

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"It is strange, but we seem to use more names for migrants than for any other group of people".

*Hon. Gordon Glen Denton, AO,
Member for Corio (Vic), Australian Labour Party,
in the House of Representatives, Tuesday, 3 October 1967.*

Says Word "Balts" Offensive

CANBERRA, Wednesday.—The Minister for Immigration, Mr. A. A. Calwell, to-day appealed to the Australian people not to call migrants "Balts," "Displaced Persons," and "D.P.s."

He suggested they should all be called "new Australians," "new-comers," or "new settlers." He said that in time the expressions "Balts" and "D.P.s" may eventually assume the unpleasant undertones of words such as "Dago" and "Reffo."

Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1942-1954), Thursday 11 August 1949, page 3
Source: Trove

CALL THEM AUSTRALIANS

An Immigration Department official said today that new immigrants should not be referred to as Balts, DPs or refugees.

"Call them new Australians newcomers or new settlers," he said.

"This is essential for the assimilation of these groups."

Daily News (Perth, WA: 1882-1960), Friday 5 August 1949, page 6
Source: Trove

The Illawarra Migrant History Project is a research undertaking of the Migration Heritage Project to provide a comprehensive picture of the settlement of post-World War 2 migrants to the Illawarra. The MHP will collate and host this information in a central location to assist further research and understanding of migration patterns to the area.

The research is being undertaken by Fidelia Pontarolo, Secretary and Founding Member of the Migration Heritage Project with assistance and editing provided by Franca Facci, Chairperson and Founding Member of the Migration Heritage Project and Darinka Radinovic and assistance with early historical research by Zofia Laba, both members of the Migration Heritage Project Committee.

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INTRODUCTION

As members of the human race we have a tendency to pigeonhole people and places to allow us to determine how and why they fit into our 'tribe' and therefore inform ourselves of how to deal with the people who fit and the people who do not fit within our lives. This is influenced by our own upbringing and equity, our Government's policies, media or inherent communal bigotry and racism. Descriptive words are already in our vocabulary or introduced into our vernacular through terminology created by influencers. In Wollongong the locals also adopted this human trait when referring to place and people in relation to migrants and migrant hostels. The names of places and people stuck, although as time passed those places and people evolved but the some of the local population's vocabulary did not.

The following explanations relate to terminology found in documents from the National Archives of Australia, just over 400 newspaper articles as well as published works by historians, researchers and authors that allows for understanding the global picture whilst looking at the local one. I invite you to read those histories to further your own knowledge, some of which can be found in the Bibliography.

On this website with regard to Illawarra Migrant History, the terminology of the different periods has been retained with the understanding of the sensitive nature of some of the words used.

BALTS, DISPLACED PERSONS, REFUGEES, MIGRANTS, NEW AUSTRALIANS, YUGOSLAVS, DAGOS, REFFOS, VIETNAMESE, NISSEN HUTS, STEELWORKS

Displaced Persons

The technical term for a Displaced Person is someone who has been dispossessed of their home or country especially by war. A Refugee as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention was "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."

Displaced Persons was the name given to categorise the groups of people who were resettled by the International Refugee Organisation after World War 2. It included those who met the technical classification as Displaced Persons or refugees. These persons found themselves predominately in camps in Germany and Austria and were "evacuees, war or political fugitives, political prisoners, forced or voluntary workers, forced labourers and former members of forces under German command, deportees, intruded persons, extruded persons, civilian internees, ex-prisoners of war and stateless persons". They were made up of predominately of people from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Jewish and non-Jewish from Poland, Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia and other parts of Europe such as Russia, Belarus, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. Displaced Persons were subject to the Aliens Act 1947 which required aliens to register whereupon they were issued with a Certificate of Registration.

The International Refugee Organisation Agreement was signed by Australia on 21 July 1947. Australia agreed to the re-settlement of Displaced Persons from Europe to Australia. The main potential of the labour pool was from the Displaced Persons Camps in Germany and Austria had already been drawn upon by countries competing with Australia for suitable migrants. 3,000,000 people were waiting in Displaced Persons Camps to be repatriated.

The Polish Displaced Persons and German minorities were chiefly farm workers and miners. The remaining Jews in the camps were mostly middle aged and unfit for heavy work as the younger and fitter Jews took a different path, not always legal, for their repatriation.

There were other nationalities in the Displaced Persons Camps who were neither Displaced Persons nor Refugees but still wanted to be re-settled in another country other than their country of birth.

The Balts

The Baltic group (Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians) included a high proportion of young men and women eager to migrate and willing to undertake domestic, hospital and agricultural work of which they were accustomed in their own lands. The Balt men were good artisans, farmworkers, professional men and technicians.

"Beautiful Balts" was the name given to this group of people by the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, who admired their physical resemblance to the population in Australia, their health, fitness, and work ethic. The Balts had a good reputation amongst the displaced persons camp overseers as being the best workers. Sturdy, independent types that gave no trouble but unwilling or unable to go home as they would not live under Russian rule.

New Australians, Newcomers or New Settlers

"New Australians", "newcomers" or "new settlers" were the preferred names for Balts, Displaced Persons or refugees as suggested by the Immigration Department in 1949. The Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, felt these preferred names were essential for the assimilation of these groups because he believed that in time the expressions "reffos", "DPs", "Balts" and "Displaced Persons" may eventually assume the same unpleasant, racial undertones of the words such as "Dago" and "wog".

Yugoslavs

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed in 1945 and comprised the states of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. In 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence from the federation, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. The outbreak of civil war was marked by atrocities as ethnic communities fought against each other for the right to self-determination. Yugoslav was a term to describe people that once were part of the Yugoslavian Kingdom and became people with one identity and one flag. They then reverted back to 6 independent countries: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Kosovo is a state that broke off from Serbia with partial recognition as an independent nation. During post-World War 2 migration, people, including displaced persons, who came to Australia were from the then Yugoslavia. Older Australians may still refer to all these groups as Yugoslavs. The name Yugoslavia is a description of a country that no longer exists and should not be used today. However, should the term Yugoslav appear in the Illawarra Migrant History on this website, it is only in the context of the times and no insult is intended. The history of Yugoslavia can be found in histories written by scholars and historians. This explanation is only about text in this publication to describe a group of people in migrant accommodation and employment in Illawarra after World War 2 from (the former) Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was dissolved in 2003.

Vietnamese

Like the "Balts" there is a tendency to call all people who came to Australia from Indo-China "Vietnamese" however this group of Indo-Chinese were made up from people from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Not all of them were "boat people".

Migrant Workers' Hostels

The first employer hostel to be built in Illawarra was the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board (MWSDB) camp in Coniston. MWSDB obtained male employees from Displaced Persons brought to Australia and thus this camp became known amongst the local people as the "Balts camp" possibly because they were apt to put all Displaced Persons in the Balt category as they were the first to arrive in Australia from the Displaced Persons camps and much was made of the Baltic people owing to the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell's, preference for the Baltic people. Although the Displaced Persons comprised other nationalities that lived in this camp, even today, although the camp no longer exists, it continues to be known as the Balts Camp.

The first Commonwealth Hostel to be erected in Illawarra was the Migrant Workers' Hostel in Unanderra. The first occupants of this hostel were primarily Displaced Persons brought to Australia by the Commonwealth Government. The local population gave it the name of the Balts Hostel although many other nationalities comprising of Displaced Persons were included in the make-up of the first residents. The hostel was also known as the Commonwealth Hostel, Port Kembla Hostel, Migrant Hostel. Later it would be better known as Unanderra Hostel.

Commonwealth Hostels in the Illawarra were referred to as Migrant Hostels or just hostels. Each Commonwealth Hostel complex established in Australia after World War 2 played a particular role in the migration scheme such as reception and training centres, holding centres or solely for the purpose of accommodation known as Migrant Workers' Hostels. In Illawarra the only type of migrant hostels to be erected by the Commonwealth were Migrant Workers' Hostel.

The Steelworks and Manufacturing Industries

The largest employer in the Illawarra of non-British, unskilled migrants was the Steelworks. The Steelworks refers to Australian Iron & Steel which was a subsidiary of Broken Hill Propriety Ltd. However, there were other manufacturers in the iron and steel industry that also employed these migrants such as Lysaghts, Metal Manufacturers, Electrolyte Refinery and Smelting Company, and Newbold General Refractories. A large number of British migrants, as well as some non-British migrants, were also employed in the mining industry in the Illawarra. There were other Illawarra manufacturing industries that employed migrants.

Nissen Huts

Nissen Huts is generally a name given by Illawarra locals to describe the metal huts that were erected on migrant hostel sites that were not purpose built timber framed huts. However, there were two types of metal huts that were used: the Nissen Hut and the Quonset Hut. Nissen Huts were purchased by the Australian Government from Britain and the Quonset Huts were purchased from the United States of America. The Australian Government sent 44 Displaced Persons from Australia to Manus Island that formed a team, that included Japanese Prisoners of War, to dismantle the Quonset Huts for transportation to Australia. In local papers the metal huts were sometimes called "igloos".