”. Nevertheless, the four weeks acclimatisation is insufficient to transform our mentality, our spiritual and mental condition to the standardised pattern of the average Australian”.

Employment officers are the next target. “It is their principle never to allot to migrants the kind of work they desire. If one of them asks to get into the Railways Department he is promptly detailed for timber work or dam construction”.

The Australian government does not receive much thanks for its free gifts of clothing, although the value amounts to 15 pounds a head. For when they wear their presents, they “look like a section of exotic birds in a zoo. One wears a light green jacket with a pair of trousers which are sky blue with yellow and red dots. In contrast to the men who look like clowns, the women appear in modest khaki”.

SMH, 31st March, 1951, p.5.
It is difficult to reconcile this picture with that of Lajovic who arrived in the summer of 1950 from a fairly prosperous background in Yugoslavia with his wife and son, and who had not been in "DP" camps in Europe. He considers his time there, looking back, as a carefree one, almost a holiday:

My wife and I consider the time we lived in Bonegilla as our best holidays. We were there for nearly three months and the main reason was that I did not want to accept a job offered by the camp authority, namely grape and fruit picking in the Riverina district. It was not that I did not want to do that kind of work, but the fact that I would have to leave my wife and son behind. While we were in Bonegilla, we had plenty of opportunity to swim in the lake, walk around, play all kinds of sports, attend films at night and in one word, a perfect holiday.

The facilities in the camp could have been described as primitive, but in my opinion were 100% improvement on the facilities in the camp in Bagnoli, where we spent a couple of weeks before embarking for Australia...

The problems the migrants encountered in the camp were mainly for the single men and women and very many of them were homesick and lonely. It all depended on the character of the person in question.

(Lajovic)

While the notion of it depending on the character of the individual is widely proclaimed by most "DPs", the single women and men argue that it was most difficult for those with families. (Chubb).

Lajovic had only praise for the food and provisions made for the migrants, yet often it is mainly the food which the "DP" under question feels free to rile against. But perhaps Hans L., who was at Bonegilla for a longer period of time, because he found temporary employment there, has a point in reference to the mood of the migrants themselves, apart from the actual conditions, whether they are to be viewed as good, good enough, or demoralising:

In the beginning we were satisfied with everything. Then as time went by, then we got more "sceptic". Every human being gets to the stage where you start to criticise. (Hans L.)

Bonegilla was, after all, "only temporary", and the time there could be taking worrying about life after Bonegilla as well as the daily events of camp routine. Chubb describes the pace of a day in his life at Bonegilla:

...the worries of the day slowly replaced any unhappy thoughts. Once again (for the hundredth time) we had to go and see the doctor, to visit the employment office...But its better to see the doctor than to be without him. Everyone hurried about their business. Someone unexpectedly bumped into a friend and there were yelps of joy, followed by lively reminiscences...In the evening, with the day's tasks and worries over, people gathered
in the bungalows, friends came round and struck up conversations. Mostly they talked about their jobs: who was being sent where to work; where the work was easier; who had signed up for cutting sugar cane, and who had been appointed to the army in Sydney. The conversation soon turned to more practical matters: how much one had to work to buy a block of land and build a shack on it. For the single and the childless, and for those families with working-age members it was much easier than for those with small children. For these it was extremely hard.

(See This is Australia, p.19)

There were also the occasional trips into Albury by foot if there was not enough money for a bus, but as Hans L. also points out, "money was the main thing, so long as you were in the camp with social service payments you couldn't do much at all". Little is spoken of any international rivalries, and while migrants more or less congregated in their own national groups, segregation within groups more usually occurred on a "class" basis, so that occasionally migrants on staff often found friendships developing with Australian staff members. But for the majority, particularly transient migrants, encounters with Australian staff were few:

We all seemed to think, and in our conversations it was that Bonegilla wasn't really Australia, because there were an awful lot of migrants. It was more or less like a little migrant city. All nationalities put together. We didn't get enough contact with real Australians. (Hans L.)

Fluctuations in employment opportunity meant that many migrants tired of waiting for a placement to be offered to them and sought their own positions. Because of the lack of jobs in the immediate district this often meant trying to find an opening in the camp itself. A job within the camp had other advantages; it was often preferable to taking one's chances in some remote spot of the Australian "bush" labouring. It could offer some stability and security, as well as a certainty of a reasonable standard of accommodation at a relatively inexpensive rate which allowed the chance for saving. Usually it also offered a better chance of preventing separation from your spouse or family. The type of jobs which could be taken up in the camp were necessarily limited and depended on one's facility with the English language. They ranged from "hygiene" positions, ie cleaning of amenities and waitressing, to assistant jobs in the education services (creches, kindergarten, and later adult classes), or in lower echelon positions in administration. Those with English were quickly recruited into clerical work or interpreting positions; European doctors were moulded into medical orderlies for camp hospitals, while the women were hired as nurses' assistants. By the fifties, the proportion of migrant staff at Bonegilla had grown to about eighty percent:

These people were the mainstay of our organisation. They were highly intelligent, highly motivated, well trained, having mostly been working prior to arrival in Australia in big IRO and UNRRA camps in Europe. They adapted easily and well to their new jobs whatever they may have been, either in junior executive jobs or
clerical, typing and junior supervisory positions. They all had of course initially (to) be able to speak good English. Mostly they all carried some type of references from their previous employers as to their efficiency in the particular type of job they had been doing.

The junior supervisory staff such as Block and Area supervisors and their assistants were about 98 percent migrants, speaking both English and in many cases several other languages. These were the people who were immediately in direct contact 24 hours a day with the migrants. Obviously they were appointed with due regard to their nationality and language ie an area with a population of Poles would be administered by a Polish Area supervisor.

(Pat Smith)

The Block Supervisors were described by Guinn as the migrants' "Philosopher, Guide and Friend". They were on call twenty-four hours a day, and usually recruited for their capacity to speak several languages, including English. They usually had their own hut and office, from where they would handle enquiries. Their jobs included organising huts within their area to suit each new shipload, acting as general interpreter, organising canteen rosters and camp work rosters (general camp duty for the transient migrants) (Franken). They also had to be impromptu social workers, "some of whom were more sympathetic than others" (Guinn). In the report written up by Franken in 1949 to describe an average day in the centre, the Block Supervisor's role of liaison between the administration and the migrants becomes obvious, although not all migrants had contact with him or seem to remember themselves as having any reliance at all on their particular influence within the administration.

Kinship networks were also often established in certain job areas. Mrs Steiner talks of the Latvian takeover of the transport system in the camp until a clean out was ordered, only so that it could be replaced with another nationality coming in and predominating in that one area. Professor Wadham of the CIPC talks of a Polish monopoly. ("That a number of Polish migrants have been appointed to various posts in the camp and that these are not unbiased in their treatment of others - especially those of other nationalities" - AA MP1722 50/23/6601, 19/5/50). The relegation of migrants not only to certain areas of employment within Bonegilla caused some tensions as the Australian man who did wield power over the migrants were often less educated, or a presumed different "class", and had only worked their way up the ranks because of the immigration situation. While Franken could claim close friendships with certain administrators, and recalls quite proudly his being asked to offer an opinion to Calwell on matters of camp organisation and the problems which migrants might be facing (can prove a photo of himself with Calwell and Dawson, as well as a personal photo of Brigadier Lemaire with whom he had established a close and sincere friendship), for Mrs "M", who worked first as a waitress and then in administration and made friends with the Australians with whom she worked, the chief administrators could still not be perceived in a favourable light: "They were so very important all those...they were like Chinese Kaisers".
There was some inter-marrying between migrants and Australian staff members, but the degrees of their acceptance by the Australian community at Bonegilla varied. For the more conservative, "inter-marriage" was a sign of lowering your social standing, an instance of "fraternising", as "Barbara" experienced when she, a young inexperienced Australian teacher, married a "Balt" doctor. The strain on their marriage was aggravated by the restrictions on her husband's ability to practice his profession. She recalls with some bitterness the humiliation that she, as well as her husband, experienced because of this:

Major Kershaw was going into the mess one night, I was with "R", and Major Kershaw came through the door as we came through and he had one of his flunkies with him...so one of them said to "R", "Good Evening Doctor", and with that Major Kershaw, who was no longer in the army, and was calling himself "MAJOR", said "Mr P please, in Australia, not 'doctor'". They were absolutely appalling.

(Barbara)

For the transient migrants life, of course, was not lived in a complete vacuum while they were there. If their fates might have been lifted in suspended animation, their particular life problems were not, and the experience at Bonegilla could only help to further aggravate social and familial tensions which had been built up during camp life in Europe, and the after effects of the war. The effect on morale of leaving a camp only to arrive at another, no matter how long one expected to stay, and because of the lack of information imparted, was an intensively negative aspect. Mrs N remembers that while she was still in Germany and together with her husband had requested to come to Australia, she noticed that the Immigration officials were giving priority to families with children because it was seen as unhealthy to leave the children in camps for too long a time,

but when we came to Bonegilla we saw the same families and children but they were still in a camp. That was terrible.

Once out of Bonegilla of course the system aggravated the situation even further as those children and their mothers would probably be sent off to a Holding centre and the "breadwinner" elsewhere, so that the family was not even kept together.

One of the most distressing forms of this separation was brought about by the policy of making young males and females over the age of sixteen also subject to employment direction. This was particularly so with females, who usually ended up as "mother's helpers", nurses' aides, or in canneries and clothing factories. "Mother's helper" was generally used as a euphemism for a domestic or maid servant. Such separation of young girls from their families caused no lack of concern amongst its members. "Sylvana" was just over the age of sixteen and spoke no English upon arrival. She has no memory of an employment interview as such, only of being asked whether she preferred domestic work to nursing. Not being able to stomach the latter, she was separated from her family and sent to work
as a "mother's helper" in Sydney. Her mother and sister were sent to Cowra Holding camp, while she and her father fulfilled their contracts at distant locations. "Pino" was not old enough to be put to work, but his seventeen year old sister was, and while he went to a Holding centre with his mother, his father and sister were sent to either end of the state.

The problem of separated married couples was just as acute, but alleviated if both were categorised as "workers". "Serge" a journalist in Italy, remembers having agreed in Italy as a "DP" to the possibility that he and his wife might have to be, and most probably would be, separated once in Australia. They agreed to this condition because of their desperation to leave Europe, so that when they were eventually found jobs together in a guest house in Warburton, even the knowledge that the job basically involved cleaning of toilets and such could not dampen their feelings of good fortune. Although it was policy to attempt not to separate married couples, or at least to locate breadwinners close to dependants in Holding centres, similar obstacles of matching up employment or accommodation places with individual needs and the pressure of movement in and out of the Reception centre meant that in the majority of cases separation was necessary for some amount of time, taking many forms and affecting all members of family and extended family units. When Mrs "M" found a job in Bonegilla with her husband, her mother was sent off to live alone at Cowra. The irony was that they had only chosen to come to Australia because their mother would be able to accompany them. The "family" was one of the last resources that the "DPs" had, and had been desperately clung to during war years. For them to lose the sense of family was equal to a final degradation. (Mrs "M" had a job initially as a waitress, but after having children in the late fifties the family were given a hut for themselves and their family, and she later resumed work as a clerical assistant in the camp). It was only because her husband had obtained a job interpreting for local members of the AWU that they were able to use their contacts to move the mother closer to Bonegilla, the Benalla centre, until a few years later permission was finally given to allow her to live at Bonegilla in the "M's" hut. But it offered little compensation:

This was the most upsetting thing. Coming all those thousands of miles, twenty thousand miles away from Europe and then all of a sudden your mother is separated from you and she couldn't live with us.

Despite the preoccupations with education and employment, by 1949 the importance of having residential social workers in the camp was recognised, as the social problems of individuals and families grew too much for amateur and proxy social workers, whether in the form of the teacher figure, or the Block Supervisor, who was often more accessible because he at least could speak another language, and had certain vestiges of authority. The arrival of the social worker did not of course solve all the problems. Caminer, a teacher at Bathurst in its first few years of operation defines the problem as one of age as well as language barriers, as King also notes:
Interpreters were much in demand. I used to borrow one from the administration staff and there is no doubt I could have done far more work with the migrants if I could have spoken their languages. In the later years I managed to speak enough German to dispense with an interpreter. German was the lingua franca of the camp. I expect a great deal of social work was done by Block Supervisors - some of whom were more sympathetic than others...Yes language was a barrier, true confidential, person-to-person one-to-one social work would have been better without interpreters. In Bonegilla much of my social work was superficial and some of it was group work and general welfare work. I worked a lot with the YWCA worker, Mrs Eleanor Crawford. She referred cases to me and I helped her organise outings, etc.

People were often reluctant to mediate their problems through an unknown interpreter, and worried wives and widows found it difficult to place faith in younger women who they might have felt had no experience in life and were to be treated more as in their daughters' age groups. Instead the social workers found themselves the attraction of less worthy recipients of their expertise:

I understand that the first two social workers sent to Bonegilla were young and attractive and easily seduced by various handsome migrants. My immediate predecessor, Fay Tice, was more experienced and did not fall into this trap. She and I were both stationed at Bonegilla for a few months.

(E. King)

In her annual report for 1950 Tice located problems of her own in dealing with the social "misfits" she aimed to help, although the lack of staff assisting her meant that she was unable to go into problems in any depth. She defined most of these problems as associated with marriage and the effects of enforced separation, and the difficulties for widows with children under the age of three. There seemed little opportunities for these women to "get on", despite the head of the social work branch's suggestion that the problem could be solved by making them more eligible marriage partners. It was not only widows though who were stigmatized:

The most unsatisfactory aspect of this month's survey was the discovery of a girl four months pregnant with her second illegitimate child. Conception had evidently taken place while she was waiting at Bonegilla to be sent to employment. The girl has since been sent to Uranquinty to have her child. She was considering having the child adopted. AAR 1445 220/49/3.

McLaren, who visited the camp in 1950 also made more general observations, about where major problems could be found, and these again were specifically related to the system of accommodation and employment placement:
Bonegilla is not intended primarily as a Holding centre for women and children, and does in fact cater for a large number of men. The men, however, are drafted into employment as soon as possible, with the result that their stay in the camp is a proportionately shorter one; with the exception of dependant males and hospital patients and staff employees, therefore, the longer term problems are those of the women.

As in the Holding centres, though perhaps not with the same urgency in the first weeks following upon their arrival, women wish to secure lucrative employment; with a prolonged stay in the camp they become restive and boredom seems to hang heavily upon them. (McLaren, AACRS A437 49/6/381).

But women were not the only ones disadvantaged by the system. Just as McLaren had noticed that women were less likely to attend English classes than men, so too she realised the disadvantage at which children were being placed, because of the belief that their assimilation would be relatively painless:

The children coming to Australia will almost certainly make better Australians than their parents. They will attend Australian schools and learn to speak English readily. Generally speaking Australian children are receiving them in a kindly manner but their attitude tends to reflect that of their homes...
AA MP 240/1 48-233295

The problem was that until 1952 they did not receive any intermediary education at all during their transit period:

School age children who remain at Bonegilla for any length of time are at a disadvantage in that school facilities are not available for them; it is questionable, perhaps, how much benefit those children who remain in the centre for a very short period would derive from a school contact, were it provided; but in instances where a family must remain in the reception centre for some reason...I understand these youngsters frequently attend the Adult Education English classes, the education of school children is a state responsibility and they therefore do not fall within the Commonwealth Education Scheme; English classes as such are rather different from the ordinary school curriculum, so that the children are not prohibited from attending, and are probably the most receptive of the pupils". (McLaren) AACRS A434 49/6/381.

Provisions for a kindergarten within the centre had been made quite early on, particularly for migrant staff (1949), but even then the verdict on the facilities was for the first few years not a promising one - the children were said to be "just filling in time in a barren environment". A primary school was not deemed necessary though until 1952 when the centre got its own state school building. It was mainly during the "DP" period that the children remained a neglected group, occasionally attending the adult classes, and all emphasis focused on the adult population and the more "difficult" problem of their assimilation.
Social problems manifested themselves in different ways and often it was less Bonegilla than Bonegilla in conjunction with the problems transported from war-torn Europe which created difficulties. So that mental illness was quite a common problem in varying degrees amongst the "DPs" at the most extreme, culminating in suicides (Krupinski and Stoller "Psychiatric Disorders in Eastern Europeans"). But illness was more commonly associated with physical health, and it was part of the social worker's duty to follow up on hospital admissions: "In the days when so many babies died...I followed up the mothers" (King). King was referring in particular to measles epidemics which inflicted young babies on the voyage over, and was usually attenuated by the lack of attention paid to them in the organisation of the transportation of the "DPs", along with the authorities insistence they be rallied to Bonegilla to be taken care of. The same lack of concern at caring for contagious diseases within the camp grounds was shown with TB cases, which were catered for in a special section of the Bonegilla hospital; a procedure which was not considered proper by one of the European doctors who was eventually recruited as an orderly. (Dr. "H").

Hospital facilities were often criticised by the migrants who were recruited to work there, as was the hospital system which exemplified in the extreme the lack of status which European professionals had within Australian society, but with an hypocritical edge:

Bonegilla in Victoria, for example, had only one medical officer in mid-1949, at a time when the centre had a floating population of 1,000–2,000 migrants, each of whom had to be examined on arrival and receive medication if ill. The Greta Centre in NSW had three Australian doctors in the 1950s. Both of these centres as well as most others, were relying heavily on the work of the "medical orderly" foreign doctors. Officially filling menial positions and receiving appropriately low wages, they examined all new arrivals and reported their findings to the Australian doctors...On the one hand, they were asked to go beyond the duty of the medical orderly - indeed at Bonegilla at least they were issued with stethoscopes so that they could examine new arrivals and the sick [although not allowed to wear white coats which would have given them some authority - Dr "H"]. On the other hand, they were ordered around by the nursing sisters who insisted that they should wash implements and clean floors.

(Kunz, The Intruders, p.94).

These orderlies were usually called on to make diagnoses since they were invaluable not only for their medical expertise, but for their facility with languages which the Australian doctors did not have. While the hospital dealt with general X-ray work and check-ups for the processing system, they also had to cope with spasmodic outbreaks in measles, infantile paralysis and TB (17th September, 1949, SMH; April 1951, SMH), and other illnesses. Any surgery or the delivery of babies was catered for at Albury Hospital, and the camp outfitted with ambulances. When the system of three Directors was operative, an RAP (Royal Aid Post) was established at each "centre", where many of the migrant doctors were also able to put their skills to some practice. Men were not the only recruits,
as many women were given jobs in Bonegilla hospital as nurses' aides to cater for the dearth of nursing staff (as they were all over the state). The hospital itself was run by a Doctor Davis. The staff circulated many rumours concerning his mishandling of the hospital, and the role of a Matron Forbes, whom he later married, and who was said to have the real reins in hand. The problem with Davis was a drug addiction which eventually drove him to suicide in 1952, but the matter was never made public and Davis was never checked over despite written complaints to the Department of Health by an Australian teacher, married to one of the European doctors whose qualifications went unrecognised (Barbara). But even if the matter never went public, rumours were rife around the camp at various times, and Mrs N, unaware of the actual reason, recalls the kind of "fear" which could take possession of the migrants, in some cases ill-informed about goings on, in others, not informed at all:

The whisper go around, whether its true or not, but the gossip was a whisper, with it the fear, don't go over there, so and so died, was just jaundice, you don't have to die of jaundice, if it was right or not, but the fear was there...

(Mrs N).

Dr H witnessed many incidences of malpractice, as well as of successful care, but the "whisper" which Mrs N heard was probably associated more particularly with an incident which occurred a few months before her arrival at Bonegilla and which did receive the attention of the Australian Press.

The episode which was first to earn Bonegilla its infamy was the report of "Emaciated DP babies" which made headlines in national newspapers in September, 1949 (2nd September, BMM, SMH). Bonegilla's lack of proper facilities for children, and particularly babies, had been a well known feature of life at Bonegilla for the first family arrivals, but in 1949 the scandal was more widespread as papers reported that seven migrant children had died in Albury after having received preliminary treatment at Bonegilla. Blame was quick to spread and to be passed on. The final numbers soon increased to twelve and the spotlight was put on facilities at Bonegilla for "DPs" in general, with stories on the quality and the amount of food for all the migrants. Bonegilla was said to have a 200 bed hospital, staffed by two doctors and four trained nursing staff, backed up by 100 staff (60% of whom were migrants) and six "DP" doctors who had practised in Europe. Dr Davis, as medical superintendent, it was said, had set up a special kitchen for dietary foods for children suffering malnutrition (3rd September, 1949, BMM). It was also claimed, with some pride, that out of 20,000 treatments since the hospital opened, there had been only twelve deaths.

Meanwhile the Albury hospital report released its own statement claiming that Bonegilla was only partly equipped and grossly understaffed, while the child deaths were said to be due to "pre-arrival" deficiencies (6th September, 1949, BMM). But the controversy did not end there; it opened the way for the Bathurst Medical Officer, Dr Van Leent to blame conditions at his own camp for TB epidemics with the winter weather, the overcrowding, the unheated, and unsewered converted barracks. Conditions
were not much different to those at Bonegilla (7th September, 1949, BMM). On 9th September it was reported that a nine month old child had died of cough and measles at Bonegilla; it had been quite healthy until it had caught cold there. The effect was that Bonegilla hospital itself was iron-curtained, with no information on the hospital or patients allowed out. Theories were rife among "DP" doctors as to the causes of the deaths (Dr H and Franken), but official commentary lay the blame at the feet of the European camps and shipping services. Australia, Calwell said, was only responsible for the child once it had arrived in Australia:

...the 200-bed hospital operated by the Commonwealth Department of Health which serves the immigrants at the Bonegilla Reception Centre is as well staffed as any Australian hospital,...The Bonegilla hospital has a professional staff of two Australian doctors and nine Australian nurses assisted by nursing and domestic staff of over 100 migrants, including six who were practising doctors in Europe and others with nursing experience. The conditions in our immigration centres have set a standard for the world.

(A.P.D., 7th September, 1949)

Holt was not satisfied with Calwell's complacent overview of the migrant health services at Bonegilla and argued that there were other factors in operation which the Australian government should be aware of and take responsibility for:

Has the Minister given consideration to complaints that have been made that the sharp change from the tropical conditions encountered on the voyage to the wintry conditions in the camps, where I understand children are quartered in unlined army huts, has a serious effect upon the health of new arrivals?

(A.P.D., 8th September, 1949).

Calwell ignored Holt's criticism of the cold conditions at Bonegilla and argued that the problem could be solved if children were no longer brought over the tropic zone in summer; adding that the good that the immigration system had achieved far outweighed twelve deaths. There was to be no further investigation into the running of the hospital, or into the system which had been set up to care for the migrants' health.

Operations at Bonegilla developed their own code of meaning, pertaining to policy directives but with its own emphasis. Criticisms of the system from outside sources, or even officials, while they occurred were rare and usually slightly regarded. In 1950 complaints came from the University of Melbourne, Professor of Agriculture who, as a member of the CIPC, expressed his concern that every endeavour was being made to instill trade union principles such as the forty hour week into these migrants at Bonegilla at the expense of incompatible agricultural principles, associated with farm work. He also made mention of other mistakes that were being made at Bonegilla; mistakes in employment placement; the failure to impart enough English and "generally unsatisfactory" features of the administration at Bonegilla. (AA MP1722 50/23/6601, 19/5/50).
Often too the administration felt that its own efficiency was being thwarted by the interference of groups outside the Department, as was the case with the "secular clergy". In June 1950, protests were made by the R.C. priest at the camp "against the disciplining of certain of his following". "This 'meddling' came to a head during the past week when Father Collins telephoned and openly accused this Directorate of acting 'unfairly' in the dismissal of certain personnel from the staff at this centre". (AA CRS A434 50/3/47288, 27/6/50).

The men were allegedly guilty of death threats, vandalism, hunger striking, and insubordination. But the issue went beyond the immediate circumstances:

> the difficulty in question may be characterised as frequently attempted interference by secular clergy in the disciplinary verdicts attached to personnel who have been judged guilty of breaches of the Regulations. (AA CRS A434 50/3/47288, 27/6/50).

The argument was deemed to focus on the "nonpolitical and nonsectarian outlook of the Director of an Immigration Centre" (AA CRS A434 50/3/47288). But perhaps of more interest was the principle of a disciplined and orderly camp. Other criticisms of the camp were more seriously responded to, and although not conducted on a public basis, struck at the very heart of the administrative system. I will reconstruct here briefly an "incident" which developed in response to accusations made by a departmental representative working inside the camp since it involved not separate issues of improprieties, but of codes of conduct, officials' attitudes and responses. It occurred while Bonegilla was still divided into three centres and at the close of the "DF" era, but holds, now, an insignificant place in the memories of those whom it involved, and at the time evoked little official concern at Canberra level.

The general allegations, made in 1951 by Ian McFayden, an Alien Registration Officer, were summed up in an official centre report as follows:

> In the course of seven and a half months at Bonegilla, which is far longer than the stay of any previous Alien Registration Officers at the centre, McFayden has formed the firm opinion that the manner in which this centre is conducted, mainly under the direction of the Assistant District Controller (Dawson), is not conducive to the ready assimilation of migrants into the Australian community. There is over much rigidity, too great an emphasis upon discipline and an insistence upon absolute obedience to the orders of the administrative staff, such obedience being secured if necessary by intimidation and strong arm methods. Many matters are treated without the humane approach which may be considered desirable at a time when migrants are making their first contact with Australian conditions. The moral tone is the reverse of high, many of the officers of the staff having entered into immoral relationships with a minimum of circumspection. Legitimate grievances are not given proper consideration, and the making of complaints, even when justified, is discouraged with threats amounting to duress. (AA CRS A434 50/3/47288. Statement 16/3/51).
But McFayden was not given much consideration. More than thirty years later Pat Smith, one of the administrators against whom some allegations were made, details his impressions of the young man:

Mr Ian McFayden was a relatively young man employed by the Immigration Department (in a section issuing certificates of Registration - a type of identity card issued to all "DP" migrants in those days) in Melbourne. He arrived from time to time at Bonegilla where he stayed for a few days subsequent to the arrival of a migrant ship containing "DP" migrants in the very early days. I say this particularly since Brigadier Lemaire left Bonegilla in about 1950. Inevitably differences of opinion arose over various aspects of administration etc. procedures etc., methods of handling people etc. Mr McFayden, whilst a nice young man, was inexperienced in the administration of an area like Bonegilla and he may have, whilst not being in any position of authority, been provoked into making some unfavourable report. I personally do not recall any serious adverse report or criticism.

(Letter Smith)

It seemed that other officials were also loath to take McFayden seriously, citing his youth, his idealism, and the fact that he was swayed in his interests by being married to a young migrant woman. (Statement, 16/3/51).

McFayden could not bring forward any evidence to support his more general allegations, but was confident that if an enquiry were held his suspicions would be upheld. Instead he offered certain circumstances of corruption in the system which he deemed relevant: The wrong confiscation of property by customs officers; confiscation of liquor by centre authorities for personal use; abuse of power by centre Patrol and use of strong arm tactics; the quality and quantity of food supplied - top prices were being paid but the food was not good quality and children were not given adequate milk - there were also irregularities in issues of clothing; the conduct of Dawson - he was said to have abused his position using unpaid migrant services for his own benefit, and to have a "lack of humanity towards the migrants and other personal criticisms". (Statement, 3/51).

Brigadier Lemaire was accused of being brutal in his treatment of migrants, conducting impromptu searches, but denied the accusation. Sikorski, who was head of the Area Patrol and was accused of abusing his position, disappeared for a while and showed up again at Greta as Chief Patolman, but not until after replying with his own defence. Smith who was accused of improper administration by sending healthy migrants into unhealthy huts, like the others, denied the allegations made against him. What is of even more interest is the response of the assistant Director Dawson, against whom personal accusations had been made, but who also appears more vocally and visibly in this whole period of "DP" events than Kershaw his immediate superior. Dawson revealed most fully the attitude inherent in his own co-administration of the camp:
It is further respectfully submitted that before credence is given to such allegations that the following be taken into consideration:

1. To maintain law and order with slender authority, in a community of some 9,000 persons rigid control is necessary.
2. In maintaining the control necessary there are always bound to be some disgruntled persons to whom the discipline of a well ordered regime is irksome.
3. The fact that all malcontents, troublemakers, recalcitrants, persons awaiting deportation, and unemployables are sent to this centre from all over the Commonwealth is one factor that makes strict control essential.
4. Over 80,000 persons have passed through this area and the fact that no major troubles have been encountered can be considered due to the maintenance of discipline and control tempered with justice.

(AA CRS A434 50/3/47288
Dawson to Heyes, 1/5/51).

Kershaw added his indignation by accusing McFayden of troublemaking and rudeness and asking for his transfer. He was regarded as an upstart. The official commentary on the episode, jotted beneath a copy of this statement, advised that liquor "must not be seized and retained or destroyed as this would be contrary to law". No mention was made of any other matter and the issue seems to have died. McFayden was finally moved, and Dawson capped off his running of the camp by being instated as District Controller, usurping Kershaw the following year.
APPENDIX E: THE BRITISH AT BONEGILLA (1951-52)

The British have the advantage of speaking Australian and going to a land where most of the social usages are the same as those they left. Their disadvantage is that they are not regarded as foreigners, who may need help; they are relations, and rather superior ones at that, suspected of a deeply ingrained conviction that anything outside their experience is not good.

P. Black, Poms in the Sun (London: The Travel Book Club, 1965), p.120.

The short interlude of the British presence at Bonegilla means that there is little information available regarding that period, yet the very introduction of the British is of interest in that it highlights not only the anomalies in their own position as the "privileged" group of migrants, but also the situation of the non-British migrant within the immigration scheme.

The arrival of the first group of British migrants at Bonegilla in July 1951, coincided with well publicised complaints by British migrants also arriving under the Commonwealth Nomination Scheme, but who had been dispersed into the hostel system. By this time the only major Reception centres, for non-British migrants, in operation were Bonegilla and Bathurst. The planned introduction of the British at Bonegilla caused fears that the conditions would not be up to scratch for them, a fear perhaps precipitated by the amount of negative publicity which had already been generated by the British. Block 14 lacked facilities for young children, and was in a dangerous position on the main road: "it is feared that complaints will be made by the coming British migrants if improvements are not carried out soon". (Department of Health, 11th July, 1951, letter from Deputy Director of Health, AA CRS A445, 220/14/30). The section of the camp which was to house British migrants would have to be brought up to the "required standard". There was no justification of such discrimination, the operative assumption being that the British were not refugees, thus not used to camp conditions, or would at least expect a higher standard of accommodation, or perhaps even more seriously they would have avenues to complaints which could adversely affect the image of the centre and of the Immigration Department.

For those British who passed through Bonegilla though they may have had little evidence to testify to the fact that they were the objects of positive discrimination, even if the other migrants (non-British), suspected that they were. Yet, a report in the BMM, detailing the arrival of the first group of British migrants at Bonegilla emphasised the more positive side of their new life, and certainly their facilities were hardly uniform throughout the camp:

"Bonegilla", a happy group of British migrants chorused, "it should have been a holiday resort!" "I even had a hot water bottle for the wife". "Fancy, 23 blankets for the four of us and
the baby". These were the cheery comments of more than 600 British migrants yesterday when they braved their rainy first morning in Australia at Bonegilla migrant camp... (they are) the first to live in "New Look" quarters at the camp. Their accommodation wasn't the rain and wind swept Bonegilla behind barbed wire where we shivered during the war... cots for their babies, mats on floors, beneath their beds, duck-egg blue coloured walls, and pink curtains, roomy cupboards, tables and chairs.

(19th July, 1951).

The bedrooms were lined and the tin huts draught free, each flattette was self-contained and measured 20'x15'. The Director of the centre which housed the British centre was a Mr A D Heywood, who described the new life of these migrants:

The camp still retains some of its war-time "security". Guards stand at each gate, but once inside the stranger can move about freely. Of course they will not stay permanently at Bonegilla. They have already begun speaking to welfare officers about their place in our community.

But not all British migrants it seems were privileged to use these "New Look" flattettes. "Eric", who arrived in Melbourne late in 1951 with his wife and son, who had worked in England as a Foreman Engineer for the Watford Gas Company, supplied with a house rent free, free fuel and other amenities but had sought a new life "somewhere with space", got more than he bargained for upon arrival at Bonegilla. He described his first impressions:

...By bus to Bonegilla and a meal, our first encounter with hostel style community feeding, which to us was not very enticing. The accommodation was a small room of a barrack, with no privacy; and already we were beginning to wonder whether we had made a mistake in coming to Australia. ...The hostels were catering for displaced persons and refugees, the title New Australians did not come into force until later. ...The hostel staff were mainly displaced persons and their living and hygienic standards were not like ours. ...The hostel scheme was ideal for developing rackets, meat and food brought in during the day to feed the average inhabitant was openly spirited away at night, by the staff. At this time, Australia was hit by a recession, and whereas only a week before the papers had been full of jobs, there were now no jobs to be had...Mind you the Commonwealth paid a dole, but this was eaten up with hostel fees and charges. Then came the next move, a batch of us were to be sent to Yallourn, to work for the SEC...All migrants were obliged to remain in their jobs for two years, that is to stay in the hostel system, but hundreds took a chance and got out of the system. Lots of them went into other than their own trade, went where they could get more money. Again I believe that the government allowed conditions to get so bad in the hostel situation, that migrants
were breaking their necks to get away and that the government could cut down on the number of hostels and their costs...Whilst at Bonegilla, Mr Holt, Minister for Immigration, came to the camp to discuss the complaints being aired by the migrants with regard to hygiene and food. He told us that we came from slums, and were not accustomed to any better conditions. This attitude on the part of the government caused frustrations, so that migrants started vandalising the washing and toilet facilities etc. trying to get their own back on the government, especially in Yallourn... P.S. In one paragraph I make reference to displaced persons and refugees, these remarks are not intended, or meant to be derogatory, we were all migrants suffering from homesickness, loneliness, and the same frustrations. There were also severe language difficulties among European migrants, with which we did not have to cope, but the Australian culture was as alien to us as it was to Europeans (sic).

The resentment of the British in being placed in the same centres as non-British migrants was not an unusual phenomenon in the registering of complaints, but stemmed in Eric's case from a belief that his own position was being denigrated as well as his expectations, considering that he had given up more "voluntarily" that the "DPs" had, and thus, like the Italians who arrived in early 1952, believed his situation gave him certain priorities. He seems not to have had access to the "New Look" flattetes, just as he had little choice over his employment placement, both he and his wife being offered jobs in Melbourne privately, they were not allowed to go there by the Department of Immigration. Fuller felt that he was in no way positively discriminated for, either in terms of accommodation or in terms of skill recognition and subsequent employment placement: "I was told by an engineer at the SEC that I would have to stay at the bottom as a fitter, and work my way up". Because of the assumption that as a Briton, he would have little problem in "assimilating" into Australian society there was little information dispensed to him, apart from a Public Relations officer on the ship who he believes gave him misleading information. Instead his three weeks at Bonegilla were spent walking into Albury and familiarising himself with the immediate surrounds with little notice being taken by staff or administration as to his circumstances. (Letters, Eric)

The reaction of the British group as a whole was conspicuous by camp standards. They formed their own administrative committees, to handle all complaints and for the serving of meals - as King recalls:

The British migrants filled their time in arranging Committee meetings!! They were the only race who formed committees. Their nominated spokesmen came to administration officers, Block Supervisors and me with carefully thought out complaints and plans for improvement. Their Block Supervisors (mostly Yugo-Slava) were much troubled. Fortunately, they (British migrants) were not in camp for long and moved to Commonwealth Hostels in the capital cities. My contacts with them were mostly trying to explain the different cultures and behaviour in their fellow camp "mates". ...Some of the migrant staff had considerable difficulty understanding the Geordies and the Scots and people from the Midlands. You can guess how the interpreters
on the staff joked about these dialects and suggested that we needed interpreters for the English migrants.

(Letter, King)

As King's comments suggest, it was the British who made up the highest proportion of her attendance figures, and pointed to a problem with the social work system. Few remember the British though, despite their relatively high profile. They became a forgotten phase in the more generally non-British orientation of Bonegilla's representative and actual function.

In February, 1952 it was announced that another 1,500 British were due for Bonegilla but by April of that year the BMM was bemoaning the curtailment of the British contribution in general, referring as an example to the fact that there were no English migrants at Bonegilla, "and the authorities there have not yet received notification of any further arrivals". (19th April, 1952, BMM)...1

1. (c.f. M. Hill claims there were still British migrants in the Holding section of Bonegilla in July when the riots occurred - "The Bonegilla 'Riot', July 1952", Chapter III.)
APPENDIX F: LIFE IN THE CENTRE

II. 1952 – 1971

Dawson's time as Director was relatively short-lived, but nevertheless remains tainted with similar kinds of suggestions of corruption and strained relationships as the McPayden incident had aroused. He was replaced in 1954 by Colonel Henry Guinn, and by this time attitudes seemed to have undergone some change. King who was a social worker at Bonegilla at the time, argues that all those involved had had time by then to learn from their mistakes; and experience had rubbed off on the running of Bonegilla as well:

I don't think the arrival of non-IRO migrants caused changes in attitudes. Changes were caused more by changes in policy at Canberra level. I do think the Commonwealth Immigration Department learned many things over the years and improved. The improvements as I've said were reflected in Colonel Guinn's running of the camp...There was less corruption in Colonel Guinn's regime, and attitudes were more humane. The corruption I fear was among the staff. In Colonel Guinn's time the staff had more amenities.

(Letter, King)

Guinn was ex-military like his predecessors and thus liable to approach his role at Bonegilla, and structure his assumptions about the manner in which the camp should be run, in a similar manner. But unlike his predecessors he arrived at Bonegilla with five years experience of running Reception and Training centres under his belt. In a special story written for the Bulletin (after the 1961 riots) Desmond O'Grady provides a brief portrait of the Guinn that the camp knew at that time, characterising him in the mode of a benevolent father figure, perfectly balancing the attributes of gentleness and discipline (as much a credit probably to his literary style as to Guinn's character):

He calls himself the camp's chief urger as well as its Director because he takes an interest in every detail of the camp and is always stopping people to convince them to go to functions such as Saturday night dances. He is a big enough man to carry his authority easily and a strong enough man to be gentle. His fair skin is an angry red at times and this together with his steep eyebrows gives him a quizzical expression which is offset by a boyish smile.

(Bulletin, 11th November, 1961, p.13)

Improvements in conditions were seen as a marked sign of this period, but for Guinn himself such changes were not significantly introduced until the Ministership of Alexander Downer (1958-1963):
Mr Downer came to the centre and lived with us for a period of three days. I escorted him everywhere - good or bad. He was not impressed and wanted to know what I had been doing. A glance at certain correspondence satisfied him that the main fault was higher up - NO MONEY. After Mr Downer's visit things began to improve - kitchens and mess halls were improved. Electric and oil burning stoves were installed, mess halls lined and heated. Painting to all buildings. Sleeping huts converted into ten cubicles and the whole area sewered. Further to the above we planted 13,000 trees. We also had a number of gardens developed and cared for by migrants who were placed on staff. Senior officers from Government Departments were quartered in flats (families). The remainder were accommodated in a Staff Block, Migrant and Australian alike. Migrant staff would represent 80% of the total staff and attended night classes in English.

(Letter, Guinn).

Guinn does, though, accept partial credit for the changed social situation as he views it, quoting his own success with the Bathurst Community during his time at the Bathurst centre:

On arriving at Bathurst it did not take me long to realise that the residents from the area were lukewarm to the inhabitants of the Migrant centre so I set out to correct this feeling.

(Letter, Guinn)

He was rewarded for his efforts by a signed testimonial presented to him by the Mayor of Bathurst, for the manner in which he "integrated the life of the Migrant centre with this City":

The migrant centre, under your leadership has played a large part in the cultural activities of Bathurst by its effort has greatly helped the Bathurst Ristedf ford society to progress. The various performances held at the Centre have contributed greatly to the musical life of the City.

The citizens of Bathurst it seems were appreciative of the more colourful aspects of "multicultural life", socially organised as segregation. On coming to Bonegilla, Guinn once again attempted to throw himself into the integration of Bonegilla with the outside communities by becoming a member of the Rotary Club of Wodonga.

The increased pride in the functioning of Bonegilla drew itself from tangible improvements in facilities and services, as Bonegilla grew more and more for the staff to have the marking of an "Australian community" and its inherent institutions. Catling, a CES officer remembers his time there from 1952 to 1964 with nostalgic bliss, regretting Bonegilla's infamous status. (Tape) Staffing facilities were good, there were floodlit tennis courts, a bowling green, cricket pitches, a Boys Club which encouraged migrants to come along, a club with alcohol, an Annual Ball, a huge dance hall, the playing of competition sports. Guinn affected changes which improved the status of gender groups as well as national, turning the "Red
Fin Staff Club", for male staff only, into a club for all staff and invited friends and visitors (King). King reminiscences of the time also rely on changes in facilities for migrant staff as well as Australian staff:

Recreation and entertainment improved greatly under Colonel Quinn. There was a weekly film, a lending library, the YMCA centre with ping pong, cards, tea and coffee open afternoons and evenings. Tennis, cricket, swimming in the lake. I formed a youth club which met for PT one evening a week, also a Brownie Pack...A very talented Latvian, Mrs Astra Ramas...taught dancing and produced several musical shows with the help of pianist Jean Steiner...To be able to enjoy these facilities one needed to be able to speak English.

(Letter)

In 1952 a Social Welfare Committee had been established composed of various bodies within the centre, as had been a Centre Amenities Organisation, which raised funds for various centre needs, whether it be a tennis roller, "DP" clothing, or dance records. The tennis team was a good example of migrant and Australian staff sharing in these "civic" efforts:

The chairman was Hungarian, the Treasurer Yugoslavian and I was the Secretary...Somehow in Bonegilla the good tennis players, if willing, were found jobs on the staff.

(King)

The growth of community for the permanent population, which I have so far measured according to the growth of internal groups, organisation, improvements in services and facilities, increasing confidence in relations with the outside community, did not mark itself as significant in everyone's life though. Mrs "K", who lived at Bonegilla with her children from 1952 until 1965 as a nurses' aide at the Bonegilla hospital, recalls little change in the quality of her life there, except for upward mobility in regards to accommodation. Her time was spent isolated from most of the camp, too busy with her children and job to participate much in any activities (Taped Interview). For men like Mrs "K"'s second husband, the change in social status was also minimal. His teaching qualifications continued to be ignored for ten years of his stay at Bonegilla, while he was taken on as a supply room attendant. He finally obtained a position in the camp teaching English to adult migrants, only a few years before he died in 1965, still at Bonegilla. It was only that death that finally made his now twice bereaved widow summon up the courage to finally leave Bonegilla with her children after fourteen years of life in migrant camps. She defined her own false security at Bonegilla as part of the difference between the "DPS" and the later migrants, "they had different aims, knew why they came". Similar observations were made by the staff who had been involved with the "DP" period and now the "new phase";


The migrants were not so poor. I think they were younger and had fewer war memories. They had more confidence. They said if they didn't like it in Australia, they would return...

(King)

Such generalisations would not of course suit all the migrants who passed through in this period, particularly the substantial number of refugees who continued to arrive under ICEM.

Desmond O'Grady tried as late as 1961 to define some of the changes in camp life, if not specifically in opportunities, which had been brought to his notice:

The camp has gone a long way since migrants had to be accommodated in canvas tents, but despite the improvements, it must pall after the first few weeks. There are two persons to each 12'x9' room and most beds have 9" inner-spring mattresses. The huts are painted and lined. There is a 28 day schedule of menus, but no one could cater for the mixture of nationalities found in each block: basically, it is a northern European diet, with a 60/40 proportion of mutton and beef on the meat side. Mutton and mutton-fat cooking make southern European stomachs turn over.

Apart from English lessons, migrants have no obligation in camp; they probably enjoy this freedom at first. But bushwalking quickly loses its fascination. Many migrants reading that Albury is the eleventh town in New South Wales, rush there after their arrival but are startled to see how small it is. The recreation huts and the library hold the interest of some, while the cinema is the refuge of others.


Sometimes the more crucial effects of camp life and the Bonegilla experience were observed from outside the actual camp situation, and coped with by these outsiders, rather than the administration or the Department. From 1956 Father Basil, a priest representing the Slovenian Catholic Church, would travel to Bonegilla as often as three times a week catering for the needs of the Slovenian refugees who arrived with nothing (Father Basil interview). He found himself to be taking on the burdens of a social worker rather than a priest, and eventually established his own boarding house for destitute Slovenian males and assisted over 200 families to Melbourne from Bonegilla by finding them jobs and accommodation. At times too (without government intervention it seems) he would divert men from Bonegilla, taking them from the ship into his Kew boarding house. Father Basil believed that Bonegilla could only demoralise those who passed through, it was not well organised and was stuck out in the bush. Just as often as he found jobs for people at Bonegilla, he found them for those who had left Bonegilla on their own steam and were left wandering the outback roads destitute. (No dates are given by Father Basil). He would bring issues of clothing down for those most in need, and again not specifically Slovenian. Ironically he also had to fight to allow men back into Bonegilla when they had nowhere else to go.
It was the "waiting" in the camp which Father Basil believed had the worst effect on the migrants, particularly coupled with their over-expectations of life in Australia. Mrs Steiner remembers her own husband, who was by that stage Chief Instructor, also advising the migrants to leave as soon as possible and make their own way. The lack of independence that the migrants had often aroused a lot of resentment and continued to exacerbate their situation in contrast with the Australian attitude, that they were getting everything for nothing (Interviews, Basil, Steiner).

But it was not all one-sided, the Australian staff too were often at a loss to understand the ways of some groups who came to Bonegilla. King, the social worker, offers one particular story of "misunderstanding":

One winter evening just at dusk offices in Civic Centre were finishing work for the day, and a cheery chatting group of Italian migrants walked through on their way "home" to Block 23. One the shoulders of two of them slung on poles was a dead sheep. They doubtless intended having a great cook up outside their huts and were proud of their hunting ability. Heaven knows what the penalty was for such a crime in a sheep grazing area. Luckily Colonel Guinn paid the farmer quick compensation and I never heard of another "hunting incident". The Block Supervisor of the Italians dealt out some punishment and the case did not come to Court in Wodonga.

(Letter, King)

King also offers stories of Australian staff developing varied kinds of relationships with the transient or staff migrants:

Aldo, "Micki", and Aresto, three charming young Italians who must have missed their mothers. They all found jobs on the camp staff. Mrs Crawford and I took them on picnics on Sundays. They cooked and we made billy tea. Sometimes we persuaded a younger Australian girl to accompany us and the trio brought along other lonely Italian men and great was the hilarity on those picnics.

The Dutch women and children were invited to tea parties with the Good Neighbour and Y.W. Committee members in Albury, once a fortnight. Transport was arranged by Colonel Guinn and Mrs Crawford accompanied the group - all in the sacred name of Assimilation! Prizes were given for various simple competitions. One prize was given to the mother of the largest family. She had twelve children - under fourteen years. The Dutch had their own social worker...so I didn't hear about their problems. I think about 80% were Roman Catholics.

In my early days in Bonegilla I heard the Ukrainian men's choir sing unaccompanied Russian songs. They were wonderful. I'd never heard such rich voices. Not understanding the words meant nothing. There was such feeling in their voices. One just hoped that Australia could give them a life equal to what they were bringing us.
Perhaps the group who are remembered with greatest consternation by the staff are the Hungarians, fleeing in the wake of the '56 revolution. In 1956/57 they arrived as the largest number of assisted arrivals within six months (5,740 men and 3,822 women), and it is the one case, apart from the general stigma which was attached to the Italians as threatening "amants" who arrived without their families, where a whole national group seems to have aroused consistent ire based on a certain reading of their circumstances, reflected in the summary given them in O'Grady's article:

The Hungarian freedom fighters reached the camp in 1957, possibly the most mixed group of all. Criminals as well as political prisoners were released when the prisons were opened, and both Communists and freedom fighters crossed the border as the fortunes of the revolution varied. Moreover, the Hungarians were from all social strata, from peasantry to aristocracy.

(Bulletin)

The criminal element is the most lauded part in King's own recall of their presence:

The Hungarian women seemed very nervous and displayed temper tantrums and were greedy when we tried to organise gifts of clothes for them. I think they had been brought out of Hungary or escaped during the 1957 Soviet "Takeover" too quickly. Their problems for me were always to do with relatives and friends left in Hungary. My Hungarian interpreter - a man, spoke excellent English but we found him involved in corruption...he "arranged" accommodation in the better huts for some of the women who paid him. When I left Bonegilla to come to English this man stood up and embarrassed me at a farewell party by reading out a "citation" on my work!

(King, also Markens)

Yet Kunz has described the composition of this group though in different terms:

Like all refugee waves, the Revolutionaries of 1956 too differed in composition from all previous groups of Hungarian immigrants. They contained a proportion of young people, and, for the first time since the 1920's an immigrant wave contained a considerable percentage of tradesmen and factory workers. Apart from the relative absence of peasants, the emigres of the Revolution represented a fairly true cross-section of the Hungarian population.

(Kunz, Blood and Gold, Cheshire 1969, p.195)

While in individual cases, Bonegilla could become a centre for positive cultural and social exchange, it was also susceptible to the creation and reproduction of more negative mythologies concerning group identity. These were structured mainly around principles of ethnicity rather than class,
since what provided the means for the camp's own self-definition, as well as its spatial organisation, were those very principles and criteria of "ethnicity".

While concern that most groups aroused on a national basis was reflected in their actual numbers, there is a marked absence of commentary both about and from the Greeks passing through during this period. Yet in the three years ending mid-1956, the total intake of Greeks was 29,344 of whom 16,833 arrived on assisted passages with a male/female ratio of 5:1 (M Tsounis, "Greek Communities in Australia", Greeks in Australia, ed. C Price, ANU Canberra, 1975, p.26). While this thesis has done little to rectify that situation due to a dearth of available sources, Tsounis offers some remarks on the effect which the Bonegilla experience may have had on their own futures:

The crucial period to consider when ascertaining where and why the various regional or chain groups settled was in the 1953-56 period, during which the 16,833 assisted immigrations dispersed from the migrant receiving camp in Bonegilla, Victoria to different parts of Australia. The factors influencing this dispersion were complex for whereas assisted migrants were expected to honour a two year contract and work in whatever industries they were directed to by immigration and employment authorities, there is no evidence to show that the majority complied with this regulation (p.28).

TT.O, in his radio "documentary" on Bonegilla, talks about his own families "escape" from Bonegilla, and suggests that many families, not only Greek, followed this same step rather than spend time wasting away in a camp isolated from work and life opportunities. It could still not be claimed that Bonegilla was a positive influence on the life of those who passed through it. Despite the advantages of orientation it may have offered, it did not offer them to all, and those advantages were often outweighed by the position the migrants were placed in just by being there:

Although Bonegilla is a good camp, it would mean ignoring 90% of the real state of things to call the inmates circumstances comfortable and to compare them with the toughest spells of army duty. The camp is bearable if migrants stay there two or three weeks, as they were led to believe they would while they were in Europe, but it becomes extremely tedious once their stay is prolonged...It is the distance from the main centres, the change they have to undergo in climate, food and all the other circumstances which have a demoralising effect when combined with idleness. The camp must be desolate in winter, when migrants have to turn to the Red Cross for extra clothing, when there is no opportunity for swimming and life becomes a dreary waste. Even in the best of weather it is no fun getting up each morning with nothing to do, to be an able-bodied man without work and see your wife sitting idly on the step of your hut and your young child scrabbling in the dust outside it. Even the makeshift clothing common around the camp, the patched trousers and jumpers, the gaudy camps and straw hats, the beards men grow because of the life they are living outside normal society can
give you the migrant camp blues.

The camps distance from the main cities seems a great disadvantage to the migrants when the CES does not succeed in finding them a post. They have to spend time and much of the little money they have if they want to travel to Sydney or Melbourne to find a job. One German who managed to do it went to Melbourne when he was down to the last 9, sustained himself on fish and chips and claims to have found a job as a weaver in the 413th factory at which he called.

O'Grady

O'Grady was writing of course after the '61 riots and in the midst of a minor recession, but the conditions he describes as conducive to "migrant camp blues" were not particular only to that period. While things were not always "that bad", and for many the processing system conveyed them along quite smoothly, Murphy had observed the same demoralising effect in his 1952 report on the "DPs" in migrant camps. In those later years a larger proportion of migrants had private resources to supplement the condition of their living at Bonegilla, but even these were limited, and as the years went on its "positive" attributes lost even official significance in the changing circumstances of the immigration experience, and the logic of the Bonegilla exercise continued to escape the migrants themselves.
APPENDIX G: Letter, Augustus T Frantz, 26th June, 1984

Lady, read on local paper your notice about the Bonegilla Camp...hope my writings could help you for a page?

Landed in Melbourne, 18/8/1950 from the Faisea MV...from Germany...straight Germany, Port Said, Suez...Melbourne...about 2,000 Displaced People from the shrinking to the East Europa...Poles, Hungarians, Yugoslavs, Czechs, Roumanians, Italians etc...Train was second class with seats...not timber ones...Europa we had 3rd class...sort of "lift" to morale for a start.

Reached Bonegilla by bus (from Albury) it was dark...At the sort of arrival-room...looked to the light globe...Swarming with mosquitos...a first drop...some who got our shed...Galv. iron walls, roof...timber frame...just to look to it...no asbestite lining...Well we got our "bed" and linens...Sure "linens" after migrant camp (only nine months for me...years for others)...was a lift...pleasant ones.

Opened my eyes...light was coming in...my nose gave a signal...as "temperature"...gave a blow...and a steaming column went up...Is this "warm Ostralia"? Well it was winter here...Morning showed lined same huts...went to breakfast...chops, porridge, marmalade, slice of bread...some cheese...Well bread was not much...as we most live on bread...but helped myself on cheese...We were divided, huts most for nationalities...Was told it was an ex-Army Camp...It was a first drop into classic galvanised-iron roofs, timber frame buildings I had to find as classic in this land...Today I am still a great believer in galv iron roof as to catch water good ones...after thirty-four years one HAS to learn life in here...we had the day free to settle down...By way of life I am an inquisitive-minded person...There was boy (I was 30, single), my age I knew on the ship and decided to get out the camp to see the place...We were walking still inside the camp when by a chance looked to the ground...There was something...a BIG Brown Penny...I picked it up...looked to my "treasure"...yes...THAT was all the money I could count on...Not bad for a few yards walk...Strangely my friend did not look much around...his nose was down...Well Ostralia is a rich land we were told.

He went back...I went on open spaces...I love them...Then I was struck. You will never think of this simple fact...My ears were getting used to the sounds about...and smiled...Cattle mooing...dogs barking, sheep baa...birds...Well...THEY were "talking" as in Europa...It lifted my morale...Reached a bitumen road and walked as it sort of followed the lake (Hume Reservoir).

A car stopped...a family inside...the driver told me "something", I said...no English...they smiled...and went on...The words were impressed...back in the camp looked to the dictionary...and laughed. They asked me if I want a lift...Well to Australians people do not walk much on roads...long distances.
We had a hall meeting where the Camp director told us how we were lucky to have huts...his ancestors did not have that luck...just tents...if any...In the evening borrowed sixpence and got an airletter...sent to my Mother...as I was here and well.

It was a starry night bit of moonlight if I remember...Walking to the post office could not help to see the Southern Cross large ones...It was another "lift"...am a bit romantic ones...

Next days went around...there was the range for gunnery...a tank shell with still hits...war was over...learned time after how the boys of years before went up North to fight Japs...I was an ex-enemy...in enemy land...Goodwill and my technical education were my wealth and hopes to the future.

On the Weir could not help to see water rushing out of pipes...Shure a waste of energy...told a friend : Why they do not put a turbine? Oh...they have plenty of power here...I remembered in the offices drawing of electrical appliances with an X on them...shure power was not that easy...What struck me as way of life.

The camp's speakers calls ended with "thank-you"...It was something of civilized...Today a vanishing ones...working mates now call out : Oiunk...a sort of grunt...am told it is the new Ostralian way to call out.

At the camp farmers, people were coming to select "man-power". The address calling out names to go to the office...mats were going to railway...I hoped to get there...I did not know what sort of life they went...they got a tent-bed-light pan...shure it was pioneering jobs...One day we got our first pay...some shillings as difference from what they got to keep us and saved...I felt a rich man...Some night got picture shows...There was Humanity of Europa...on their faces you HAD to see what they suffered to survive. But the younger ones had sparkling faces...pretty ones...all talking their own language. German was the common ones.

Somebody tried to put out their national costumes...Forgot.few days after our arrival we were called at sort of railway station...where our baggages boxes were...I had a suitcase, rucksack and a bag...some young officer in plain clothes were looking in our baggage...when it came my time I opened my suitcase...books were in there...he run through the pages and out came a branch of Oak and a blue flower...He took them and tossed in a sort of incinerator. I was ready to blow. The branch of Oak and flower were Europa to me. I took them the last hour before I left. There in Delmenhorts (Germany) the last hours before going on ship...I felt to walk out of the camp. There were green fields...It was a misty-blue sky...flowers...birds... pretty houses among trees. I tried to fill my eyes, and soul to the full. Will I ever see them again? So I took a branch of an oak and a flower there. That young Ostralian officer could NOT know what he did to me. I know today how important it was...to stop diseases to come in this land...Today I am a harder fighter to keep this land free of diseases.
One day my name came on the speaker...There in the office they asked if I wanted to work in the PMG...Well...telephones...S h u u r e...so my life started to roll on. I got the job, passed the examinations...got married (HAD to import a girl). Maria is 29, did four years of university. Franco, 28, a good mechanic and Andreas-Konrad a shy 21 old tall...keeping busy even if out of work...Mama is a "floorid" Mother-General (Maria Mother-Superior).

I built my home...shure the iron is galvanised iron and it sing when rain...Year ago I met an Ostralian...he too was in Bonegilla Camp...I asked him if then the huts were lined...Shure not...So we did not have worse than them...and he dropped. We did NOT have hot water...we had to get cold showers...I could not believe myself...me...ex-enemy...hot water showers...and Australians cold water...Well I am thirty-four years in this land...30 Europa...too many time I am told to stop swearing...well...I talk same language...BUT...am a sad man about this land. It was a good land, young people clean and well mannered, good melodic songs, what of today?

Hope what I wrote will help you, you can ask more...am including some of my writings done lately...old age...you know.

An Austrian by old traditional...romantic, melodic, music...am including foto made on my arrival...my surname was different, Italians forced my father to change the original. I got it back when I became citizen of this land, even my suitcase proved my dreams.

Best Wishes,

Augustus Tarcius FRANTZ
Valley Street, Bega, NSW, 2550

Bega, 26th June, 1984.
APPENDIX H: FRANKEN

One Day in the Life of a Supervisor

Generally the day of a Supervisor begins early in the morning. Although the Assistant can take care of outgoing transports, the Supervisor is always anxious to get the blankets, linen and mess-gear back, and wants to keep an eye on them. Therefore he will by up at 5.30 am, say good-bye to his people, count blankets etc. and start to make his daily report.

At 7.30 am he has to look after the mess-orderlies and when everything is working right, he has just enough time to have breakfast himself. Because at 8.00 am the men for general-camp duty are lined up, sometimes not all, and the microphone has to come into action to get them all together.

After 8.00 am the hut leaders report to the Supervisor their sick and absent. But in a family Block it is quite necessary to check each hut carefully, as well for the cleanliness as for the sick children, then most of the mothers try to hide their sick children and don't like to have them taken to the hospital.

About 10 am this work is done and the sick reported to R.A.P. As the Assistant is going to the Post-Office on Tuesday and Thursday the Supervisor has to take care of the weekly linen change. There is a lot of work to do even when the Block is only half-full then the dirty linen ought to be thoroughly checked.

About 11-11.30 am the Medical Officer arrives and in a family block it will take half an hour before the doctor has seen all the sick children. In case of infectious diseases blankets and linen has to be collected and sent to the hospital.

During the morning the Supervisor receives a lot of telephone calls mostly from Employment Office, Movement Control, Alien Registration etc., and the people involved have to be called over the microphone and instructed where to go.

After luncheon there is a little time left to rectify hutlists, nominal rolls, card systems etc. Employment and transferlists have to be checked, and as most of the migrants now in this camp are only a very short time here it seems necessary to call all involved to the office and instruct them about the offices they are to go.

Arrangements to move people from two or more huts together are made. A daily inspection of lavatories and ablutions is inevitable, but mostly it can only be done in the afternoon. As the Supervisor's office is the central point of the life in a Block, it is also an Information Office. One day I registered the number of visitors in my office and counted 175.
In a family block crockery is broken and has to be replaced after the persons involved have been instructed to be more careful with Government property. Children are hurt and come always to their Supervisor to be bandaged, 5 to 10 children a day is no exception. Most of the time is spent giving information to the newcomers. But although it takes a lot of time it is quite necessary to do because the Supervisor who tried to inform his people will get a better contact with them, and will be able to ask more from the concerning duties, cleanliness etc. On the other side, he saves the Central Offices a lot of trouble.

Duty lists are made in the afternoon. They have to be made very carefully, then only when the migrants observe that the duties are divided justly between all of them, you will get a good co-operation.

It will also take you about one hour to straighten out the dispute of two mothers quarrelling because their children had a fight, and it often occurs in a family-block with people living all together in one hut.

After Supper the hut leaders report again to the Supervisor’s office to deliver the cards of the duty-class for the next day. Most of the time children who had a little temperature in the morning are getting high fever in the evening. They are mostly measles or scarlatine cases. The doctor has to be called and it will be almost midnight before the day of a Supervisor is over. The time after Supper will give him the chance to do his office work, but even then people come dropping in with all kinds of troubles, among them broken stretchers are no exception. With 50 or 60 persons leaving at 6.30 am the next morning nominal-rolls have to be ready on the previous night.

Almost everything occurs after 10.00 pm, from broken water-pipes to broken gutters by possums, and the Supervisor is glad when the night-doctor leaves his Block and all the huts of the Block are dark.

Bonegilla, 28th November, 1949.
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**Industry**  
Dutch    German    Greek    Russian    Australian   D.P.   Italian   Total

**Table 2:** Allocation to First Employment of Assisted Passengers Migrants: November 1952 - April 1954 (in thousands)
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| PRIMATES
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TABLE 2 (continued)

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(Source: AA CRS A445 174/4/8
AA CRS A445 220/14/25)
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<td>AA</td>
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<td>ACC</td>
<td>Australian Citizenship Convention</td>
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<td>Australian Immigration Advisory Committee</td>
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<td>APD</td>
<td>Australia, Parliamentary Debates</td>
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<td>CIPC</td>
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<td>SMH</td>
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(iii) **Papers Presented to Parliament**


### Taped Interviews

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### Informal Interviews

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Letters

A T Frantz  
Senator M Lajovic  
J Primozic  
Mrs Mezince  
E G Puller  
"Jose"  
E King  
Col Henry Guinn  
Pat Smith M.B.E.

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19/8/84  
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