

# Fascism and the Russian Community in Interwar Queensland

by John Perkins

From the early 1920s onwards, so-called 'White Russians', emigre opponents of the Bolsheviks who had triumphed in the civil war that followed the October Revolution of 1917, began to arrive in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Almost all of them came via Manchuria and, to a lesser extent through China, where they had found a sanctuary of sorts after the collapse of Admiral Kolchak's regime in Siberia in late 1919.

Most of the White Russians involved had enjoyed privilege, power and a degree of affluence while Nicholas II was Tsar of All the Russians. 'Holy Russia' was then, as an early student of the 'White' movement observed:

a social order built upon privilege and force, comfortable to parasitic groups which found their life in serving it .... For the most favoured, the old order meant glittering distinction, luxury, all that power, titles, decorations, ancestral names, and estates could bring.<sup>2</sup>

All this was transformed by the October Revolution and the victory of the Red Army in the ensuing civil war. The thousands of 'Whites' who escaped to Manchuria and the ports of northern China faced a life of economic hardship and personal insecurity. The collapse of Russian power and influence in the Far East, insofar as it was likely to be exercised on behalf of White Russians, meant they existed on the sufferance of local warlords and a Chinese population resentful at the privileged position of foreigners. Banditry was widespread. The Manchurian city of Harbin, the main centre of Russian settlement in East Asia, acquired the reputation in the 1920s as the 'Chicago of the Far East'.<sup>3</sup>

Those who were fortunate enough to raise the fare and gain entry into Australia departed for a country of which they had little prior knowledge. They found themselves in an environment that was more alien culturally than even Manchuria or China. In the main lacking facility in the English language, they were forced to seek a livelihood from manual, often casual labour.

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The largest community of post-revolution exiles emerged in Brisbane. The Queensland capital was the first major port-of-call on the sea route from Shanghai and other ports in East Asia. Another nucleus of settlement appeared in the Thangool area near Rockhampton, where a number sought a livelihood from cotton-growing on a share-farming basis. Some found employment as miners at Mount Isa or as cane-cutters in the Tully district of Queensland.<sup>4</sup> According to one estimate, by 1937 about 300 Russians resided in Brisbane and another 200 or so in the Thangool district, out of around 1,500 persons of Russian birth in Queensland as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, White Russians mainly settled in Sydney.

By no means all of the Russians residing in interwar Australia were 'White' emigres. A number had arrived in Sydney and Brisbane before 1914. Some were seamen who had jumped ship in Australia. Others arrived in the wake of the abortive Revolution of 1905, the 'dress rehearsal' for 1917. Many escaped from political exile in Siberia or from labour camps.<sup>6</sup>

A number of the more radical political refugees returned to Russia after the October Revolution. Between 1918 and 1925 the political complexion of the Russian community was transformed with the departure of large numbers of Bolshevik sympathisers for the Soviet Union and their replacement by White Russian arrivals.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, partly on account of the difficulties involved in travelling to Soviet territory during the Civil War and the limited means of most Russian residents of Australia, a number of pre-war arrivals remained in the country. According to one estimate made in the early 1940s, pre-1914 immigrants accounted for about a fifth of the Russian settlers in Brisbane and, insofar as they were interested in politics, were generally anti-Tsarist and on the Left.<sup>8</sup> Even post-1920 arrivals included some of left-wing but non-Bolshevik views. The librarian of the Russian Orthodox church in Brisbane, until his expulsion from the position in June 1935, was a former Red Army man who was accused of having 'Secretly supplied literature of the left-wing to young people'. A number of 'Russian Communists', including a former White army officer, were employed as wharf labourers on the Brisbane waterside.<sup>9</sup>

Over the course of the 1930s a tiny minority of the Russians living in Australia embraced the ideology of fascism. A branch of one Russian fascist movement was formed in Brisbane. At its peak, around the outbreak of war in Europe, the security service estimated the membership at about 40.<sup>10</sup> Another fascist organisation had representatives in Sydney and at Thangool, where they succeeded in obtaining some subscribers to the party's periodical, *Fashist*. At first

glance, the relatively limited appeal of fascism for Russian emigres in Australia is surprising. It was, however, sufficient to cause considerable dissension within the Brisbane community in the 1930s.

This analysis of those Russians in Australia who became members or were supporters of organised fascist movements is mainly based upon evidence resulting from surveillance by the security service. As such the material has to be treated with caution. The White Russian community was riven by political and personal antagonisms that were sharpened by the trauma of the Revolution, Civil War and years of precarious existence in Manchuria or north China. The outward manifestations of that experience in not a few cases approached paranoia. 'Reds' were not only 'under beds'. A liberal, or a person making statements of a liberal nature, could quite readily be denounced as a Bolshevik.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, as the climate of public and official opinion shifted in the late 1930s towards recognition of the threat posed by Nazi Germany and Militarist Japan, moderate conservatives among the White Russians were denounced as 'fascists' by fellow exiles.

The internal divisions within the White Russian community in Australia increased as the Bolshevik regime consolidated its hold on Russia, raising frustration at the ineffectiveness of the emigre movement. This seems to have particularly affected those in distant Australia. Other than collecting funds for the various emigre organisations, such as the 'Fund for Saving the Homeland', the only reported positive action undertaken in Australia was that of an individual who obtained employment in Brisbane as a wool packer for the purpose of 'putting propaganda pamphlets in bales of wool purchased by the U.S.S.R.'<sup>12</sup>

The expertise available to the security services for the surveillance of White Russians was far from adequate. An officer sent to search the dwelling of a Russian for subversive material asked the owner if an ikon of Christ on the wall was 'Rasputin's picture'.<sup>13</sup> The main source of information was members of the Russian community and, reflecting the divisions within that community, the material provided was often contradictory and far-fetched. In a communication to the Intelligence Section of Northern Command, an analyst-interpreter at the Censor's Office in Brisbane instanced an individual whom one agent had 'described as a fascist, whereas another agent states definitely that he is not, he is merely stupid'.<sup>14</sup> The analyst in question was one of the few trained and intelligent linguists whose services were available to the security services.

### THE 'WHITE RUSSIANS'

A large proportion of the emigres had served in the Great War, principally as junior officers. The 'White Armies' may not have been,

as one Stalinist source considered, 'overwhelmingly dominated by reactionaries who were prototypes of the fascist officers and adventurers who were later to emerge in Central Europe'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the numerous emigre officers were at least potential recruits to movements that emphasised discipline, promoted force as a means of achieving generally vague objectives and had a penchant for the wearing of uniforms.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously, the White Russians arriving to settle in Australia shared the pronounced anti-communist stance of fascism. From a combination of the virulent anti-Semitism that pervaded the Russian upper classes before the Revolution, and a tendency to ascribe the latter to a 'Jewish-Bolshevik' conspiracy, the anti-Semitism of Hitler's National Socialism had a decided appeal. Similarly, Nazi propaganda against freemasonry accorded with the views of many Russian exiles who were inclined to attribute the success of the Bolsheviks, and their own misfortunes, to covert but powerful forces. The Russian Orthodox priest of Brisbane in the 1930s, who was a fascist sympathiser if not a member of a fascist organisation, is reported in early 1941 to have once 'boasted that he would not become naturalised, as the King of England was a Mason and the Governor-General (Sir Isaac Isaacs) was a Jew'.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1920s at least the overwhelming majority of White Russians were monarchists. They desired the restoration of the Romanov dynasty that had ruled Russia since 1613, expanding from the small, landlocked principality of Moscow to become the largest land empire of history. The process had extended the frontiers of Russia to the shores of the Pacific, the heart of Central Europe, the borders of Afghanistan and the Black Sea. This achievement, which was intimately associated with the Romanov dynasty, had been a source of pride, privilege and power for the Russian ruling class.

As an ideology of counter-revolution, however, monarchism in the post-1917 Russian case suffered from two fundamental deficiencies. In the first place, when, partly as an outcome of the Great War, so many crowned heads of European states were forced to flee into exile, monarchy as a political arrangement, came to be perceived by many as an anachronism, especially among the younger emigres. These were the most likely to be attracted to the ideology of fascism.

The second and more specific deficiency of a Romanov restoration was the lack of a universally acceptable 'pretender'. Two claimants to the succession to the throne of the Tsars of All the Russians emerged during the 1920s. A legitimist minority among the emigres supported Grand Duke Cyril Vladimirovich, the eldest son of Grand Duke Vladimir, the second surviving male issue to Alexander II (1844-1881),

and therefore first cousin of the last Tsar, Nicholas II. Although Cyril declared himself Emperor in August 1924, the preference of most of the numerous officers among the emigres was for Grand Duke Nicholai Nicholayevich.<sup>18</sup> As a grandson of a younger brother of Alexander II's, his claim as a third cousin to succeed Nicholas II was somewhat tenuous. However, until his dismissal in 1916 he had been a popular commander in chief of the Russian army. He remained up to his death in 1929 the titular head of the Paris-based Russia General Military Union (Ruskii Obsche-Voyenskii Soyuz or ROVS), the organisation to which most veterans belonged.

The removal of Nicholai Nicholevich from the scene effectively resolved the question of the succession but did little, however, to enhance the appeal of Cyril Vladimirovich. His political learnings, insofar as his passion for sports cars allowed him time to develop any, also alienated many in the emigration. He was an openly avowed Germanophile and pro-fascist. The ceremonial of Mussolini's Italy was adopted at his 'court', first in Germany and later in France. His wife, a Saxe-Coburg princess, was an early financial supporter of Hitler's NSDAP.<sup>19</sup>

For most of the emigres democracy had little appeal as a political arrangement. Its absence from Tsarist Russia had been the guarantor of the privilege and position they had enjoyed. From their perspective the October Revolution had demonstrated the 'mob-rule' they associated with democracy. Bolshevism was, in the words of a White Russian resident of interwar Brisbane, 'the caricatured crowning piece of the era of democratic ideas'.<sup>20</sup> Many emigres considered that their cause had been betrayed by the western democracies through the limited extent and hasty conclusion of intervention in the Civil War. In the world of the 1930s democracy was losing ground to authoritarian governments and appeared to be a political system without a future.

In the absence of a universally acceptable claimant to the throne of the Romanovs, a more general and abstract desire for the restoration of the pre-1914 order pervaded the Russian emigration, especially the older generation. As one of their number observed to a foreign correspondent in Harbin in the early 1930s:

They have only one thing in common: the belief, I should say the conviction, that their miserable exile is only a passing trial, soon to end in their glorious re-entrance into Russia. Yes, soon. That is the tragedy of these people. They have never lost hope. When you tell them that the Soviet system has already lasted for fifteen years and shows no sign of having reached the end of its tether, they listen to you as an heretic. Then they laugh. You must never attempt to take away from a man the one thing that makes life bearable for him.<sup>21</sup>

The above attitude limited not only the appeal of democracy but also that of fascism for Russian emigres. Many dismissed it as an innovation of that era and as a divisive force within the emigration. In exile there was a pronounced tendency for the former residents of the multi-national empire to fragment into more limited ethnic groupings. This was most obviously the case with the Finns, Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians who, as an outcome of the Revolution and civil war, had acquired independent nation states as objects of allegiance. It also applied, however, to Ukrainians and to the Cossacks who, for example, formed their own associations in Australia.

The one unifying force among Great Russian and most Cossack emigres was adherence to the Russian Orthodox religion. This was not initially the case. In the early years after 1917 there were serious doubts as to whether it would survive in emigration. A number of emigres, including prominent noble families, embraced Roman Catholicism, partly in response to Vatican proselytising.<sup>22</sup> A Russian Orthodox church gradually emerged, on the basis of existing Russian churches abroad, in particular those of Paris, Belgrade, Harbin and Shanghai, and the support of the Greek Orthodox church. However, as with the Romanov succession, two rival metropolitans, one based in Paris and another in Yugoslavia, laid claim to the succession to the patriarchy of Moscow.<sup>23</sup> In addition, there were among the emigres Old Believers and non-Ukrainian members of the Uniate Church who continued to hold to their particular religious beliefs.

'Defeatism', the notion that military intervention by another power would engender civil war in Russia and the collapse of the Soviet regime, came to be the most widely held tenet of belief among the emigres. Cyril's successor as 'pretender', his son Vladimir, described it as the 'White Idea'.<sup>24</sup> Here again, however, the emigres were divided between those who hoped for the salvation of Russia from Berlin and those who supported Japan as the preferred interventionist power. As an idea, 'defeatism' reflected a considerable naivety on the part of its adherents. As one White Russian said of the community in Manchuria: 'They hope great things of the Japanese, notably that the yellow soldiers will reconquer Siberia for pure, disinterested love of the White Russians'.<sup>25</sup> Scarcely less naive were the fascists among them who foresaw German-Japanese intervention to topple the Bolsheviks as an expression of 'fascist internationalism'.

There were therefore several points of confluence between the political ideas circulating among the Russian emigration and those of fascism. Support for Nazi Germany or militarist Japan was generally viewed as the only means by which the Soviet regime could be overthrown. Hitler's anti-Semitism had a decided appeal for many

emigres. They naturally empathised with the virulent anti-communism associated with fascism. With the passage of time; and as a result of the conflict between the ‘pretenders’ and the personality of the leading claimant, support for a restoration of the monarchy waned considerably.

Two of the essential tenets of National Socialism were unacceptable to Russian emigres with leanings towards fascist ideology. First, the anti-Christian stance of the Nazi ideology, as expounded by its ‘theoretician’ Alfred Rosenberg, had little appeal to them and its adoption would have been a considerable barrier to the expansion of membership of any Russian fascist party. Second, the basis of National Socialism, with its glorification of a specific race, could hardly be emulated by a Russian movement desiring the restoration of a multi-racial empire on a corporatist basis. These two factors are recognised in the programs of the Russian fascist parties.

Perhaps typical of the White Russian emigration, multiple organisations claiming to be fascist emerged to compete for support during the interwar period. The Berlin-based ROND drew its support almost exclusively from emigres residing in Germany and aped Hitler’s National Socialists, even down to the form of moustache its members sported. The most important fascist movement to emerge within the Russian emigration was the RFO (Rossiiskaia fashistkaia organisatsiia), under the leadership of Constantin Vladimirovich Rodzaevsky, whose basis of support was among the large Russian community in Manchuria. The other organisation was the VFO (Vserossiiskaia fashistkaia organisatsiia). This was formed in 1933 essentially as the creation of Anastasii Andrevich Vonsiatsky, who declared himself its Vozhd or leader.<sup>26</sup> Vonsiatsky, an ex-officer in the Tsar’s army, had subsequently married a wealthy American somewhat older than himself, who provided the basic finance of the organisation.

The existence of three separate fascist organisations within the White Russian emigration in part reflected ideological and personal differences between their leaders and members. Vonsiatsky and his VFO eschewed anti-Semitism as a key element in its ideology and program — the Vozhd’s first wife had been Jewish — whereas it was central to the platform of the RFO and the ROND. The RFO envisaged a privileged role for the Orthodox Church in the envisaged ‘New Russia’, whereas the ROND, perhaps influenced by National Socialism, was more equivocal on the question of religion. The basic division between them, however, emanated from having different patrons. The continued existence of the ROND came to depend upon Hitler’s whim. Rodzaevsky’s RFO was effectively a pawn of the Japanese. The VFO flourished only insofar as the Vozhd’s American

wife, a representative of the 'capitalist plutocracy', continued to fund its activities. Vonsiatsky supporters were in the main anti-Japanese and, at least in Australia, pro-German. Principally perhaps on account of distance, little contact appears to have developed between Russian fascists in Australia and the ROND.

### THE FASCIST ORGANISATIONS

Vonsiatsky's VFO never achieved a significant following in Australia. This was partly on account of its ideology, in particular the refusal to make anti-Semitism a key feature of the program, and partly because of the North American basis of the organisation. Most White Russians in Australia had arrived from Manchuria, where many of them acquired at least an acquaintance with Rodzaevsky's RFO and retained contacts with people residing there. Another important factor was the personality of the Sydney representative of the VFO, who also propagated the Vozhd's political views in other Australian port cities: one Vassily Alexandrovich Prootkovsky.

Born in 1889, Prootkovsky was an officer in the Imperial Russian army during the World War. In the Civil War he served in a Russian unit operating with the British interventionary force based at Murmansk in northern Russia. For bravery in action against the Red Army he was awarded the British Military Medal. Subsequently, with the withdrawal of the British force, he met Trotsky and was offered a command in the Red Army.<sup>27</sup> He seems to have declined the offer. Eventually, in 1926, he made his way to Australia, where he obtained employment as a seaman on coastal vessels.

Prootkovsky possessed to a pronounced degree an ability to alienate most White Russians he came into contact with. He denounced as 'Bolshevik' anyone who disagreed with his fascist views and referred to the Russian Club in Sydney as an institution that did 'nothing apart from organising tea-parties and dancing-parties'.<sup>28</sup> His outspokenness contributed to his internment in early 1942. A letter of his to K.A. Stekloff, the leader of the VFO in Shanghai and the wartime successor to the Vozhd, intercepted by the Censor's Office, indicated that 'he approves of the German attack on Russia, and hopes for a German victory'. In the same letter, apparently, 'He also commented sarcastically on the Australian army'.<sup>29</sup>

Nicholas Poliakoff (alias Pole-Rogan) had far more success as the VFO representative in the Thangool area, although this did not extend much beyond gaining subscribers for the organisation's periodical. Born in Russia in 1902, Poliakoff had been an officer in Kolchak's White army in 1919. At some time or other he went over to the Bolsheviks and by 1922 was a lieutenant in the Red Army. In 1924



he was appointed a magistrate at Vladivostock before leaving shortly afterwards for Australia.<sup>30</sup>

The most active and organised Russian fascist group in Australia was affiliated with the Harbin-based RFO. By late 1936 a branch based on Brisbane had emerged and a small cell existed at Thangool.<sup>31</sup> Of all the fascist groups in Australia, the Brisbane branch of the RFO appears to have maintained the closest connections with those of like mind both in Australia and overseas. Until the outbreak of war and its closure in September 1939, the branch met at the local German Club and on arrival the members saluted the portrait of Hitler hanging there. Its leader was active in organising viewings of Nazi propaganda films. A search of his home in mid-1940 revealed Christmas cards from the New Zealand anti-Semitic publicist A.N. Field, from E.J. Jones, the Sydney-based founder of the fascist Australian Unity League, who sent 'Pan Aryan Greetings', and from G.E. Thomas, a Mosley lieutenant in Britain, who wrote 'in Comradeship'.<sup>32</sup>

The moving spirit behind the establishment of the RFO branch at Brisbane was Alexander K. Vitte who arrived to settle in Brisbane in 1925, after a number of years residence in Manchuria. Described by a security service report as 'a clever, capable, and strongly political minded individual', Vitte left Australia in 1938 to take up what he described as 'a lucrative commercial position' at Shanghai, which was then occupied by the Japanese. In September 1939 the head of the Shanghai branch of the RFO reported to his then equivalent in Brisbane that Mr. and Mrs. Vitte had been registered 'under the assumed names of A.K. and N.N. Alexandroff'. By that time it would seem that Vitte's business fortunes were at a low ebb, for he was applying for a job as a foreman at a British-owned furniture factory.<sup>33</sup>

Vitte's successor as leader of the Brisbane branch of the RFO was Ivan Pavlovich Rodjestvensky. Born in the Siberian province of Tomsk in 1895, he was originally destined to follow his father's profession as an Orthodox priest. On the outbreak of war in 1914, however, he transferred to a military college before serving in the Imperial Army during the World War as a lieutenant. Subsequently, he joined Admiral Kolchak's forces in Siberia and rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. On the collapse of Kolchak's regime in late 1919, he crossed with other elements of the forces into China, where he was not interned on account of having a relative in Manchuria: a brother who had similarly served as a colonel with Kolchak. In Harbin, he worked in the administration of the Chinese Eastern Railway, which was then under White Russian control, until dismissed in February 1925 with the Soviet takeover of the enterprise. Thereafter, he worked for the

Portuguese in southern China as an armed guard defending ships operating on the Woochow River against pirates before making his way to Australia, having met in Harbin a medical practitioner who had resided in the country for several years.<sup>34</sup>

Landing in Townsville in late August 1925, Rodjestvensky worked as a cane-cutter, followed by periods on a Cloncurry cattle station and as a coal trimmer on coastal vessels. Sea-sickness forced him to relinquish this position and spend two years working for a company with a contract to bitumen roads in Queensland. During that time he met a Russian hairdresser and, on discovering apparently that 'it was not hard to learn the business of a barber', he paid £10 for two months training. Eventually, in 1931, he established his own business in South Brisbane, where most of the Russians in the Queensland capital resided, and continued to operate until his internment in 1942.<sup>35</sup> This occupation provided ample opportunity to expound fascist views to customers who cared to listen.

Of the three Russian fascist organisations of the 1930s, the RFO was the most emphatic supporter of the Orthodox Church. The slogan of the Party was 'God, Nation, Labour'. According to Point 6 of the program adopted at the 3rd party congress, held in Harbin in July 1938: 'The Orthodox religion is the religion of the majority of Russian races, and as the religion of the chief founders of Russian civilisation and history, will enjoy the special protection of the Government. All other religions with the exception of satanic and immoral religions and the Jewish sect, will have full freedom and support'.<sup>36</sup>

One of the major activists in support of the RFO in Brisbane, who may or may not have been an actual member, was Valentine Antoniev, the Prior or Archpriest of St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church. Born in 1878, Antoniev was ordained a priest in 1910 and served as a chaplain with the Russian army during the First World War and in the same capacity with Kolchak's forces during the Civil War. After eight months searching for a position in Shanghai, some English priests assisted him with the purchase of a ticket and he arrived in Townsville in 1923. Initially he was employed on relief work, before becoming a coal miner at Mount Mulligan for three years, followed by four years as a stoker on a coastal vessel operating out of Cairns. During that time he wrote a number of letters to the Cairns Post denouncing Bolshevism. In 1932 he was appointed priest of St. Nicholas Church in Brisbane, where the stipend was so low that he had to work two days a week as a labourer in order to support his family.<sup>37</sup>

From its origins in the mid-1920s the Russian Orthodox Church community in Brisbane was riven by conflict but Antoniev's fascist

views and the force with which he expressed them raised the level of conflict to an altogether higher plane. A meeting of a group of his opponents on 1 February 1935 resulted in a protest against his 'social and political activities' signed by eleven of those present and forwarded to the Metropolitan Antonius in Yugoslavia.<sup>38</sup> This step initiated developments leading in 1937 to a defamation action against Antoniev by the organiser of the protest.<sup>39</sup>

The core of the opposition to Antoniev were members of the local branch of the Russian Imperial Union, a Paris-based organisation that itself espoused at least quasi-fascist and anti-Semitic policies. The organisation was 'Opposed to the Jewish Yoke on Russia', brooked 'No compromise with Jewish Marxist Revolution', advocated 'A National Dictatorship to bring Revolution to a Finish' and proposed to outlaw strikes in a post-Bolshevik Russia. The essential differences between its program and that of the RFO were support for the restoration of the monarchy and, most important, opposition to collaboration with Japan. Members of the RFO were referred to by at least one Brisbane member of the Imperial Union as 'Japano-Fascists'.<sup>40</sup>

### THE QUEENSLAND FASCISTS

The pinnacle of the influence of fascism and fascists within the White Russian community of Australia came in 1941. The Nazi-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939 had bewildered the community. Hitler's spectacular successes in 1940 heartened those who were anti-British. His invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 created 'confusion and dissension' but appeared at first to validate the 'defeatist' idea among the emigres that the overthrow of the hated Bolshevik system would come about through the invasion of Russia by another power. It was reported to the security service that: 'The religious broadcast from Smolensk after its occupation by the Germans had great effect'.<sup>41</sup> At this critical juncture the picture of attitudes among the emigration in Australia provided by the security service is contradictory. According to a report of early July 1941, Antoniev's support for the Nazi invasion caused considerable dissension among the St. Nicholas church community. Apparently, 'feeling against his sentiments ran so high last Sunday that, had he made any remarks about the advantages of German rule for Russia . . . certain members of the congregation intended to approach him whilst he was in the Church, and treat him with violence'. Yet according to a report of early October, 'Fascist propoganda has been so successful that 80% of the White Russian community in Brisbane can now be regarded as Fascist'.<sup>42</sup>

Led by Antoniev, the Russian fascists in Brisbane were active in October 1941 collecting money and clothing for the relief of Russians in German-occupied areas. This was a response to the efforts of the left-inspired Medical Aid to Russia organisation and the Russian Red Cross movement that sought to raise funds to assist the people of the Soviet-controlled areas.<sup>43</sup>

Support for Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union rapidly waned from late 1941 onwards.<sup>44</sup> This was in response to a number of developments. The anticipated anti-Bolshevik uprising in Russia and speedy collapse of the Soviet regime did not eventuate. 'Defeatism' was predicated upon intervention by another power igniting a rebellion and the replacement of Stalin's government by one acceptable as a negotiating partner by the intervening power. The continuing resistance of the Red Army, in spite of heavy losses, and especially the repulse of the German army before Moscow in December 1941, forced emigres to reassess their convictions as to the nature of the relationship between the Kremlin and the Russian people. As a security service report of 19 February 1942 observed: 'Russian resistance with its heroic qualities, has rallied to the Russian cause many of the Russian emigres, who, at the outbreak of hostilities, had doubted to which side to owe allegiance'.<sup>45</sup>

The change of attitude was assisted by Stalin's concessions to the Orthodox church, his evocation of past Russian military heroes and his conversion of the conflict into a 'Great Patriotic War'. As a Russian residing in Brisbane observed: 'abolition of the Comintern, the election of a new Orthodox Church Patriarch, the recognition of the old ranks and uniforms in the army and the call to fight for the Fatherland in place of the communistic International . . . these things show that Russia is again on her national road and that she is disregarding unrealisable dreams about an "international paradise"'.<sup>46</sup>

News of the anti-Slav policies adopted by the Nazis in the occupied territories began to disabuse the emigres, as it did those directly affected, of the notion of the Germans as liberators of Russia. Hitler's failure to announce a policy for the future of Russia, and his reluctance to employ White Russians residing in Germany in the occupied territories, was said to be the cause of 'considerable disillusionment among the Russian emigres'. The appointment of the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg with his wellknown view of the racial inferiority of Slavs, as Reich Commissioner in Russia, 'further dashed White Russian hopes'.<sup>47</sup> The entry of Japan into the war on the Axis side, and the southward thrust of Japanese forces towards Australia from early December 1941, was viewed by all but a small minority as a threat to the last refuge of the exiles.<sup>48</sup>

With the expansion of Japanese power into the South Pacific the existence of fascists within the White Russian community posed a dilemma for the authorities. On the one hand, their anti-communism received sympathetic understanding in some quarters. On the other, with the leftwards shift of public opinion in Australia, which became especially pronounced after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, the lack of action against Russian fascists began to be a source of criticism of the authorities. According to a Brisbane report of early November 1941: 'A rumour is prevalent among the Russian community to the effect that the Russian Fascists are being protected by persons in Government positions'.<sup>49</sup>

Eventually, in early 1942, 28 Russians were ordered to be interned. Of those arrested, 26 were residents of Queensland. They included the priest Antoniev and Rodjestvensky, the local leader of the RFO. In essence they were interned because of their membership of fascist organisations, and, in the case of the RFO, on account of the association of its East-Asian leadership and membership with the Japanese authorities.

Over the course of internment most of those with leanings towards fascism changed their views radically. Although he remained 'fanatically White', Rodjestvensky, the local leader of the RFO, abandoned his pro-Axis beliefs in response to a variety of influences. Not least was a reading of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, which convinced him 'that Russia would become manure for German culture'.<sup>50</sup>

Antoniev was one of the few who continued to espouse fascist ideas. Of his internment at Loveday Camp in South Australia, it was said that 'he has given little time to Christianity but has given a few lectures on anti-semitism'. Otherwise he seems to have devoted himself to learning the German language and to concern over his loss of hair. 'Is it boredom or the water', he wrote to a Brisbane woman in September 1942, 'but my hair is falling out terribly and I am afraid I shall come home bald. Please buy at once from Wilkinson some 'Bay Rum' hair tonic and send it to me without delay'.<sup>51</sup>

The restriction order on Antoniev was lifted in May 1945, enabling him to resume his duties as priest of St Nicholas church. This was at first welcomed by adherents of the Russian Orthodox religion who had resorted to divine worship at a Greek Orthodox church. This feeling soon changed when Antoniev again demonstrated his 'propensity for causing dissension amongst his people and his tyrannical government of Church affairs soon caused a rift'. A row with the choirmaster resulted in the departure of the choir for the Greek Orthodox Church, taking most of the congregation with them. By late 1945 only a handful of the faithful continued to attend the services at St Nicholas.<sup>52</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The internment experience of the 28 White Russians arrested in early 1942 was relatively brief, at least in comparison with that of many Germans and almost all Japanese internees. They were released before the end of the war. The post-war situation of deteriorating relations between the West and the Soviet Union favoured their speedy rehabilitation and reconciliation with Australian society.

With the end of hostilities, the security service switched focus from 'fascists' towards 'communists'. This is aptly illustrated by two official inquiries into the 'political sentiments and activities' of a White Russian interned as a 'fascist' in 1942. The investigator in March 1945 took the view that the individual's 'period of internment has not in any way altered his political views' and the man therefore 'cannot be regarded as a loyal citizen of this country'. The second investigator, in late 1948, found the former 'fascist' was 'very moderate in his views' and did 'not appear to be engaged in subversive activities'. The definition of subversion had become 'communistic tendencies'.<sup>53</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. For a brief survey of the White Russian community in Australia between the wars, see B. Christa's entry in J. Jupp (ed.) *The Australian People* (Sydney, 1988) pp.754-5.
2. G. Stewart, *The White Armies of Russia* (New York, 1933) p.23.
3. A.R. Lindt, *Special Correspondent* (London, 1933) p.29. Another contemporary writer drew an analogy between the recent history of Manchuria and that of the 'wild' American West. (F. Simpson, 'Manchuria, Promised Land of Asia', *National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. LVI, No.4, 1929, p.406).
4. Australian Archives (hereafter AA) ACT, A6122/XR1, 115, Russian Fascist Union.
5. *Fashist*, No.30, 1937.
6. According to information received by the Queensland police, 'about 75% of the Russian immigrants arriving in the State are of the criminal class, being mostly escapees from Russian Penal establishments'. They included an entire gang of convicted counterfeiters who came via Shanghai. (AA ACT A1/1, 15/11795, Arrival of Undesirable Russians in the Commonwealth). However, the 'criminal element' formed a far smaller proportion of the migration than the police source suggests.
7. The precise number of returnees from Australia to Russia cannot be determined from census data but it must have been a few hundred. The censuses of 1911 and 1921 respectively enumerated 4,456 and 4,138 Russian-born residents. A substantial number of Russians arrived after the 1911 census had been taken and before the outbreak of war. Reportedly, arrivals at Brisbane in 1913 were running at 20 to 80 a month. (Daily Standard, 23 June 1913). The decline in the number of Russian-born between 1911 and 1921 is entirely accounted for by males who declined from 3,413 to 2,828 while the number of females actually increased, from 1,043 to 1,310. Two groups of male returnees (of 35 and 20 members) are known to have left in early 1920 (from an extant record of their application to convert Australian currency into gold). The 1921 census preceded the departure of a considerable number of Bolshevik sympathisers, following the improvement of communications with the Soviet Union, and before the arrival of significant numbers of White Russians. In March 1921 the unofficial Soviet representative in Australia informed the Commonwealth Government that 817 individuals were desirous of returning. By the end of April 1924 about 450 landing permits had been issued to White Russians. (AA ACT, 20/32131; A 9891/1, LON REFUGEES 2, Part 1).

8. AA ACT, A6122/XR1, Item 115.
9. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q17744; *Idem.* Q11432.
10. *Ibid.* The term 'security service' is employed here to denote collectively the various organisations concerned in the interwar period with the surveillance of individuals deemed to be potentially or actually 'subversive'. They were Military Intelligence, Naval Intelligence, the Investigation Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and sections of the police forces of the states. (On the subject of political surveillance in the 1930s, see F. Cain, *The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia* (Sydney, 1983) ).
11. See, for example, *Fashist* (the organ of a U.S.-based Russian fascist organisation), No.37, July 1937, in which the conservative owner of several cafes in Sydney and the scholarly founder of the local Pushkin Society are among several emigres denounced as being 'Bolsheviks'.
12. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q30567.
13. *Ibid.* Q21869.
14. AA ACT, A6122/XR1, Item 115. The individual was to be interned in 1942 as a presumed fascist.
15. M. Sayers and A.E. Kahn, *The Great Conspiracy against Russia* (London, 1946) p.107.
16. G. Bailey, *The Conspirators* (London, 1961) p.128).
17. AA ACT, A659/1, 40/1/289. (He applied for and was granted naturalisation in March 1940).
18. According to a recent study of the dynasty: 'Probably, a majority of Russian emigres stood by 'Nicholasha', many wishing him to declare himself Nicholas III'. (J.D. Bergamini, *The Tragic Dynasty: A History of the Romanovs* (London, 1970) p.466.
19. J.J. Stephan, *The Russian Fascists* (London, 1978), pp.12-4; Bergamini, *Tragic Dynasty*, pp.465-6; R.C. Williams, *Culture in Exile: Russian Emigres in Germany, 1881-1941* (Ithaca, 1972) pp.213-4. See also Grand Duke Cyril, *My Life in Russia's Service — Then and Now* (London, 1939). Cyril died in 1938, leaving his son Vladimir (born in 1917) the position of 'pretender'.
20. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q21869. This statement is almost identical to one found in a typed lecture on 'The National Idea' by Vladimir Vitoshinsky, which was confiscated during a police raid on his home during World War II. Vitoshinsky wrote of Bolshevism as 'the caricature-like ending of the era of democratic ideas'. (AA ACT, A6122/1, 116, Russian Imperial Union).
21. Lindt, *Special Correspondent*, p.46.
22. L. Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, 2 vols. (London, 1930) I, 524; Williams, *Culture in Exile*, p.287.
23. AA ACT, A6122/1, 121, Russian Orthodox Church.
24. Cyril, *My Life*, p.223. 'Defeatism' was also in essence the position the exiled Trotsky came to adopt in the mid-1930s. By then he believed that the Bolshevik opposition, although committed to defend the Soviet Union, should also be prepared to take advantage of a military defeat to overthrow Stalin. (See L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (London, 1937) pp.165-6, 287-8).
25. Lindt, *Special Correspondent*, p.46. In his pioneering history of the Russian Revolution, William H. Chamberlain referred to 'The White Russians, who always cherished an exaggerated idea of the willingness of other people to fight their battles for them'. (*The Russian Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York, 1935) II, 166).
26. See Stephan, *Russian Fascists*, *passim*; 'Fascism among Russian Emigres', in J.L. Wiczynski (ed), *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, Vol. XI (Gulf Breeze, Florida, 1979), pp.59-64; E. Oberländer, 'The All-Russian Fascist Party', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. I, No.2, 1966, pp.158-73.
27. Information obtained in 1962-63 by the late Constantin Mikhailovich Hotimsky and communicated to the author.

28. *Fashist*, No.52, 1939.
29. AA, ACT, Item 578. At the beginning of the 1950s Prootkovsky attracted fleeting press attention as a recluse living in a tent overlooking Pittwater'. (Pix, 31 Mar. 1951).
30. AA, ACT, A6122/XR1, 115.
31. *Fashist*, No.30, 1937.
32. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q27301; AA, ACT, A6122/1, 115.
33. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q21869; AA, ACT, A6122/XR1, Item 115. Vitte's wife Nina accidentally drowned in September 1945, after falling into the Whangpoo river at Shanghai. (AA ACT, A1066/1, IC45/55/3/11/1, Internees — Australian Abroad Far East).
34. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q21869.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid. Q17744.
37. *Courier-Mail*, 26 Aug. 1937; AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q17744.
38. *Courier-Mail*, 25 Aug. 1937.
39. See Ibid. 24-28 Aug. 1937.
40. AA ACT, A6122/1, 116; AA Brisbane, Q11432.
41. AA Act, 981/1, SOVIET UNION 8, Part 1.
42. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q17744.
43. Ibid.
44. A similar process within the Russian emigration in France is described in R.H. Johnston, 'The Great Patriotic War and the Russian Exiles in France', *Russian Review*, Vol. XXXV, No.3, 1976, pp.303-21.
45. AA ACT, A981/1, SOVIET UNION 8, Part 1.
46. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q11432.
47. AA ACT, A981/1, SOVIET UNION 8, Part 1.
48. Exceptions here included an individual who arrived in Brisbane in 1939 from Manchuria, then the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, who was said to have 'addressed local Russian Fascists on the success of Japanese rule in Manchukuo ..., and the ideal living conditions prevailing there'. He also apparently advocated 'the desirability of Japanese control of Australia and the consequent advantages and conditions to be gained'. (AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q17744).
49. Ibid.
50. AA ACT, A6119/1, 30.
51. AA Brisbane, BP242/1, Q11432.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid. Q8093.