

# Perpetrators of racism

## by the Making Multicultural Australia Project Team

The National Inquiry into Racist Violence, which published its findings in 1991, concluded that racism and racist violence “permeates the day-to-day lives of Aboriginal people”. The Inquiry found that Aboriginal people suffered attacks on communities, neighbourhood violence, discrimination in housing and service provision, harassment by some elements of the police and the criminal justice system as well as by racist organisations. While the overwhelming proportion of all acts of racism and racist violence reported to the Inquiry were against Aboriginal or Islander people, the Inquiry also discovered a level of discrimination and sometimes violence against people of non-Anglo identity - people from Asia, people of colour or people whose clothing and customs marked them as non-Anglo.

The Inquiry concluded that racist violence, other than that directed toward Aboriginal people, was at present not a serious problem in Australia which was still a country of relative social cohesion. But it did flag racist violence as an emerging issue and one which must be confronted “before it becomes a significant threat to our fellow Australians and society”.

The perpetrators of racism and racist violence have been shown to be acting as individuals or in some cases as part of an organised group, several of which were identified by the Inquiry and most of which are on the extreme right wing of politics. These include National Action and the Australian Nationalist Movement, the leaders of which were gaoled in Western Australia for a campaign of mostly anti-Asian racist violence and intimidation.

The largest and most influential of the hate-

mongering organisations, although it claims not to advocate violence, is the League of Rights. Well financed and resourced, it has its greatest success in country areas where it hitches its racist and anti-semitic propaganda to “motherhood” issues like the intensification of family values, patriotism, nationalism and monarchism. The League has always had front organisations including the Lilac League, the Christian Institute for Individual Freedom, the Australian Heritage Society, Save our State and so on. Its hatreds are particularly centred on the Jews and it circulates the notorious Tzarist forgery, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which purports to show a Jewish plot to control the world.

Another enemy of the Jews is the National Socialist or Nazi Party; while it has always been a fringe group its leader of 20 years ago, Ross “The Skull” May, was a well-known figure with his bald head and Third Reich propaganda. Another import which was also small in numbers was the Ku Klux Klan based on the American model of racist violence against blacks. But of more concern presently is a modern cousin, the Lyndon LaRouche organisation, which has recently gained considerable support in this country and which espouses a type of White Australia Policy; it is alleged that the well-financed LaRouchites are enrolling young Australians and taking them to America for training in propaganda and possibly active racist actions on their return. Similar to, although much smaller than, their American models are militia and pro-gun movements in Australia. With the passage in 1996 of uniform anti-gun laws around the country this type of movement is expected to grow.

But there is a level of racism and racist violence which, while it may be planned, is not part of the organised racist movements described above. When Jewish cemeteries are desecrated,

synagogues, mosques or temples vandalised, anti-Asian or anti-semitic graffiti daubed on walls or when Orthodox Jews and Muslims walking in the street are harassed, this is usually the work of young, white males, often identifying with the European “skinhead” model. The solution to this last problem is in community education and addressing the causes of grievance, usually economic, which lie behind this violence.

And there is also a need to recognise the continuum leading to racist violence; it begins with thoughts and moves toward acts. The level of hate speech is the level at which the thought becomes manifest and intervention can occur, which is where the incitement to racial hatred legislation comes in.