

Britain's genuine desire to be rid of remote entanglements. The decolonization of Papua New Guinea is briefly reviewed in R.R. Premdas's partly theoretical analysis of the constraints and choices before it in formulating a foreign policy. Ideals of independence and non-alignment, he concludes, conflict with political, social and economic realities. Limited successes in diversifying aid, trade and investment imply a neo-colonial relationship for some time to come. A realistic foreign policy 'will be *de facto* one of alliance, but carefully camouflaged by the symbolic rhetoric characteristic of a foreign policy of non-alignment.'

This conclusion does not accord with the spirit of Commonwealth developing in the South Pacific Forum where Papua New Guinea along with other new island states is freely associated with Australia and New Zealand. Nor does it accord with concepts of 'a Pacific Family' and 'a Pacific Way' which have developed in the South Pacific Conference. Happily, a keener appreciation is shown of the advantages of regional co-operation in economic development and diversification than in political and external affairs.

In a fresh, challenging assessment of problems and prospects, J.K. Thomson emphasizes not only the need for unity 'that can harness and mobilise largely untapped mineral, aquatic and human resources', but also for energetic, determined leadership that will instil in the people a new spirit of self-reliance. Yet neither he nor any other contributor really faces up to the problems of overpopulated islands which need outlets for migrants.

As this book clearly shows, the view of Oceania from Guam and Denver is back to front to Wellington's. New Zealand's and Australia's closest friends and neighbours appear to be historically as well as strategically unimportant to Americans. How fortunate they are compared to the Micronesians!

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Dream and Disillusion: A Search for Australian Cultural Identity. By David Walker. Australian National University Press, Canberra 1976. 279 pp. N.Z. price: \$14.30.

DAVID WALKER'S *Dream and Disillusion* is an important contribution to the serious study of intellectual life in modern Australia. It is now clear that we have known surprisingly little about the formation of his four central characters – Vance Palmer, Louis Esson, Frank Wilmot and Frederick Sinclaire – and not much more about the contexts in which men like these defined their work as writers and social critics. Walker's book carries significantly further the detailed exploration of careers and concerns to which A.G. Serle's general survey of Australian cultural history in 1974 looked forward.

Walker shows that in the period 1900 to 1914 Palmer, Esson, Sinclaire and Wilmot shared in a distinctive effort to discover the sources of an Australian

cultural identity. The content of this effort was shaped less by native experience than by the involvement of these men in English intellectual movements. Palmer, for example, was drawn quite intimately into *The New Age* circle of A.E. Orage during his pre-war periods in London and espoused a number of the positions loosely associated with Guild Socialism. Esson, Wilmot and Sinclair, although not so involved in personal terms with Guild concerns, nonetheless engaged vicariously in the pre-war English ferment around notions of the servile state, personal creativity and its relationship to the national culture.

Applied to Australia, these emotional and intellectual proclivities produced, again most clearly in Palmer, a search for the roots of a new kind of person: a man (the masculine virtues were explicit) free of traditional imperial sentiment, sensitive to the class nature of modern political and industrial institutions, alive to the challenge for art of a new land. *The New Age* transferred to Australia involved, then, a rejection of urban and industrial life in favour of closeness to the soil and a rejection of the dead hand of merely historical allegiances.

The proving ground for these hopes of a new cultural and political identity was to be the First World War in which Palmer and his contemporaries became actively involved as an expression of earlier Melbourne associations in the Victorian Socialist Party, in opposing conscription, in arguing for new approaches to class relations and in striving to develop a consciousness among Australians of their distinctive national situation. The years 1916-1918 were especially fruitful in the range and energy of cultural and political definition with the group.

Such efforts failed to take continuing root. Walker's account of the period between the wars is largely one of the gradual withdrawal of his principals in the face of their perception of the illiberality of Australian governments, the suburban malaise of the citizenry and the continuing problem of creative production. Sinclair retired to New Zealand (presumably a no more inspiring environment); Palmer made a decent, if somewhat innocuous living as a full-time novelist, scriptwriter and broadcaster active in liberal and libertarian causes; Esson's efforts through the Pioneer Players to stimulate a national drama ended in acute disappointment; Wilmot adapted more readily to a pragmatic, civilized role as a promoter of books and learning.

Although the optimistic energy of the years before 1918 was largely gone, Palmer continued the search for a useable past which finally found expression in his *The Legend of the Nineties*. The broad thrust of this cultural nationalism emphasized that there had been in the 1890s a utopian and humanist vision in Australia which, if it failed to survive intact the challenges of depression, repression and urbanization, nonetheless provided the Australian artist with the sources for personal growth. The authentic Australian voice which, for Palmer, was heard most clearly in the Lawson-Furphy line, spoke in accents more bush than city, more proletarian than *bourgeois*, more dinkum than Oxbridge and London. And yet this vigorous, iconoclastic type needed to be recognized also as a local variant of his radical counterparts elsewhere.

Walker's story, only baldly summarized here, offers valuable new insights. It will no longer do to suppose of Palmer, for example, that his work sprang fullfledged from a native radical tradition; it ought now to be viewed as a flawed, though in its context, rather admirable effort to think about his

culture in ways which would retain contact with the important sources of dissent in England but which would also sustain a distinctive sense of place and national identity. Walker has also shown for Australia what others have done for England and America; that the decade prior to 1918 was *the* period of high creativity in the generation of cultural and political criticism (if not of art), a period of manifestos which collapsed into various forms of retreat and personal abstraction but which set the boundaries of twentieth-century debate about political and intellectual questions. Finally, Walker has some shrewd assessments in terms of Palmer's creative writing of the difficult relationship between personal creativity and the commitment to a national culture.

Walker deserves the credit that properly attaches to the first reliable cartographer of difficult territory like this. Not that one reads the book without reservation. There is, for example, the matter of Guild Socialism, a syndrome which may need a more precise focus than Walker develops here. The Orage—Chesterton—Belloc group which particularly attracted Palmer can be distinguished from G.D.H. Cole, William Mellor and the revisionist Fabians, though the term Guild Socialist often covers them all. *The New Age* was identified more with the cultural and religious side of the Guild phenomenon and was less narrowly focussed than were the young dissident Fabians on the details of political economy, trade union structure and worker control. Orage ended up in the 1930s a disciple of Gurdjieff and Yoga; other *New Age* writers headed off into other forms of anti-modern aestheticism and religion. Cole, Laski and the political Guildsmen had, by the 1920s, reached some sort of accommodation with the Labour Party.

It might sharpen our sense of precisely what meaning Palmer derived from Guild Socialism to know where in this spectrum Orage really stood. In certain respects, it is not clear that there was much of politics in the Orage line of influence (certainly not a radical one in the sense which G.D.H. Cole represented before 1918). Retreat into forms of medievalism, personal cultivation and cultural preoccupation was so thoroughly part of that kind of Guild Socialism from the beginning that one hardly needs to summon up the familiar rubric of the First World War to explain it. Was Vince Palmer, then, a political man? Did he ever have any systematic political illusions to lose?

Then there is the last chapter where Walker may have produced unnecessary debate for himself. Much of this is devoted to a rapid summary of the views of a mixture of historians, sociologists and others on literature, ideas and society in Australia. It is rather inconclusive and random, omitting, for example, some important discussions by literary critics around this theme. Vincent Buckley's well-known essay, 'Utopianism and Vitalism in Australian Literature' (*Quadrant*, 1959), speaks directly to Walker's interest here, arguing for the priority over radical nationalism as an influence on Australian writers of a proto-Nietzschean emphasis on the Will, the Soil, Joy and Physicality. Buckley's alternative line of influence — which embraces Palmer — merges in an interesting way with some themes in *Dream and Disillusion* and might, along with the essays of A.D. Hope, have provided a better point of summary reference than do some of the offerings in Walker's stocktaking. I fear that the last chapter may deflect attention from the substance of the book. I hope that fear is unfounded since Walker has written a work of important research and analysis.

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