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**The Expropriation of Goodwill and Migrant Labour in the Transition to
Australian Football's A-League**

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ABSTRACT

This article explores ethical and financial issues in connection with the cancellation of Australia's National Soccer League (NSL), at the end of the 2003-2004 season, and its replacement with the corporatist A-League competition which excluded the ethnic clubs which had made up the bulk of the NSL. These ethnic clubs had been formed by and revolved around Croatian, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Macedonian, Jewish, Polish, Serbian, and Yugoslav ethnic communities based in Australia's major cities. Many commentators were of the opinion that one of the aims of the A-League and its "ground-zero" or "scorched-earth" ideology was to institute exclusion of the ethnic clubs that had formed the backbone of the NSL for 30 years. Interview responses from ethnic club administrators and supporters are our primary data source. We conclude that fans and volunteer labour forces of the ethnic clubs have been alienated, in the Marxist sense, from the A-League; the A-League clubs; and the ruling clique that controls Football Federation Australia (FFA). There are lessons to be learned here for sports industry marketers and managers. Extreme solutions enforced in a top-down manner, combined with ground-zero ideology, can create disenfranchised groups. These groups, resentful of being written out of both history and the future, store their grievances up only to agitate again years later when the environment appears less hostile.

Keywords: *Alienation; Australian football; Croatian Diaspora; Croatian nationalism; Football hooliganism; Marxism; Soccer history; Soccer sociology.*

Introduction

This article explores ethical and financial issues in connection with the cancellation of Australia's National Soccer League (NSL), at the end of the 2003-2004 season, and its replacement with the corporatist A-League competition which excluded the ethnic clubs which had made up the bulk of the NSL. These ethnic clubs had been formed by and revolved around Croatian, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Macedonian, Jewish, Polish, Serbian, and Yugoslav ethnic communities based in Australia's major cities. Many commentators were of the opinion that one of the aims of the A-League and its "ground-zero" or "scorched-earth" ideology was to institute exclusion of the ethnic clubs that had formed the backbone of the NSL for 30 years. Interview responses from ethnic club administrators and supporters are our primary data source. We conclude that fans and volunteer labour forces of the ethnic clubs have been alienated, in the Marxist sense, from the A-League; the A-League clubs; and the ruling clique that controls Football Federation Australia (FFA). There are lessons to be learned here for sports industry marketers and managers. Extreme solutions enforced in a top-down manner, combined with ground-zero ideology, can create disenfranchised groups. These groups, resentful of being written out of both history and the future, store their grievances up only to agitate again years later when the environment appears less hostile.

The ex-NSL Croatian clubs generally have been the most vocal opponents of the A-League and its ground-zero ideology. Melbourne Knights (formerly known as and still informally known as Melbourne Croatia) complained to the Australian Human Rights Commission when it was unable to use its sponsor's name and logo, Melbourne Croatia Social Club and the Croatian flag, on its shirts in 2014 because of FFA rules (Melbourne

Knights, 2015).¹ Meanwhile, FIFA (the global regulatory body) has been putting renewed pressure on the FFA to introduce promotion and relegation, a concept which the FFA has steadfastly resisted not least perhaps because it would give the ethnic clubs a clear pathway to the top league once again.

The A-League has shifted away from a traditional social accountability model to one of corporate accountability between the A-League and its member private-equity clubs. However, capitalism creates its own discontents (Heimann, 1961, pp. 38-9, 103-7, 146). As mentioned, one source of resistance to the A-League has been the Croatian clubs and their supporters. Melbourne Knights and Sydney United, informally Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia, have ultras style supporters (Hughson, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2000, 2002) in the tradition of the Croatian and Italian ultras. These groups, historically, have been more organized, more visually-oriented, and more carefully political than the typical English hooligan firm (Mignon, 2002; Roversi and Balestri, 2002). Online forums and homemade fence banners are the new vehicles for dissent for the marginalized supporters of Old Soccer's ethnic clubs.

Although the recently introduced annual FFA Cup (knock-out competition) does allow state-league clubs (including ethnic clubs) to play against A-League clubs this has not solved the exclusion problem since promotion and relegation to and from the A-League competition proper is still not in place (and is unlikely to be for the foreseeable future unless the global regulator FIFA rules otherwise and is able and willing to assert its will).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the study's Research Questions; Section 3 provides a history of the NSL and A-League; Section 4 presents a brief and focused Literature Review; Section 5 introduces Alienation Theory (the main theoretical framework we use in this article); Section 6 describes Research Method;

¹The National Club Identity Policy (NCIP) makes it illegal for any new or existing clubs (wanting to alter their logo/ name) to have any "ethnic, national, political, racial or religious connotations either in isolation or combination" in their name, logo or emblems (Colangelo, 2015).

Section 7 presents and discusses our research findings; and Section 8 concludes. The Results and Discussion section is further divided into two sub-sections as follows: (a) Interview Results; and (b) Application of Alienation Theory.

Research Questions

The three research questions formally addressed in this study are as follows:

- (a) How did the FFA utilize the new A-League and the associated scorched earth or ground-zero ideology in 2004-05 to institute exclusion upon the ethnic NSL clubs?
- (b) What have been the consequences of the A-League restructuring upon Australian football's stakeholders including the ethnic clubs and their fans?
- (c) What sources and forms of resistance have emerged to challenge the A-League model?

History of the NSL and A-League

Ethnic clubs, formed by a particular European immigrant community (other than English, Irish or Scottish), first came to prominence in the 1950s and the dedication, talent, and solidarity of fans, players, and administrators saw many of these clubs rapidly rise up through the divisions to such a point where they were threatening or entering the premier-league level in each state-based pyramid. Warren (2003, p. 48) writes that “[w]hen the new migrant-based clubs began springing up across New South Wales in the 1950s, [Anglo-Australian club] Canterbury was simply left behind”. For example, in Western Australia, Italian-club Azzuri (now Perth Soccer Club) won its first Division One league title in 1953 and then again in 1959, as well as Charity Cup wins in 1952, 1953, 1955, 1956, and 1958 (Kreider, 1996, p. 62). Fellow Italian-club East Fremantle Tricolore won its first Division One title in 1958; while Dutch-club Windmills (now Morley Windmills) won its first Charity Cup one year

later (Kreider, 1996, p. 62). Regarding the Croatian clubs, Adelaide Croatia formed in 1952; followed, in quick succession, by Melbourne Croatia (1953) and Sydney Croatia (1957).

At that stage Australia had no national football league. In some states the clubs achieved straight-forward promotion into the premier leagues, where they dominated, but, in Sydney, these clubs were originally not allowed to play in the top league (Warren, 2003, p. 35). In Sydney in 1957 a breakaway rebel league and governing body were formed (New South Wales Soccer Federation, NSWWSF), and, because it had the best clubs, both ethnic and non-ethnic (which really meant Anglo-Australian), it soon became the dominant league (Warren, 2003, p. 35). Ethnic teams such as Sydney Austral, Prague, Polonia, and Apia, played alongside established Anglo clubs such as Canterbury and Auburn in the NSWWSF Division One. Warren (2003, p. 40) recounts the 1960 grand final when 17,000 people watched the “Canterbury Babes” (now Bankstown Berries) stun the favourites Prague 5-2 in Leo Baumgartner’s first year at Canterbury having crossed over from (Sydney) Prague.²

The NSL, the brain-child of two visionary club presidents, Frank Lowy of Hakoah and Alex Pongrass of St George Budapest, was Australia’s first national football (“soccer”) competition and it existed during the years 1977 to 2004 inclusive (Warren, 2003, pp. 219-20). This ethnic community based competition was Australia’s first ever national sporting competition involving club teams rather than state teams (New South Wales Migration Heritage Centre and Powerhouse Museum, 2006; Skinner et al., n/d, p. 6; Warren, 2003). Despite the fact that football is only Australia’s third or fourth most popular winter sport, the NSL survived for nearly 30 years, and produced many footballers who would go on to play for Australia’s national team, the Socceroos, and/or for leading club sides in Europe (Nimac et al., 2008).

² Baumgartner was an ex-SK Rapid Vienna (Austria) player and typical of the playing talent that migrated to Australia after World War II.

Warren (2003, p. 220) lists the foundation 1977 NSL clubs as follows: 1 West Adelaide Hellas (Greek); 2 Adelaide City Juventus (Italian); 3 Mooroolbark (English); 4 South Melbourne (Greek); 5 Footscray JUST (Yugoslav communist); 6 Heidelberg (Greek /Greek Macedonian; as opposed to what is now referred to as FYROM or Skopje Macedonian); 7 Canberra City (non-ethnic); 8 Sydney Olympic (Greek); 9 Hakoah (Jewish); 10 St George (Hungarian); 11 Marconi (Italian); 12 Brisbane City (Italian); 13 Brisbane Lions (Dutch); and 14 Apia (Italian).³ No club was admitted from Perth due to its remote location on the west coast, 2,130km from Adelaide and 2,721km from Melbourne. The first season had a first-past-the-post system and Sydney City (Hakoah) won the league with Sydney-based Marconi Stallions finishing runners-up. Mooroolbark was relegated at the end of the 1977 season and its place was taken by Newcastle KB United. The record NSL crowd was 18,367 for Newcastle KB United against Sydney Olympic in April 1979, a year when Newcastle's average home crowd exceeded 10,000. The large crowds attending the games of a one-team-one-city non-ethnic club such as Newcastle KB United was perhaps even back then suggesting to some alternative pathways forward for the top-league in the country.

In 1984 both Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia were admitted into the NSL. Both clubs had playing strength; administrative competence; excellent footballing connections back in the old country; and large and passionate supporter bases. Unlike Greek and Italian immigration, which had dropped significantly since the 1950s, Croatian immigration continued to be maintained at high levels and some parts of western Melbourne and Geelong are believed today to be 30% Croatian. At the time the league's administrators and many fans were nervous about these two clubs, fearing the nationalistic passion of their supporters and the bringing of Balkan politics into a football league on the other side of the world.

³ In fact Western Suburbs played in 1977 rather than Apia but it merged with Apia at the end of the 1978 season and the Western Suburbs name disappeared.

Melbourne Croatia's heated on-field and political rivalry with Footscray JUST continued on in the NSL until the end of the 1989 season when Footscray JUST was relegated. (Melbourne Croatia was anti-communist and pro-Croatian independence whereas Footscray JUST was supported by people who saw themselves as Yugoslavs and were mostly pro-communist.) After just one year in the Melbourne suburban competition Footscray JUST disbanded perhaps because of disappointment with the relegation plus the awareness that permanent and important political changes were taking place in the Balkans. Kova and Pave Jusup of MCF⁴ explain that Footscray JUST was a "pure Yugoslav club" in terms of how it viewed itself and that its supporters were around 85% Serbian, 10% [now FYROM] Macedonian, and 5% Croatian. Kova adds that: "I think that there were more Masseys [Macedonians] than Croatians at JUST" (group interview, 11 January 2011).

The *Crawford Report* (2003) argued that the NSL's poor management and its domination by ethnic clubs were the factors preventing the broader Australian community from fully embracing the NSL competition. The new national A-League competition, which replaced the NSL, was formally announced at a media conference held by the FFA's Frank Lowy and John O'Neill on 22 March 2004 in response to the *Crawford Report* (Solly, 2004, pp. 224-31, 236-41, 311).

The A-League was established with a view to solving the principal dilemma that Anglo-Australians would not support European ethnic teams *in large numbers* by using a "top-down" approach in response to prior formalized community consultation. The vision behind the A-League was to set up one or two clubs in each major Australian city (Hallinan, Hughson, and Blake, 2007, p. 285; Solly, 2004, p. 311) which could then be supported by Anglo-Australians, Europeans, and other people of various ethnicities (Danforth, 2001, p.

⁴ MCF stands for Melbourne Croatia Fans and it is the name of the present-day ultras group at Melbourne Knights.

376; John O'Neill, CEO, FFA, cited in Solly, 2004, p. 312).⁵ The foundation A-League clubs were: 1 Adelaide United (new franchise which debuted in the last NSL season); 2 Central Coast Mariners (new franchise); 3 Sydney FC (new franchise); 4 Melbourne Victory (new franchise); 5 Newcastle Jets (NSL club since 2000-01); 6 New Zealand Knights (new franchise); 7 Perth Glory (NSL club since 1996-97); and 8 Queensland Roar (NSL club from 1977-88 as Brisbane Lions). Only non-ethnic, one-team-one-city NSL clubs were included in the A-League. The later placement of teams in select regional cities (9 Gold Coast United and 10 North Queensland Fury) was part of the FFA's plan to have a number of stadiums in place around the country for the purpose of winning the (ultimately failed) 2022 World Cup bid.

South Melbourne's recent failed A-League bid deserved to be accepted based on the club's history, membership, supporter base, and junior leagues. The notion that affection for a foreign country (in this case Greece) must mean disloyalty towards Australia is an accusation frequently levelled at members of Diaspora communities by the mainstream (Sheffer, 2003, pp. 219-38). This simplistic thesis in no way reflects the "complex" (Sheffer, 2003, p. 226) "dual loyalties" (Sheffer, 2003, p. 228) or "divided loyalties" (Sheffer, 2003, p. 226) felt by, for example, many Greek-Australians towards Australia and Greece (Carniel, 2006). As Sheffer (2003, p. 70) writes: "Host societies and governments will face similar difficulties in their relationships with individuals and groups who have such hybridized identities and overlapping loyalties". Furthermore, the FFA's decision unfairly privileged Anglo-Australian roots over Greek-Australian roots.

The FFA's sheer meanness is clearly apparent here: South Melbourne minus the Hellas tag as Melbourne's second A-League club surely would not have jeopardized the league's overall goals of operating super-clubs (on the basis of one or at most two teams per city) and having a league free of visible ethnic associations. As online forum posters pointed out, South

⁵ See also the comments of Melbourne Victory fans cited in Hallinan et al. (2007, p. 287).

Melbourne's entry would have avoided the case of the second team taking fans away from Melbourne Victory since South Melbourne already had its own hardcore supporter base that predated the creation of both the A-League and the Victory. Secondly, as South Melbourne fans also pointed out online, if South Melbourne was the only ethnic club in the A-League, how could there then be new "ethnic crowd trouble" since there was, literally, no other ethnic team for the South fans to clash with?

We see here the emergence of online supporter forums as a vehicle for fans of disenfranchised and alienated clubs to express their viewpoints in the public arena. A Preston Lions (informally Preston Makedonia) fan made a brilliant post when he remarked that: "Even if we changed our colours to blue and white, changed our name to Northern Star, and fired ninety percent of our volunteer staff purely because of their ethnicity you [Anglo-Australians] still would not support us!" The author of this particular post is known online as "Preston North End" and personally to MCF members as "Steve". He is known and respected by Melbourne Knights' fans as being a long-term and committed follower of Preston Lions as opposed to being disrespected for being a mere keyboard-warrior (which he is not).

Literature Review

The ethnic clubs (both in the state leagues and later in the NSL) served a vital social role as meeting places for newly arrived immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe who often faced alienation and hostility from Australia's hegemonic Anglo-Celtic community (Carniel, 2006, p. 3; Danforth, 2001, p. 372; Hallinan et al., 2007, p. 289; Hay, 1994, 2001; Hughson, 1997a, pp. 171-2, 183, 1997b, p. 242, 2000, pp. 9, 18-9; Jones and Moore, 1994, p. 23; Mosely, 1994, p. 33; Warren, 2003). As football commentator Les Murray (2006, p. 48) writes about the Hungarian club Pannonia that once played in the lower divisions of the Illawarra League, "the club ... provide[d] a source of recreational comfort for a small

community otherwise stressed by its need to work and struggle while in transition from an old life into a new". The ethnic clubs also served an economic role in providing a meeting-place for networking for the community members and a gateway to employment opportunities (Hallinan et al., 2007, p. 289; Hay, 2001; Hughson, 2000, pp. 8, 21; Mosely, 1994, p. 33). Community members felt community identity, belonging, and pride with respect to these clubs (Danforth, 2001, p. 372; Hallinan et al., 2007, p. 291; Hay, 2001; Mosely, 1994, p. 33). Similarly, ethnic businesses felt obligated by cultural, familial, and religious ties to financially support the clubs. In the early days when the Croatian community club Sydney Croatia (now Sydney United) had few supporters owning their own businesses, supporters helped the club's player recruitment programme through generous pay packet deductions (Nimac et al., 2008, p. 28).

The ethnic clubs were clearly radical "political" entities in at least two respects: (a) their ethnic identities were statements of resistance against Anglo-Australian cultural hegemony (Danforth, 2001, p. 372; Hughson, 1997a, pp. 171-2, 183); and (b) the names "Croatia" and "Makedonia" served as statements of national identity during an era when Croatia and Macedonia were submerged politically within communist Yugoslavia. As Mosely (1994, p. 35) points out: "Croats deliberately used their soccer club[s] to express a political message that was denied them through political channels". Furthermore, Mosely (1994, p. 35) writes that: "More than any other ethnic group in Australia the Croats used soccer for political means". In the same vein, Hay (1994, p. 62) comments that: "For Croatians, soccer was one of the few outlets they had to express their sense of national and collective identity".

Regarding the history of Croatian Diaspora football clubs in Australia, Nimac et al. (2008) explain that most immigrants to Australia in the 1950s were unmarried men who had fled the new communist regime of Josip Broz Tito. As a result, the Croatian clubs that formed

in Australia's major cities to cater for the Diaspora, including Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia, have always been nationalist, pro-independence, and anti-communist. Their arch-rivals were the Yugoslav clubs, officially backed by the ruling communist regime in Yugoslavia, such as Footscray JUST in Melbourne (JUST stands for Yugoslav United Soccer Team) and Yugal in Sydney. The ideology at both Melbourne Croatia and Sydney Croatia has remained largely unchanged for 50 years. The ideology of Sydney United in 2008 can be clearly seen from this passage in the club's history book, *More than the Game*, co-authored by four Croatian-Australian second-generation professionals:

“The match was notable for another two reasons – it featured the greatest number of Croatian-Australians in the [Sydney] Croatia line-up until then, eight, and it was played on the day Josip Broz Tito died in Belgrade – May 4, 1980. Whether there is a mystical connection between the above events is for others to speculate” [Nimac et al., 2008, p. 105].

MCF leader Kova comments that Footscray JUST was despised more by Melbourne Croatia supporters during the communist era in Yugoslavia than were the Serbian clubs because, with the Serbian clubs, “at least they were honest in regards who they were” (group interview, 11 January 2011).

For Croatians living in Melbourne and Geelong, from the 1960s through to the early-2000s, it was accepted that you would attend both Roman Catholic Church services and Melbourne Croatia home games. Melbourne Croatia was also able to powerfully unite Croatian immigrants because it clearly promoted the fact that it was neutral as between the two most famous Croatian clubs Hajduk Split and Dinamo Zagreb (Jusup, 2017). The Zagreb-Split rivalry was never permitted to sow seeds of discord within either Melbourne Croatia or Sydney Croatia. This has been especially important in more recent years since the collapse of the old pan-Yugoslavia league has meant that Dinamo Zagreb now rarely plays its old bitter rivals Red Star and Partizan Belgrade.

As mentioned earlier, the *Crawford Report* (2003) argued that the domination by ethnic clubs was a major factor preventing the broader Australian community from fully embracing

the competition. For example, an Anglo-Australian living in Adelaide would usually resist supporting either the Italian community's Adelaide City or the Greek community's West Adelaide Hellas. To illustrate this point, only 2% of South Melbourne's membership was non-Greek in the mid-1990s (Kyriakopoulos, 1999, p. 60, cited in Danforth, 2001, p. 379). The sports historian Roy Hay (2006, p. 174), long associated with the Croatian community's North Geelong Football Club, expresses this point clearly when he states that: "Australians of long standing ... were not prepared to overcome their initial feelings of strangeness when they came into contact with these new clubs".

It can be argued that the FFA's decision to exclude clubs from the A-League that did not deserve ordinary relegation from the NSL amounts to not treating such clubs according to principles of fairness and social justice. The lack of promotion and relegation to and from the A-League has effectively banished the ethnic clubs to perpetual suburban obscurity in the state premier leagues, for example, Victorian Premier League (VPL) in Melbourne, New South Wales Premier League (NSWPL) in Sydney, etc. Vamplew (1994, p. 11, citing Allan, 1982) has termed this *assimilationist* approach "reverse multi-culturalism" whilst Hughson (1997a, p. 170) agrees that it is "assimilationist".

The Springvale White Eagles Victorian State League Division 1 club based in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs, studied ethnographically by Hallinan et al. (2007), creates a great Serbian atmosphere on match days and could attract crowds of 1,500 people to home games when it played in a division where other clubs barely attracted 200 (i.e. State League 2 SE). Springvale White Eagles has suffered less adversely than Melbourne Knights or South Melbourne from the demise of the NSL for the quite simple reason that it was never an NSL club. Further down the pyramid, below the VPL, the end of the NSL has produced fewer obvious consequences on clubs' media coverage, crowds or match-day atmospheres. Therefore, by studying one A-League club and one club (then) playing at below VPL level,

the Hallinan et al. (2007) article does not adequately capture the severe negative effect that the demise of the NSL has had on the biggest ethnic clubs.

In terms of the socio-economic background of English football hooligans, Armstrong and Harris (1991) and Hobbs and Robins (1991), proponents of the anthropological approach to hooligan studies, support the “working class in general thesis” whereas Dunning et al. (1991) and Dunning (1994), of the Leicester School, state that “the core football hooligans come predominantly from the rougher sections of the working-class” (cited in Astrinakis, 2002, p. 91). John Hughson (2002, p. 42) has written that the families of Sydney United’s hooligan firm of the early-1990s, Bad Blue Boys (BBB), tended to be part of the upper or “respectable” level of the working-class with relatively stable jobs and “comfortable” homes.

Theoretical Framework: Alienation Theory

This section introduces a theory of transference whereby the committed football fan places her/his life struggles on to the football field during the two hours of match day action. The fan’s team then bears the fan’s transferred identity and hopes whilst the opposing team bears the fan’s transferred life obstacles, fears, and the evil wishes and schemes of her/his enemies. The match result then provides an immediate artificial “resolution” of the fan’s life struggles. This resolution has one important advantage over “real life”: the match score provides a clear and unambiguous outcome to one’s struggles and dilemmas. At the end of the match the fan either “wins” or “loses” over issues of identity, status, self-esteem, success, popularity, achievement, etc. We extend and link this theory of transference to Marxism (which is not inconsistent with it) to discuss issues of appropriation of migrant labour by the FFA.

As one’s life struggles are transferred on to the football field, for the two hour duration of the match, one’s hopes become attached to the players as well. They literally become containers for hopes as was the case for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)

and the “myth of Lenin” for millions of sincere communists prior to 1989. For those elite players having awareness of this, it is little wonder that they can find the weight of people’s hopes and expectations oppressive. As Murray (2006, p. 199) writes, about Diego Maradona during his time with the Italian club Napoli: “He was carrying too much on his shoulders, bearing the hopes and dreams of all those millions”.

When the ethnic clubs were excluded from the A-League, this would have been a major blow to many supporters since it represented the officialdom deciding that these fans’ life struggles were no longer capable of or worthy of *public* resolution and that their struggles must be removed from the public realm. If any fan wanted to continue following an ethnic club then she/he could only do so in the obscurity of a state premier league in front of small crowds and with very minimal media coverage from the mainstream (non-ethnic) press. The ethnic clubs, and the fans of these clubs, were removed from the national league stage and relegated to perpetual suburban obscurity. Faceless franchises were erected in the place of the ethnic clubs and all football fans were pressurized to immediately give their allegiances to these artificial entities. For example, in Sydney, you either gave your support to new A-League club Sydney FC or you vanished from public view and from the public record. *In a sense the A-League stole the fans’ transferred hopes and dreams that the fans had already transferred on to the ethnic clubs and to the players.* This is very similar to the process of “primitive accumulation”, studied by Marx (1976/1867) in Volume 1 of *Capital*, whereby the English peasants had to be forced off the land and capital concentrated in a few hands before capital accumulation proper could begin. These fans’ transferred identities, hopes, and dreams were ridiculed, denied, and devalued by the A-League. Melinda Cimera, Club Secretary of Melbourne Knights and a school teacher by profession, says that: “The fatal flaw is that ground-zero ideology” associated with the A-League (group interview, 11 January 2011). In Marxist terms, the fans had no control over events surrounding the formation of the

A-League and hence literally (not *just* metaphorically or emotionally) they are “alienated” from the A-League and from the A-League clubs (Marx, 1975/1844; Ollman, 1976)

The Marxist analysis can be easily extended to the part-time and volunteer staff and financial contributors who worked for and contributed to the ethnic clubs in the pre-NSL and NSL eras. These people gave a part of themselves, literally, by putting it into their clubs (Marx, 1975/1844; Ollman, 1976). We are not asserting that if these people had known what would later happen to the NSL that they would have withheld their labour or money. However, clearly some people would have done so. Under capitalism the worker puts some of herself/himself, literally, into the products produced and, according to the young Karl Marx’s (1975/1844, 1976/1867) Alienation Theory, this is then *alienated by the capitalist firm* which has legal ownership over the finished products and disposes of them as it sees fit with the objective of surplus-value maximization uppermost in its corporate “mind” (Bryer, 1995, 1999, 2006). According to Marx’s Theory of Surplus-Value, surplus-value is literally unpaid labour time extracted from the workforce; as he would go on to explain in Volume 1 of *Capital* (Marx, 1976/1867, chapters 6-9; Ollman, 1976).

Marx’s Alienation Theory and Surplus-Value Theory are compatible with each other because the workers are alienated from the products produced and the surplus-value contained within them (which is converted into money which is later retained by the firm and not fully paid out to the workers). We cannot accept French communist philosopher Louis Althusser’s (2005, pp. 13, 33-4) theory of the “epistemological break” where he distinguished between the left-humanist “ideological” (p. 34) young Marx and the “scientific” (p. 34) mature Marx. For Althusser, Marx’s first work after the break was “The German Ideology” of 1845-46. We do not accept this theory and hence we assert that the “young Marx was already truly Marx”. The theory of alienation, as expounded by the young Marx in his *Paris Manuscripts* of 1844, was never renounced by the mature Marx (for being humanistic or for

being idealistic or for any other reason). The theory of alienation is found in *Capital* Volume 1 (first published 1867), the major work of the mature Marx, although admittedly the term is used less frequently there.

The primitive appropriation of the accumulated labour and capital of the NSL staff and volunteers can be seen in the fact that the A-League and its franchises, profit-making organizations, stole the goodwill and identity that the NSL had built up over 30 years. This communal goodwill and standing was *appropriated* and privatized and devoted to pure money-making ends. However, its creators were largely excluded. Note that what is appropriated is financial capital, but cultural capital is correlated positively with financial capital and is also appropriated. As accounting students and practitioners know, Goodwill is an asset that can appear on a Balance Sheet but, under current International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), can do so only after a corporate takeover when its value is objectivified and verified in the purchase price.⁶ The financial capital, or accumulated labour, resident in the NSL at the end of its life, and attributable to the NSL rather than to its individual clubs, was used by the A-League to create present and future revenue streams on private-equity capital (and was attributed to that capital). This goodwill, capital or accumulated labour (for the Marxist economist all three words can be used to describe the same substance, although not all accumulated labour creates fresh goodwill) relates to the national competition, whatever it is called, and it was clearly stolen because the labourers were not compensated nor was their permission to end the NSL sought.

Other parts of the capital or accumulated labour relate more directly to the individual NSL clubs (either as part of their own goodwill or as the capitalized value of existing physical facilities at the grounds) rather than to the national competition.

⁶ Paragraph 51(b) of Australian accounting standard AASB3: *Business Combinations*, the Australian adaptation of IFRS3, states that the acquirer shall “initially measure that goodwill at its cost, being the excess of the cost of the business combination over the acquirer’s interest in the net fair value of the identifiable assets, liabilities and contingent liabilities recognised”.

Research Method

I (the first-mentioned author) first gained an appreciation for the NSL and the ethnic clubs by watching regular weekend SBS highlights programmes on Perth television in the late-1980s and early-1990s. At this time Perth had no NSL team. I felt that the marginalization of the ethnic clubs by the FFA in the 2004-05 restructuring was not ethical or just and had been done in an unkind manner which, at certain times, had allowed racist worldviews to enter the debate. I felt that this issue should be brought to an international audience through a research project and publication(s). Both the authors are Anglo-Celtic Australians and so the reviewer for a different journal who assumed we were addressing perceived wrongs affecting our own ethnic group(s) was woefully off the mark.

Data for this study was obtained by extensive literature search; two personal interviews; one group interview; and observation.

“An interview is a conversation between two or more people that has a purpose in mind” (Kahn and Cannell, 1957). Interviews enable researchers to gather further valid and reliable data that will help answer the researchers’ questions and objectives. This is further backed up by Kvale (1996, p. 14) who states that: “An interview is literally an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest”.

There are various types of interviews: semi-structured; in-depth; group; and also structured interviews. A semi-structured interview was selected for the primary means of data collection by the researchers; the researchers had a list of themes and questions that were to be covered. This method was chosen as it is well suited to explore the respondents’ perceptions and opinions and also enables probing for more information and for clarification of answers (Barriball and While, 1994).

One of the advantages of semi-structured interviews is the potential to overcome the poor response rates from questionnaires (Austin, 1981). Furthermore, Gordon (1975) states

that “it also provides the opportunity to evaluate the validity of the respondent’s answers by observing non-verbal indicators which can be helpful when trying to gather a true and fair opinion”. This is further supported by Bailey (1978) who claims that the respondent (except perhaps in group interviews) is unable to get help from others when giving a response or forming an opinion which gives the researcher a clearer set of results.

One of the drawbacks of interviews is the interviewer may send unconscious signals which may lead to the respondent to give answers that are expected by the interviewer. Furthermore the interviewer may not know if the respondent is lying which questions the validity of the information gathered which could occur due to poorly structured interviews. The researcher should maintain her/his own knowledge and let the interviewee flow to prevent having biased data. Lastly, these types of interviews are very time consuming in terms of writing the questions; finding interviewees; and the time spent at interviews.

The interviews were to be completed face to face. It was estimated that they would last from 0.5 to 1.5 hours each. The goal was to speak to the president and any other available persons in the management or administrative teams of each major ethnic ex-NSL club.

To begin the project I originally sent an e-mail (in late-2009 /early-2010) to the contact e-mail addresses listed on the official club websites of each of the major Sydney- and Melbourne-based ex-NSL ethnic clubs informing the clubs of this research project and asking someone at each club for an interview. No club responded except for Melbourne Knights.

I was later able to obtain the personal mobile phone number of the Sydney United president through Melinda Cimera, Melbourne Knights’ administrator, at my interview with her on 11 January 2011. A telephone call to the president of Sydney United led to this president declining me an interview. He stated that his views on the issues are on the public record. He also expressed a desire to, using mixed metaphors, “avoid making waves” and to “keep his head down”. Melbourne Knights president Ange Cimera has no official position at

FFA or FFV and so he feels he is able and willing to express strongly-held personal views in the public realm whereas the Sydney United president has been involved at an official level with the Football New South Wales (FNSW) state federation. Therefore, his relative incentives to speak out or keep silent then differed (in 2009-11) compared to Mr Cimera.

My first semi-structured personal interview was for 1.5 hours with Melbourne Knights president Ange Cimera at the administration office of Knights' Stadium in the Melbourne western suburbs on the quiet weekday of 16 February 2010. I remained in contact with the club and on 11 January 2011 I visited Knights' Stadium again and interviewed Ange Cimera's daughter, Melinda, the club's secretary and a school-teacher by profession. During our 1.5 hour semi-structured interview a young man in his early-20s, wearing street-clothes rather than office-attire, was seated with us around the boardroom table. I wondered who he was but Melinda had no problems at all with him being there so clearly he had cordial relations with the club. Around two-thirds or three-quarters of the way through the interview he left the room. I asked Melinda if I could meet members of MCF, the club's present-day ultras. She immediately brought the young man back in and he took me to the empty Batcave Social Club underneath the grandstand where I interviewed him (Pave Jusup, then aged 22), and other MCF members Kova (aged 26), and Sime (aged 22). This semi-structured group interview lasted approximately 2.0 hours. After the interview, because it was by then early evening, Kova drove me back the significant distance to my hotel near Tullamarine Airport in the outer north-western suburbs. The conversation we had in the car was also beneficial although it is not quoted in the present article. Sime had said nothing during the group interview but he had nodded assent or laughed at various points.

My observation included my attendance at the Melbourne Knights versus Sydney United friendly match at Edensor Park, Sydney on 30 January 2010; the rematch between

these two clubs at Knights Stadium on 5 February 2011 (where I joined the MCF on the eastern terraces); and several other Melbourne Knights' 2011 regular season home games.

In general Research Question (a) was answered more from secondary sources and Research Questions (b) and (c) answered from interview (primary) data. The actual 2004-05 restructuring was not discussed in depth at interviews because it had occurred five/six years before the interview dates and was assumed to be common knowledge and in the public realm. By contrast, the ongoing, long-term *consequences* of the restructuring (Question (b)) are still being felt; and these were explored at length in the three interviews.

Results and Discussion

Interview Responses

During the time period covered by our personal observation and interviews, the MCF numbered around 70 on regular match days; its members congregate on the concrete terraces on the eastern side of the home ground, Knights' Stadium (Sunshine North), below the bar. There is a minority of Anglo-Australian supporters in the group. The younger teenage crowd stands up lower on the terraces from the twenty-somethings sub-group which positions itself higher up and closer to the bar, indicating both its higher-status and its drinking propensities.⁷

We remember the important insight of the young Karl Marx that the working-class is *objectively* alienated from capital and from the means of production under capitalism (Armstrong and Giulianotti, 1997, p. 26; Heimann, 1961, pp. 124-9; James, 2008, 2009a, pp. 93-6, 147-58; James, Briggs, and James, 2011; James and Kavanagh, 2013; Marx, 1975/1844, 1976/1867; Ollman, 1976). *Objectively* the MCF members are predominantly second-generation Croatian-Australian teenagers and young men from the working-class western and northern suburbs of Melbourne plus the satellite town of Geelong. Therefore, the

⁷ In the NSL-era, the Melbourne Knights' ultras group was the Knights' Army.

opposition of MCF members to what has been marketed as “Modern Football” can be viewed in traditional Marxist class struggle terms. The famous anti-communist ideology of Melbourne Croatia is a red-herring here. MCF members have been seen by the authors wearing merchandise of Australia’s left-wing trade union, Construction, Forestry, Mining & Energy Union (CFMEU), so the club’s anti-communism should be viewed as a specific historical position vis-a-vis the ruling regime in Yugoslavia rather than being symptomatic of a generalized right-wing or anti-labour attitude among the supporters.

The MCF’s leaders are intelligent sporting traditionalists who oppose the increased corporatization of both football (soccer) and Melbourne’s favourite football code Australian Rules Football. Kova explains that: “Another thing MCF stands for is traditional football; football for football’s sake. ... That [corporatization trend] is a massive [object of] hatred for us. We think a club should be formed organically, not just by five guys in suits”. Pave goes on to add, before agreeing that they are all amateur sociologists: “People are becoming drones. It’s a direct correlation to globalization”. Kova continues: “They say soccer is a business [but] it’s not. I support Melbourne Croatia. I’ve been here since day zot. I don’t want to support a plastic club”. Pave is also a lifetime supporter of Australian Rules Football’s Footscray club, based in Melbourne’s western suburbs not far from Knights’ Stadium. He refuses to call this club by its new corporatized name of “Western Bulldogs”.

Pave and Kova of MCF claim that there is subtle racism in Australian society that works, in Pave’s words, as “an undercurrent”. Kova argues that the banning of the ethnic clubs from the A-League reflects the assimilationist logic of the White Australia Policy which applied officially to Australia’s immigration intake from 1901 through to the early-1970s. An angry exchange, but one which took a surprise humorous turn at the end, took place at this point in our group interview:

Kova: “For a multi-cultural country it [Australia] is still very racist”.

Pave: “It is an undercurrent; you have to understand what the double-speak is to understand what they are really doing. When the Socceroos play there are people behind it but there is tension. There is still an ‘us-and-them’ mentality but it’s not out in the open. We never said [at Knights] that ‘everyone’s welcome’ but we also never check at the gate if you are Croatian or not. ... We are not holding meetings here in Croatian are we?”

Kova: “It comes back to the White Australia Policy; they are white, we are olive”.

Pave: “But we came in under the White Australia Policy”.

Kova: “They wanted people with the big tits really [laughs]. ... It’s like David and Goliath but we don’t have a Jewish name [all laugh]”.

It is interesting that current A-League club Brisbane Roar is, in reality, Hollandia Inala Soccer Club renamed. The club, known as Brisbane Lions in the first NSL season, still wears the orange strip of the Dutch national team in the A-League. It may be that (white) Dutch associations are less upsetting than Balkans associations for certain people.

Traditional social accountability has been replaced suddenly with a corporate model of accountability whereby accountability obligations are periodically discharged by the A-League clubs primarily via accounting numbers and overall financial viability rather than via football-related variables or arguments. Mining magnate Clive Palmer routinely put an artificial 5,000 person cap on stadium crowds at his Gold Coast United’s home A-League games (Lewis, 2010; Monteverde, 2009). This strategic business move was done purely to save money on public transport subsidies and ground rental costs.

Ange Cimera, president of Melbourne Knights, answers as follows (in personal interview with the first-mentioned author, 16 February 2010) regarding his perceptions about the end of the NSL and the setting up of the A-League:

“Look as far as the NSL is concerned, we were disappointed in the way that they [the FFA] did it. With the *Crawford Report* we knew what was coming, we suffered, and we didn’t play in any competition for over a year. ... I have no problems with what they were trying to do but the way they did it was not fair to clubs that have been there 50 years or so. They say they are bringing in more people to the league. I think some of the [A-League] clubs such as Brisbane, Newcastle and Central Coast are struggling at the moment. The majority, the owners are putting up lots of money, how long can they still do it? They should have got the clubs that have been around 50 years involved but they pushed us aside. I don’t think the standard of the game in the national league has improved that much [since the NSL era]. ... Our last year NSL [Knights] defence virtually won the championship for Victory, [but] we [had] finished third last. [Frank]

Lowy gets a lot of credit for destroying the [ethnic] clubs; he should get a lot of credit for destroying the clubs. He's the man of the time, everyone kisses his ass, but he destroyed every club that meant something to our soccer community, not only here but in Sydney as well".

Pave and Kova of MCF discuss the exclusion of Melbourne Knights from the A-League and the club's present predicament stranded down in the VPL through the following exchange of views:

Pave: "We are bigger than the league [VPL]. We are denied access to anything bigger. They [lower division Croatian clubs] think that they are the equal to us [now]. There is a resentment towards Knights. They think we are just another Croatian club. ... [At MCF] we like to feel we represent Melbourne Croatia in the stands. We do like attention towards us. It is a little attention seeking but you do it to show your love. You do want people to see it. ... They [the FFA] can't take away our memories. They [Knights' champion team of 1994-1996] were the best side in Australia's history".

Kova: "We are just like Liverpool. They are living on their former glories just like us".

Pave: "We deserve to be at the top. Why should we not be in the top division? We are the club of Mark Viduka".

When asked about what he sees as the immediate future for the Knights, now a VPL club, Ange Cimera replies as follows:

"We just want to stabilize the club; we have a young team now. We will survive; we have our core of supporters. We own our own ground and facilities. No-one can force us to do anything. In 30 or 40 years we will still be the Knights, backed by the Croatian community, but second or third or fourth generation [Croatians]. Do we want to join the A-League? No, not the way it is set up now. If Marconi, Sydney United, us, and South [Melbourne] could get promoted and relegated, then 'yes' [we would be interested]. We would need three or four leagues, not just two. A small club needs to have a goal - to be able to get promoted to A-League. At the moment we just want to survive until they stop ethnic cleansing".

Application of Alienation Theory

In Marxist terms, the ethnic club fans had no control over events surrounding the formation of the A-League and hence literally (not *just* metaphorically or emotionally) they are "alienated" from the A-League and from the A-League clubs (Marx, 1975/1844; Ollman, 1976). Fans are excluded from the bright new world of Modern Football *unless* they abandon their clubs and support a new plastic franchise.

In the case of the migrant labour at the ethnic NSL clubs, alienation was low in the NSL years as the workers and financial contributors strongly identified with the clubs and the ethnic communities felt a strong sense of shared ownership with respect to the clubs (Hay, 1994, p. 60; Jones and Moore, 1994, p. 29; Mosely, 1994, p. 33; Nimac et al., 2008). The labour was a labour of love. Murray (2006, p. 57) writes, regarding his whole family's volunteer work for the St George Budapest club: "The work was done on the fuel of love for the cause". The various ethnic communities could be said to "own" the NSL and pre-NSL clubs and this was not too much at odds with experienced reality (Jones and Moore, 1994, p. 29; Mosely, 1994, p. 33). Club workers gave up parts of themselves but they put it directly into a valued community asset (Hay, 1994, p. 60), watched over by loyal and relatively honest and sincere community members who served as club officials. Based at least upon Warren's (2003) and Murray's (2006) recollections, the St George Budapest club of the 1950s through to the 1970s would fit into this picture.

The NSL clubs were semi-capitalist organizations, inhabitants of the fringes of the capitalist economy, as players were semi-professional, coaches were mostly part-time, and sponsors were mostly small local businesses run by ethnic community members. Marx (1981/1894, p. 126) writes that "capital" is money "invested in order to produce a profit". A strong argument can be made that the *primary* objective of the ethnic NSL clubs was not profit-maximization but to serve as a container for the ethnic community's hopes and dreams. This was even more so the case for state league clubs in the pre-NSL era and for state premier league clubs today. Therefore, worker alienation could be said to technically exist at the semi-capitalist ethnic NSL clubs but it was low. It could not be compared with the alienation that many Croatian, Greek, Italian, and Serbian supporters of these clubs faced during the working week working with huge Australian employers such as Ford at Broadmeadows in Melbourne's north where workers from these ethnic backgrounds were heavily involved in

labour disputes as union organisers and shop stewards (Bramble, 2008; Hay, 2001; Leung and James, 2010a, 2010b; Leung et al., 2011; Ross, 2004).

The financial capital, or accumulated labour, resident in the NSL at the end of its life, and attributable to the NSL rather than to its individual clubs, was used by the A-League to create present and future revenue streams on private-equity capital (and was attributed to that capital). This goodwill, capital or accumulated labour relates to the national competition, whatever it is called, and it was clearly stolen because the labourers were not compensated nor was their permission to end the NSL sought. Ange Cimera of Melbourne Knights agrees with this “theft of goodwill” thesis as it was put to him by the first-mentioned author on 16 February 2010. Mr Cimera also makes the following comments at this point:

“We [the ethnic clubs] made the competition, we attracted the fans, it was like goodwill, they took it off us; they said you can’t play here anymore. ... We need to be recognized as the clubs that started the NSL, kept that tradition up, and got a kick in the guts later on” [personal interview, 16 February 2010].

Other parts of the capital or accumulated labour relate more directly to the individual NSL clubs (either as part of their own “goodwill” or as the capitalized value of existing physical facilities at the grounds) rather than to the national competition. As an example, the Melbourne Knights has freehold ownership of its stadium and land in the western Melbourne suburb of Sunshine North (personal interview with Ange Cimera, 16 February 2010). The land area, a former drive-in movie theatre site, is around 90,000m² and is only 12 kilometres west of the Melbourne city centre. The land value alone would be significant. However, with the Knights unlikely to sell this land, the unlocked value remains largely academic; in accounting terms the “value-in-use” is what counts. The only government funds used on the Knights’ construction project was AUD60 thousand for the light towers (personal interview with Ange Cimera, 16 February 2010). All other money was raised by members of Melbourne’s Croatian community.

According to Melinda Cimera and Pave Jusup, 300 Foundation Members put in AUD1 thousand each, at different times, to fund purchases of the land and the building construction. Originally, the grandstand had a section reserved for Foundation Members, with a seat and a car-park space provided for life. The plan was that these could later be handed on to the next generation. The intention was that there would be multi-generation community ownership of the land and playing facilities. However, with small crowds in the VPL, the scheme has been abandoned and all parts of the grandstand are now open to the general public on match days.

The labour used on the stadium and grandstand was probably a mix of volunteer Croatian labour and paid Croatian labour hired by small Croatian-owned construction companies. Because the Knights and other ethnic ex-NSL clubs were not admitted to the A-League, this accumulated labour/ financial capital has been, according to Marxist economic theory, “wasted” and “devalued” (Marx, 1978/1885, pp. 205-6, 486, 1981/1894, pp. 353-62; Yee et al., 2008). In other words, the labour and capital invested by part-time and volunteer staff and financial contributors at the ethnic clubs can be viewed as still existing, in accumulated but devalued form, at the state premier league level.⁸ This accumulated past labour and capital injections have now become wasted or devalued capital in that they can find no legal way of entry into the new, heavily policed world of the A-League. They have been shunted down into a lower league that operates at a fivefold reduced financial level in terms of annual revenues. Given that the A-League sets a cap on transfer fees payable to state premier league clubs at an extremely miserly AUD3 thousand (as at date of personal interview with Ange Cimera, 16 February 2010), another previously significant revenue stream for the ex-NSL clubs has shrunk to very close to zero (Melbourne Knights, 2015). The

⁸ We do not have access to financial statements for the ethnic clubs during the NSL years. We do not know how many reported accounting profits or how often. If they did not report profits then the surplus-value, arising from migrant labour, would not have been “realized” on the market. As Marx (1976/1867, 1978/1885, 1981/1894) makes clear, surplus-value is created in the factory but then it is either “realized” or lost in the market-place. One of the crucial sources of revenue for the NSL clubs was transfer fee income. For example, Melbourne Knights received 20% of the transfer fee or £600,000 paid by Celtic to Croatia Zagreb, formerly and now again Dinamo Zagreb, in relation to the ex-Knights player Mark Viduka (Hall, 2000, pp. 80-3).

Knights will, literally, not have the financial resources to develop “the next Mark Viduka” or “the next Danny Tiatto” for the benefit of the A-League and the European super-leagues. Capital devalues, financially, if the profit stream that the capital is expected to generate suffers serious and long-term expected decline (Marx, 1978/1885, pp. 205-6, 486, 1981/1894, pp. 353-62; Yee et al., 2008). The value of Melbourne Knights’ freehold land in Sunshine North may be high but the club does not plan to sell this land. The “value-in-use” of the Knights’ land and facilities and its goodwill have suffered fivefold or worse reductions now that the club is restricted to fielding its senior team in the VPL.

Conclusion

This article has reviewed the cancellation of Australia’s National Soccer League (NSL) competition and its replacement in 2004 with the corporatist A-League which is based on the North American model of “one-team-one-city”; no promotion and relegation; and private-equity franchises. We believe that one of the aims of the A-League and its “ground-zero” ideology was to institute exclusion of the ethnic clubs that had formed the backbone of the NSL for 30 years. However, capitalism creates its own discontents. Online forums and homemade fence banners are the new vehicles for dissent for the supporters of “Old Soccer”, many of whom are political and militaristic ultras in the Croatian and Italian tradition. Although the recently introduced annual FFA Cup (knock-out competition) does allow state-league clubs (including ethnic clubs) to play against A-League clubs this has not solved the exclusion problem since promotion and relegation to and from the A-League competition proper is still not in place.

The limitations of our study are obvious. We were only able to interview administrators and supporters from one ethnic ex-NSL club, Melbourne Knights. A wider range of responses might have illuminated other important issues. However, although we only interviewed two

administrators and three supporters, they are long-term and well-respected leaders of Melbourne Knights. For example, Ange Cimera is long-serving club president and his daughter, Melinda, is the club's only administrator. Furthermore, MCF leader Pave Jusup was later appointed Melbourne Knights Vice-President at the tender age of 26. Also, Melbourne Knights was and is regarded as one of the "Big Four" ethnic clubs alongside Marconi Stallions, South Melbourne, and Sydney United. Lastly, by looking at MCF in 2011, we build on, and in many respects supplement and confirm, Hughson's findings on the Croatian-Australian BBB ultras of 1990s Sydney United.

We also appreciate the irony of using Marxist theory to situate theoretically the situation of a club which traditionally has been well known for its anti-communist ideology. However, this issue can be reconciled by noting the *objectively* working-class roots of MCF members and by pointing out that Melbourne Knights' historical position reflected primarily distaste towards the ruling communist regime of Yugoslavia. We have observed MCF members wearing official CFMEU merchandise (left-wing building industry trade union) and CFMEU has an advertising sign at Sydney United's Edensor Park ground. Therefore, we do not view the use of Marxist theory as being a limitation of this research. Marx's theories have an on-going relevance today as capitalism reaches higher and higher forms and penetrates even deeper into the social fabric than it did in Marx's own time.

It would be good to see future research incorporate future developments in Australian football as the principal historic dialectic of Modern Football versus Old Soccer will continue on unabated. We will see periods of relative calm and periods of renewed tension. History has repeated itself with the pre-1957 situation of ethnic clubs being barred from Sydney's premier-league being replicated decades later when the A-League barred ethnic clubs in 2004-05. Some might say the Modern Football-Old Soccer contradiction underpins football worldwide so the Australian situation is not special. Whilst this overall premise is true,

Australia is an interesting case both because the transition from NSL to A-League can be identified as the precise moment when Modern Football took hold here and also because the obvious tension between “ethnic” and “mainstream” is a unique feature of Australian football, and the NSL was an ethnic league whereas the A-League is a mainstream league. We do note that the USA, Canada, and New Zealand have experienced similar issues.

In September 2016 Sydney United Senior Football Director Sam Krslović warned the FFA that, if a national second-tier competition is not introduced soon then “it’s inevitable clubs will take matters into their own hands” (Cockerill, 2016). In the first-half of calendar year 2017 we saw the new Association of Australian Football Clubs Alliance (AAFCA) (second-tier clubs) forming and lobbying for more decision-making authority and power within FFA (Bossi, 2017; Lynch, 2017). The Alliance, initially formed by Victorian second-tier clubs, now has at least 81 out of the 129 NPL (state premier league clubs) on board and also the backing of FIFA (Bossi, 2017; Football Alive, 2017).

Meanwhile, FIFA is also strengthening its long-term push for promotion and relegation to and from the A-League. It also wants the current voting structure of FFA (one vote per nine member federations and one vote total for the A-League clubs) expanded to a more democratic model by 31 March 2017 (Bossi, 2017). If AAFCA clubs make up a newly created national second-tier league then the demands and preferences of both FIFA and the AAFCA will be met but only if we have both promotion and relegation to and from the A-League. FIFA and the AAFCA may not seem natural bedfellows to many but clearly in this case their interests converge at least on the one single issue of promotion and relegation. A breakaway A-League, independent of FFA and echoing the Sydney rebel league of 1957, is not outside the boundaries of possibility (Lynch, 2017). Now Steven Lowy is 16 months into his tenure as FFA chairman, succeeding his father Frank, some smell new weaknesses and opportunities. We await future developments with interest.

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