

Premier and the Pariah

"The Premier and the Pariah" The Bulletin 26 May 1888. Courtesy State Library of New South Wales

Excerpts from an Editorial in The Bulletin

Saturday, May 26, 1888

This editorial criticises NSW Premier Sir Henry Parkes - not for restricting Chinese coming to Australia - but for the way his government has gone about it.

...We claim to be a civilised people; we claim that one of the reasons we should exclude the Chinese is that they belong to an "inferior" race; we claim to be the inheritors of centuries of intellectual and moral culture. ...

Centuries of culture have superimposed the artificial and civilised man upon the bedrock of naturalism, and the civilised man is a stickler for justice; for consideration for the weak and the undefended, the oppressed, the imbecile and incompetent. As founders of this southern world we boast our wealth and prosperity... the Chinese came here not even in error. Our statutes gave them free passport, and we excluded them in defiance of our own legislative enactment. Clearly, they are entitled to some consideration ...

The Chinese are more to be pitied because they are the victims of political blundering and parliamentary Machiavellianism. There was neither the resolve nor intention on the part of the Government to keep them out of New South Wales until popular clamour broke all bounds and dashed in an angry flood against the very walls of Parliament House itself... we do not blame the agitation which found its vent in something approaching a riot...

The Chinese must go! This is a decision we in Australia have all long since come to, but being a civilised people we are not desirous of pitch-forking them over the Heads. The Chinese must go; but there are methods in their going. For the Premier's conduct (The Bulletin refers here to Premier Parkes of New South Wales taking unilateral action on the licensing of Chinese residence in some colony cities and his proposal to compensate those deported from the colony) we Australians are likely to pay dearly. That spirit of growing federation between the people's of Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania and New Zealand, which it was hoped that the Chinese agitation would expand, cement and solidify, has received a severe blow... has put back that national and federal movement for 50 years or more. And these persecuted Chinese are the innocent cause of a fresh feud added to the great pile of jealousies which tend to keep the Australian States and Australian peoples bitterly watchful and aggressively asunder.