Sitting on the rail: The Westralian Worker's response to wartime issues

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Chapter three

Our old pals the square’eads

Although Western Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century was a reasonably ethnically homogenous society, populated mainly by British and Irish migrants and their descendents, there was a large and growing group of Germans in the State. Mary Mennicken demonstrates that “at the beginning of the century the German-speaking community formed the largest group of [non-English speaking] Europeans in the State.” This community was made up primarily of German nationals, but also of immigrants from other German-speaking nations like Austria and Switzerland. “By 1914 the German-speaking community was in its heyday with a flourishing German club in Fremantle and German-speaking Lutheran communities in Perth, Fremantle, the Goldfields and in the south of the State.”

Hostility towards Germans in wartime is well documented. The public was fearful, suspicious and hateful. “The feeling was that ‘the only good German was a dead German’”, and it captured Western Australia quickly. Bobbie Oliver refers to an incident that took place almost immediately after the war broke out, on 5 August 1914, in which a gang of youths hurled bricks at the Austrian Consulate on St George’s Terrace until the caretaker removed a coat of arms from the wall. A military detention camp was quickly established at Rottnest Island, a holiday resort, for the internment of all “enemy aliens” who were perceived to be a potential threat; evidently the perception of an imminent threat was widespread, as “[i]t is only in Western Australia that a general round-up of

2 Mennicken, M. The Germans in Western Australia, p58.
aliens occurred” 3 Indeed, at the national concentration camp at Liverpool, New South Wales, twenty-one per cent of inmates originated in Western Australia. 4

A great many enemy aliens interned were forced to turn themselves in by destitution. The wives of detainees were paid a stipend of 10s per week, with an additional 2s 6d per child; in 1916 these amounts were increased to 15s and 3s respectively. This was an attractive option when faced with the alternative: unemployment. Many workers refused to work alongside Germans or other “enemy aliens”. The Fremantle Lumpers’ Union, for example, refused membership (and thereby work) to many immigrants. 5

The Secretary of the Amalgamated Baking Trades Industrial Union expressed concern in 1915 that the German bakers H. Geise, Albert Loosen, Charlie Triaden, John Lohf, and Joe Neissener were union members and he wanted to know “the truth about them” as “certain utterances had been overheard by other union members”. Neissener and many others were put out of work as “no Britisher would work where a German was employed”. In February 1916, Neissener signed a declaration stating that he was destitute and wanted to be interned on a voluntary basis to be able to keep alive. 6

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that the labour movement resisted the urge to persecute Germans. In the early establishment of guidelines for internment, Oliver “senses an attempt by the Western Australian [Labor] Government to protect the aliens themselves”. 7 The editor of the Westralian Worker, John Hilton, defended in court the loyalty of the Dutch-born Willem Siebenhaar, whose foreign-sounding name and radical politics had resulted in his suspension from the public service. 8 There was a tension between the labour movement’s “head”, which stood for international solidarity and

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4 Oliver, B. War and Peace in Western Australia, p64; Mennicken, M. The Germans in Western Australia, pp64-66.
5 Oliver, B. War and Peace in Western Australia, p76.
6 Mennicken, M. The Germans in Western Australia, p60.
7 Oliver, B. War and Peace in Western Australia, p66.
8 Segal, N. Who and What Was Siebenhaar, p6.
“British fair play”, and its “heart”, which was angry at Germany for starting the war and could not bear to work alongside the enemy’s sons.

The Westralian Worker’s immediate response to the war, as we have seen, was to stress that “[w]ith the vast bulk of the German and Austrian people we have no quarrel whatever”, and that “[o]ur nation is at war. This doesn’t follow that we have to hate anybody.” It was not much concerned by the internment of Germans at Rottnest, trusting the Labor governments to take such actions as were necessary to protect Western Australia’s interests. The subject was one of minor amusement. On 14 August 1914, it reported that “[s]everal Germans … are having a spell at the popular tourist resort of Rottnest”, and recounted this amusing incident: “On hearing that several Germans had been arrested at Bunbury an unsophisticated Barrack-street tailor was heard to exclaim, ‘Thank God, Bunbury has declared her neutrality!’” Apart from this couple of sentences, the problem of dealing with enemy aliens was not addressed in the immediate wake of the war’s outbreak.  

It was not until late October that the subject was mentioned in any depth, and even then there seemed to be little sense of urgency. “Imperialist” wrote calling for the internment of “all those who naturalised in less than three months of the outbreak of the war, and of course those who are not naturalised at all”, and argued that “all German Clubs should be forthwith closed”. Shortly afterwards, T.H. Baird reminded the Worker’s readers of Germany’s socialist credentials, and insisted that while “[t]he idea that the German people are all bad is very prevalent just now, … anything that tends to allay the bitter

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9 *WW*, 14 August 1914, pp3-4; 21 August 1914, p5; 23 October 1914, p6; 7 August 1916, p6.
feeling ... towards the Germans as a people will be for the good of the world’s Labor movement.” Baird seems to have been responding to an atmosphere that was not conveyed by the pages of the Worker, which suggests that its policy was to avoid hysterical anti-Germanism and maintain a cool head about whether Germans who had lived in Australia for many years could suddenly become dangerous enemies. For example, in January 1915 the military searched the homes of prominent German businessmen, the Streliz brothers; the paper responded by emphasising that “nothing of a compromising nature was found” and that “[b]oth are naturalised subjects with Australian wives and children, and their eighty employees are all British.” This was an opportunity to generate hysteria about the possible disloyalty of influential German-Australians, but the Worker preferred to douse the flames of suspicion. 10

A report by “Gossip” about his visit to the temporary military camp on the Fremantle Esplanade certainly supports this conjecture, and is remarkable for its sympathy towards the “German sea captains” interned there:

One could not help but feel sorry for these large, comfortable, respectable citizens, who, with long curved pipes drooping from their hairy mouths, mooched aimlessly up and down watching in silence with unexpressive faces the various squads at work. They did look so deadly bored! They had plenty of liberty, but—there was always the lad with the fixed bayonet and ten rounds of ball cartridges.

Better to be at the front and to risk being shot, than to be “interned” for day after day, week after week, month after month—and nothing, absolutely nothing to do!

Later, he recognised one of the prisoners:

There was an interesting episode during the afternoon when the police brought in another prisoner, one Richter, suspected of being an unnaturalised German.

10 WW, 23 October 1914, p6; 6 November 1914, p3; 8 January 1915, p4.
… Then I remembered Richter used to be a Kalgoorlie barber, and tried very hard to enlist in the Goldfields Regiment which is now taking charge of his person! Captain (now Major) Kingston wouldn’t have him in his company because he could speak English but brokenly. But Richter protested, and took a lot of shaking off! 11

Gossip’s empathy for the internees was not universally felt. Several unions had begun to receive complaints from their members about working alongside Germans and other migrants they suspected of disloyalty. The mining unions had always been opposed to foreign labour, citing the fatal risks posed by communication problems on the mines. In the wartime climate, they began to agitate against aliens once again, particularly in the face of widespread unemployment. These complaints reached the ALF’s Metropolitan Council through G. Kerr, who suggested that a committee be formed to investigate the problem. As “the question was cropping up in various quarters” and “feeling was very much divided on the subject”, Kerr’s proposal was adopted so that “[a]n authoritative statement [might] go out from the heads of the movement.” 12

The committee reported a fortnight later, concluding that “we should not discriminate in working with those who were our former mates, and who are related to countries who have been made our enemies.” It stressed that “it was highly improbable that Austrian and German workers who had gradually built up homes in these parts would use their influence to assist the enemy in any way”, and referred to the strong unionist principles held by German immigrants. The report was well received. One wag suggested that the mother of the British monarch should be British (she was German). E.J. Tweedall

11 WW, 13 November 1914, p3. This sympathetic description of the Kalgoorlie barber contrasts sharply with the Worker’s goldfields column, which is explored in greater depth later. Anthony Splivalo, one of those interned on Rottnest, mentions in his memoir that, “The only members of this nationality I had ever known were the two German barbers in Kalgoorlie.” (The Home Fires. Fremantle Arts Centre Press: Fremantle, 1982, p64.) It is quite possible that Richter is one of the men he remembered.
12 WW, 9 October 1914, p5; 6 November 1914, p4; 27 November 1914, p3.
dissented, insisting that “if he lived in Germany and attained the age of a hundred not all the German whitewashing would make him anything else than an Irishman” and that “whether naturalised or unnaturalised they should be banished to Rottnest.” In the end, though, the report was endorsed by the meeting “almost unanimously.”\(^{13}\) The arguments advanced by the report clearly informed J.A. Doland and Alexander McCallum’s first annual report to the State Executive during wartime:

> We have no quarrel with the German worker. We have just as much in common with him as we have with our comrades in France, Belgium and Russia, and we trust that it will not be long before we are again extending to him along with the workers of all countries the hand of fraternal greetings. It may be as well if, at this critical period, we issued a warning to the organisations not to allow racial hatred to spring up in our ranks. The Labor movement is too great a movement to allow the question of accident of birthplace to interfere with our comradeship... A broadminded toleration should be exercised, and so long as a worker is a loyal citizen and a unionist no exception should be taken to him.\(^{14}\)

This was more than just a statement of the ALF’s policy regarding “preference to Britishers”; it was a plea to member organisations to halt the trend towards persecution that had already begun. In some industries the feeling against foreigners was stronger than in others. Three columns in particular—“Goldfields Glimpses: Life & Labor on the Golden Mile”, “Timber Topics” and “Fremantle Doings”—offer different perspectives on an issue that was of immense importance to the labour movement, and allow us to analyse the relationship of the *Westralian Worker* to different sections of contemporary society.

\(^{13}\) *WW*, 11 December 1914, p.6.

\(^{14}\) *WW*, 19 February 1915, p.2.
On the goldfields

The most fervent anti-enemy sentiment was expressed by H.E.J. Foreman, the manager of the Worker’s Kalgoorlie office. He wrote under the penname “Maori”, and from the start of the war took a virulent pro-British line.15 His passionate and colourful descriptions of the departure of Kalgoorlie volunteers have been referred to previously,16 and even before the war had started the column had praised “the fine stalwart men and slim active youths” who had been inducted into the military reserves: “we cannot help feeling a thrill of pride when we see our fine citizen soldiers on parade, knowing as we do that they are being trained to defend their own country against foreign aggression”.17 The goldfields had a strong sense of nationalism and commitment to Empire, and Foreman was no exception.

The dangers posed to mine workers by the poor English of some migrants had long been a concern, and the onset of war heightened the tensions felt in the workforce. The irrational fearfulness of the goldfields’ population is illustrated by their reaction to an unexplained earthquake. While Foreman stressed that “[u]p to the present all ideas as to the cause are purely theoretical”, he also mentioned that “I have met some who are inclined to believe it is some devilish scheme of the Kaiser’s which has gone ‘agley’ like most of his cleverly laid plans.” When a bill introduced by the Scaddan government to restrict the use of migrant labour in the mines was defeated in the Legislative Council, there was outrage. In “the present time of crisis, Australia can call upon its manhood to

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15 “Maori” was never expressly identified as Foreman, but material published about conscription during the first plebiscite campaign was signed by Foreman. Although it is possible that the manager of the Worker’s goldfields office was protecting a correspondent’s identity, it is extremely unlikely that the Kalgoorlie office would have left the “Goldfields Glimpses” column for an outsider to write.
16 See page 28.
17 WW, 31 July 1914, p5.
defend the country,” ran the argument, “but IT CANNOT CALL upon unnaturalised non-
English speaking foreigners to whom some of the mine managers love to give preference
over Britishers. ... [T]he great Liberal leader, Frank Wilson, ... should pay a visit to
some of his friends at Rottnest!”

This emotional plea to wartime patriotism is typical of the rhetoric used in the debate
over “preference to Britishers”, but the underlying cause of the tension was
unemployment. Foreman would regularly make the link between unemployed Britishers
and migrant workers, and to him the problem’s solution was obvious: the military
authorities should arrest all non-Britishers and make their jobs available to more suitable
candidates.

There are at the present time some 300 or 400 Britishers walking around the
fields seeking work and wanting it badly. At the same time I am led to
understand by those in a position to know there are about the same number of
foreigners at work on the mines on the belt. This is hardly a state of affairs that
should be tolerated in a loyal British community. It will no doubt be argued
that many of these foreigners although subjects of the nations we are at present
being attacked by are themselves opposed to the Governments they are under,
and are in no way favourable to the present war. That is as it may be. The fact
remains, however, they are liable to service in that country to which they owe
allegiance, they have not adopted this as their country, they are earning and
saving money with which they will go home when opportunity offers and
portion of that money will, either directly of [sic] indirectly, be used as a
weapon against Britain. ... [A]ction should be taken by the Defence authorities
here and the out-of-work Britisher given a chance to get work.19

The employers’ response, throughout the war, was that foreigners would work in
conditions that Britishers refused to endure. This allowed the labour movement to cloak
their xenophobia in the garb of legitimate industrial concerns. “If such a statement is
correct,” wrote Foreman, “then there can only be three reasons why a Britisher should
refuse to work where an alien does not object to. Either the work is more arduous than a

18 WW, 9 October 1914, p5; 30 October 1914, p4.
19 WW, 6 November 1914, p4.
white man should be asked to do, it is unsafe, or it is unhealthy. Neither of these conditions should exist in any mine on the belt.*20 This call for improved working conditions sounds like a worthy aim, but it was merely a debating point in response to claims made by the Chamber of Mines. The labour movement did not want to raise the standards migrant workers endured, it wanted to put them out of work altogether. The view was reportedly widespread: “Just at the present juncture, at any rate, almost everyone in the community believes in Britishers getting the preference, all things being equal, when there is a job going, and it is a mighty just belief too.”*21

The xenophobic attitude grew more pervasive as time went on. In late 1914, a deputation comprised of civic and union leaders waited on the Chamber of Mines and “preferred [sic] their request to the Chamber, that whenever opportunity offered for work on the mines preference should be given to Britishers.” The request was accepted, and as the employers’ scrambled to look more patriotic than their neighbours, “[s]ome of the mine managers went so far as to offer to replace any absolute foreigners who might be employed with British labor, but the deputation made it plain that they were not seeking the discharge of any men and only required an assurance that in future a patriotic preference should be shown.”*22 In January 1915, the damage caused by their anti-enemy campaign worried the Eastern Goldfields ALF. The Secretary wrote to the Defence Department “drawing attention to the unfortunate position of many naturalised Germans and Austrians, who had been thrown out of employment owing to natural prejudice, and asking whether the Department had any intention of providing for them.” It did not, and

*20 WW, 6 November 1914, p.4.
*21 WW, 20 November 1914, p.4.
*22 WW, 27 November 1914, p.7.
“the Minister desired to point out that there were quite a number of British born people in Australia who were at present unable to find employment either.” This tough stance was endorsed by Foreman: “Hear, hear! Senator Pearce. I am with you there all the way!”

Subtlety was not Foreman’s forte, and he consistently used his column to agitate against the exercise of caution. To him, the risk of injustice to an innocent migrant was insignificant: all foreigners were enemies who should be incarcerated or left to starve without employment. By July 1915, his rhetoric grew more forceful:

A very large number of Austrians and aliens are still at large on the northern woodlines, and I am credibly informed that there are over 70 foreigners at work on the Gwalia mine alone, probably a larger number than ever before. Of course, there are quite a number who have discovered that they are Slavs, Croats, Dalmatians or something else which will serve their turn for the present. The unpleasant fact remains, however, that in times past when any trouble threatened with the Britshers on the job they were all “Austria man” and stood together like one family. ... I trust the time is not far distant when every decent-minded man and woman in the community will look with scorn and contempt on the disloyal rotter who emplovs a foreigner while there is a Britisher to be found looking for a job.

At times, Foreman’s genuine concern for his unemployed compatriots was revealed. In response to a Sunday Times accusation of idleness in the working-class (what would today be termed “dole bludging”), Foreman gave a moving description of the state of affairs:

At every change of shift there are scores of men on every mine following up the chance of getting even one shift in. Only yesterday there were between 50 and 70 men on the Horseshoe looking for work, 20 to 30 on the Ivanhoe, and pretty well the same average on all the other mines. These men are not looking for “fancy jobs” either, but glad and thankful to get a shift in at anything that will give them a few shillings to help keep the wolf from the door. Talk about men not being genuine unemployed. Let the writer of the paragraph in question try getting out of his comfortable bed at 12 o’clock at night in the freezing cold and trot round some of the mines and see the men who have done the same on the off chance of getting on for a shift, waiting about in the damp and cold.

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Men don’t do that for fun or seeking a change of occupation. ... [There are] scores of men who are not wasters and vagabonds, but genuine hardworking men, badly in need of employment.\textsuperscript{25}

In Perth, there was a similar concern about the extent of unemployment caused by the war. Official figures showed that for the quarter ending 30 September 1914, Western Australia’s unemployment rate was 9.2 per cent. By March 1915, the situation had deteriorated significantly. Figures provided by affiliated unions to the Metropolitan Council of the ALF showed that 39.9 per cent of unionists were unemployed, with a further 41% working reduced hours. In some industries, the problem was acute: of the Carpenters’ Union’s 1000 members, 750 were without work.\textsuperscript{26} Don Cameron regularly addressed mass meetings of the unemployed, and his harangues included calls for armed revolt should the government fail to act. The workers “are face to face with their masters, who are in effect denying them the right to live and work”, he insisted “Yes, if intelligent reasoning will not remove the embargo which prevents the hungry from being fed and the idle from working, I favor physical force.”\textsuperscript{27} Despite the severity of the situation, Cameron did not use migrant workers as a scapegoat. Rather, mass unemployment was a result of capitalism and imperialism, and the solidarity of labour across national boundaries was the solution.\textsuperscript{28} The patriotic Goldfields, however, could not accept this argument.

By 1916, goldfields workers were determined to take a stand against enemy aliens. The Miners’ Union (the third-largest union in the state, with 2328 members) decided that

\textsuperscript{25} WW, 2 July 1915, p5.
\textsuperscript{26} WW, 5 February 1915, p3; 5 March 1915, p2.
\textsuperscript{27} WW, 3 September 1915, p3. He had previously declared his support for “physical force if all moral suasion failed” at a meeting of the ALF’s Metropolitan Council. (WW, 20 August 1915, p3.)
\textsuperscript{28} The position adopted by Cameron and the Fremantle ALF will be explored in greater depth later.
“after the 1st of February next they will absolutely refuse to work with enemy subjects”. 29

James Cunningham, the union’s secretary, told the Kalgoorlie Miner,

Numbers of these men make no secret of their national sympathies when underground, and expressions of disloyalty have frequently been made during crib time, when the newspapers are generally read... [The] disloyal sentiments expressed were reported by members to have been almost unbearable, most particularly for those who have relatives fighting at the front. 30

H.E.J. Foreman’s words in the Westralian Worker a day previously are striking in their similarity:

All Britshers at the present time very naturally resent having to work with enemy subjects. The position, however, is intensified in the case where perhaps a number of Britshers are on the plat[form] having crib, and in the same place may be four or five Austrians or other enemy subjects. With the crib the papers are brought out by the aliens, who read to each other the reports of supposed allied defeats, etc., and it needs no knowledge of their language to realise that they are gloating and rejoicing over these incidents. The Britshers have relatives and friends at the front, and it needs only a small spark to ignite the tinder which may at any time blaze up into an uncontrollable fire. 31

By adopting the union’s line, the Worker became a participant in the industrial dispute rather than a mere interested bystander. The Miners’ Union condemned the Defence Department for failing to intern foreigners; the ALF gave the Minister one last chance to toughen the internment policy, insisting that “all enemy subjects, irrespective of position, be interned, the impression that this was not being done, being detrimental to recruiting”; and Foreman issued a direct threat: “Does [the Minister for Defence] wish to bring about another industrial crisis? We should hope not. But it is certainly time he took action.” 32

On Sunday, 6 February the Miners’ Union met at Boulder to hear the Department’s response. Captain Corbett, an intelligence officer who had been sent to the fields in

30 Kalgoorlie Miner, 29 January 1916.
response to a previous request by the union, reported that the Government would not adopt a policy of mass internment “because all the enemy subjects on the field were known to his Department and were not considered a risk to security.” Foreman glossed over this explanation, reporting only that Corbett “gave an explanation of the Department’s attitude, also answering a number of questions. He did not, however, succeed in satisfying the meeting that all that could be done was being attempted”.

Accordingly, the Miners’ Union appointed vigilance committees who would inspect the naturalisation papers of any working foreigner challenged by his British workmates. If the documents could not be produced, the workers would strike until the foreigner was laid off.33

The results of the strike demonstrate that it was pursued out of irrational xenophobia rather than realistic analysis of the situation. Very few of the immigrants risked coming to work, and it was noted that “the 120 Slavs who profess themselves to be in favor of the Allies nearly all decided to keep away from the mines rather than cause any trouble.”34 Now, however, he expressed sympathy for “[t]hese people [who] have much against their wills been ground under the heel of Austria, and have at no time had any love for their masters.”

It is rather hard, because since the war a certain section of them have subscribed hundreds of pounds for the relief of the Belgians, Serbians and others who are fighting the Austro-German curse, and have done everything in their power to show that they have no sympathy with the authority which holds their country in thrall in Europe.35

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34 WW, 11 February 1916, p5.
But despite this admission that over a hundred innocent men had been made destitute, Foreman dismissed any obligation the Miners’ Union might have for them. “It appears to be hard luck,” he wrote, “but it is not the only unfortunate position brought about by this unholy struggle.”36 Six months earlier, Foreman had claimed they were not really Slavs, but were “Austria man” [sic]; his concern for their plight did not last long before he returned to that refrain.37

The cry is that the loyal Slavs, should have been allowed to work. But the line of demarcation was too difficult to draw. Before the war they were all proud to all themselves “Austria men,” and only in isolated cases did we hear of Slav nationality. It is unfortunate that there are fifty wives and ninety-four children concerned in the trouble. But whatever measures may be taken for the relief of those in actual distress, the Miners seem determined that the resolution passed shall stand… [T]here is no moral obligation involved. From all accounts the enemy subjects who have in the past been interned showed absolutely no gratitude for the humane treatment they received at the hands of the department.38

Neither the Kalgoorlie and Boulder Miners’ Union, which had precipitated the situation, nor the Defence Department was prepared to offer relief payments to the men; it was ultimately left up to the State Government to provide an allowance to their families, as long as they surrendered themselves to internment. Unmarried men received nothing.39

The true motive of the strike was not to protect those miners who were upset by working alongside the enemy, it was to effect what these days might be called an “ethnic cleansing” of the goldfields. Foreman revealed this on 18 February: “One thing we have all to guard against in the future, and that is that, war or no war, the foreigners must be

kept out. The Miners' Union has the remedy in its own hands... I hope they will have the same courage to use it, and I believe they will.\textsuperscript{40}

Paradoxically, the strike undermined the xenophobic myth that foreign labourers on the goldfields were stealing work from Britishers. From the turn of the century, mine managers fostered racial division in the workforce. A future president of the United States, Herbert Hoover, pioneered this practice at Gwalia, where he imported Italian labour and sowed disharmony between them and their British workmates.\textsuperscript{41} The immigrants were generally used for unskilled and uncomfortable work, hence “[a]lmost the whole of the enemy subjects who have been dismissed from the mines were employed underground as ‘boggers’ or truckers, etc.”\textsuperscript{42} Several mines were forced to close down as there was no British labour available to do the work, and up to 200 members of the Surface Workers’ Union were put off. Foreman suggested that the problem would only be temporary, as about 150 Meekatharra men were looking for work. However, they were not genuine unemployed—they were on strike, and the Chamber of Mines refused to hire them on principle. The \textit{Worker} was put in a difficult position: while it wanted to report that “[g]radually the shortage of labor on the different mines, caused by the withdrawal of the foreign element, is being overcome and soon they will all be in full swing again”, it was forced to advertise that “[t]here is still work for truckers and boggers on the mines of the belt.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{WW}, 18 February 1916, p8.
\textsuperscript{41} Gregson, S. “Foot Soldiers for Capital”, p130.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{WW}, 11 February 1916, p5.
The “preference to Britishers” controversy was prolonged because the Chamber of Mines and the unions disagreed over the definition of “enemy alien”, and sought clarification from the government. Senator Lynch “put up a most persistent fight” on behalf of the Slavs, but failed to convince the Miners’ Union, which reaffirmed its opposition to foreigners on the mines and called for the establishment of a tribunal to hear disputes over nationality. The following week, the union claimed that “three foreigners who were enemy subjects were specially sent for to go on to work”. Foreman relished the chance to flex his rhetorical muscles, damning “the wickedly provocative action agreed upon by a body of soulless ghouls, who were willing to sacrifice the interests of their shareholders, the welfare of thousands of Britishers and their wives and families, in fact the life of the whole community for the sake of a score or so foreigners who were born under the Austrian flag.”

Again it was assumed that all foreigners were probably sympathetic to the German military effort:

How many Germans throughout the wide Empire were treated as friends, and acted in every way as decent citizens before the war, but as soon as opportunity offered showed themselves for the liars and hypocrites and enemies they were? … “Prove this man is against the Allies’ cause, and we will sack him,” say the Chamber of Mines. What a rotten argument it is. The sneering smile is there, the general demeanor, a gesture is sufficient to brand him for what he is. But how are you going to prove it? No, let the Chamber of Mines individually and collectively prove themselves Britishers.

In the end a commission was established to deal with such questions. It commenced its work on 11 September 1916 and was apparently quite successful in resolving disputes, because Foreman’s weekly tirades against foreigners all but disappeared from then on.

The *Westralian Worker* certainly contributed to the success of the miners’ industrial

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45 *WW*, 1 September 1916, p6.
46 *WW*, 15 September 1916, p6. Occasionally anti-German sentiment would find expression in the debate on conscription, but it was of a different nature.
action, by stirring up anti-German sentiment and calling for swift action to be taken. Foreman’s campaign on behalf of the Miners’ Union reveals the power of the labour press when wielded for a cause.