

**‘The main thing is to shut them out’  
The Deployment of Law and the Arrival of  
Russians in Australia 1913-1925: An histoire<sup>1</sup>**

**Marett Leiboff**

**Brisbane, August 1915**

On Tuesday 10 August 1915,<sup>2</sup> a 25 year old Russian<sup>3</sup> named Neplen Matanakes was allowed to disembark from the *SS Empire* in Brisbane, the capital city of the state of Queensland in the recently federated Australia. A year into World War I, Neplen’s journey had started a few weeks earlier in the Chinese Russian city of Harbin. Like other Russians before him, Neplen made his way to the Japanese seaport of Dairen (or Dalny), also located on the Chinese mainland. He then joined the *SS Empire* at Kobe, Japan, on one of its regular round trips to Australia and, after brief stops in Hong Kong and Manila, the steamer arrived in Darwin on 1 August 1915. The three unnamed Russians on board were mentioned in dispatches telegraphed south.<sup>4</sup> Brisbane was the *SS Empire’s* first capital city landfall in Australia and, by disembarking here, Neplen followed the path of thousands of other Russians who arrived in Australia through its most northerly state capital (Govor 1997).

Brisbane was bustling the week Neplen arrived. The ‘Brisbane National Show’, or ‘Ekka’, was in full swing and the streets were filled with visitors from the Bush. Vaudeville, plays and silent movies were showing in its theatres, trams were rattling through the city and

suburbs. The Parliament Building, a partial replica of the Louvre, spoke of a wealth borne of agriculture and mining. Grand timber mansions sat on the verdant hills that clung to the meandering Brisbane River; built on stumps and clad with wide verandahs to manage hot, humid monsoonal summers, the houses added to an impression of languid torpor.

Arriving during Brisbane's warmly pleasant winter must have been astonishing for a Russian. But, apart from the climate, Australia's third largest city was not so different from the city of his birth, Nizhny Novgorod. Russia's 'third city' had a population of 97,000 in 1913, while Brisbane's population was around 150,000 in 1915.<sup>5</sup> Both cities were major commercial and trading hubs located on rivers — the Volga and the Brisbane. Brisbane must have seemed the perfect place to disembark. Indeed, if Neplen had not liked it, he had the financial means to continue his journey east across the Pacific to North America.

But for now, Neplen had other matters at hand. He had to satisfy a Commonwealth customs agent that he was not a member of a prohibited race and, therefore, subject to Australia's infamous racially discriminatory White Australia Policy, and that he was in good health. He might have given the agent pause for thought; his brown hair and hazel eyes were combined with the traces of a Central Asian appearance not uncommon among Russians of a range of ethnicities. Yet he was lucky he only had to satisfy the Commonwealth official that he was a suitable person to enter Australia, which he did successfully. Only three weeks before, as a Russian, the Queensland *police* would have insisted that Neplen produce a passport before being permitted to disembark in Brisbane.

Though he may not have known it when he left Harbin, Neplen was not required to produce a passport. As it turned out, his arrival was so utterly unremarkable it was either not recorded by the local Queensland State immigration officials or the record was lost. And if he entered the Immigration Depot established to assist new arrivals from the Mother Country (a reception grudgingly extended to the unwelcome Russian arrivals), his stay was brief. Neplen was now safely in Australia.

## Coming to Australia

Neplen was among the last of a wave of Russian arrivals in Queensland in the second decade of the 20th century. That Russians came to Queensland in numbers is a curious, little known chapter in Australian history. Small numbers had arrived in Australia in the latter part of the 19th century through Europe but, from around 1907, much larger numbers began to travel east across Asia on the newly completed Trans-Siberian railway to China, before embarking on steamers bound south to Australia (Govor 2005: 22). The route held one key advantage: the ability to slip out of Russia through its Chinese frontier without alerting the Imperial Russian authorities. Many of the Russian arrivals disembarked at the first large cities on the Australian mainland, which happened to be in Queensland. Between 1911 and 1914 a total of 2000 joined the 800 or so Russians already living in the State. By 1918, there were 4000 Russians living in Queensland out of an entire Russian population of 6000 in Australia (Evans 1988: 28).<sup>6</sup> The population was fluid; many moved to country Queensland to work on farms and labour in ports, railways and mines, while others returned to Russia (Govor 1997: 149, 177-8). A community began to settle on the flood-prone south bank of the Brisbane River in the municipality of South Brisbane (Govor 1997: 150). A 'Russian colony' took shape (Stedman 1979: 201). In 1915 a Russian synagogue was established (Trone 1993). The first Russian Orthodox priest arrived in 1923 and the first Russian Orthodox Church was founded in 1925.

By 1919 around 900 Russian men of all ethno-religious backgrounds (and an indeterminate number of women and children) lived in Brisbane.<sup>7</sup> While they shared a language and birthplace, the Brisbane Russians were a far from homogenous group (Govor 1997: 145-57). Doubrovskaya recounts how some (ethnic) Russians refused to join a newly-formed Russian association in 1910 because Russian Jews were committee members (Doubrovskaya 1993: 72).<sup>8</sup> The so-called Russian colony was neither uniform nor cohesive:

[It was] ... formed out of every significant group of Russian globetrotters whose diverse political and historical origins produced a highly

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fractured society at times. As in other Russian enclaves abroad, the uncertainties and frustrations of their historical predicament frequently unleashed a virulent factionalism which systematically afflicted even the most innocuous community enterprises (*Doubrovskaya* 1993: 72).

But the very existence of Russians, whatever their ethnicity, meant that Brisbane was not a fortuitous, random, disembarkation port (Govor 1997: 157-8). When Neplen arrived, he entered a familiar, conflicted world that had been shaped in part through connections and links established in Harbin. It didn't take him long to find fellow Jewish Russians who had already made the move to Brisbane through Harbin. Apart from a few forays into Queensland's regions between 1917 and 1920, Neplen remained in Brisbane for the rest of his life. Though he lived for a decade on one of the verdant hills on the river (Toorak Hill, which he first set eyes on in 1915), he otherwise made his home within the physical boundaries of the 'Russian colony'.

Neplen died in 1962. Naturalised as a British subject in 1922, he had spent most of his life in Australia. But most people who knew him had never heard of Neplen Matanakes. Like most of the Russians who arrived in the second decade of the 20th century (Govor 1997), Neplen Matanakes was an assumed name. For most of his life in Australia he used his real name, Morris Leiboff, which he reclaimed — using *law* to reinscribe his name and identity — in 1920.

Figure 1: C 1950. Morris Leiboff (right), his son – my father (centre), my grandmother Sonia (Sophie) Leiboff (left).



## Knowing Morris: Creating histoire

I, too, knew Morris Leiboff. He was my grandfather, but, being not quite three when he died, this is a scant knowledge, the memory of a small child, created through stories and artefacts, through the eyes and memories of others, and imperfect recollections. This imperfect archive of memory, a knowledge of and about a person intimately connected to me but unknown in any real sense, renders my grandfather an intimate stranger. But his status as intimate stranger allows me to remain outside his life in a way that other members of my family who knew him well would be less able. It allowed me to take the step of investigating a formally constituted archive, piquing my curiosity about the description of a file listed in the National Archives of Australia, labelled Morris Leiboff 'formerly Neplen Matanakes' (NAA: Russian Leiboff M).

I didn't think it was my place to look at this file, knowing him only as this intimate stranger, thinking that my father, Morris's son and only surviving child, should be the person to see what the archive held. My father knew nothing of Neplen, but recalled that sometime during the 1940s he heard my grandfather joking with a visitor about 'Matakes'.<sup>9</sup> In December 2010, prompted by the focus of the collection in which this article now sits, I ordered the file at the National Archives of Australia in Brisbane. A range of thoughts had gone through my mind: had the file been incorrectly ascribed to him, did it contain a mistaken document, or was Morris in fact Neplen? There was no mistake. Morris arrived in Australia using the name Neplen Matanakes, which he changed by deed poll to Morris Leiboff in 1920. This file held documents used to trace and monitor my grandfather's movements through Queensland between 1916 and 1922, yet it disclosed so much more. Wisps of his life were contained in the forms created to impose a bureaucratic surveillance on all aliens, prompted by the threat to Australia during World War I. The *War Precautions Act 1914* (Cth) was used to generate a detailed surveillance regime through the War Precautions (Aliens Registration) Regulations 1916 (Cth), a regime that continued after the war ended.

My grandfather's file is emblematic of the way law is *created*

through the file (Vismann 2008); the file and archive is more than a simple device that records this law's administration. The obligation to record the movement of aliens created a literal archive that documents an account of a life that my grandfather obscured. The file is both fascinating and repelling: the literal archive contaminating a life known to Morris' family through encounter and memory (cf Szörényi 2010). It reveals the way in which the files and apparatus of regulatory regimes contain a selected, partial, and limited reading of a life, a life created through law.<sup>10</sup> As Birrell observes, drawing on Derrida's conception of archive fever: 'Whereas the archive is conventionally conceived as closed and finite, Derrida reveals a contingency and contextuality' (Birrell 2010: 98). In this file, the administered law is revealed as absurd, cruel, and pettifogging when read beyond its limits; the archive cannot function as a literal truth.

Here, though, I wish to move beyond the archive and file by drawing on my grandfather's story to explore the law contained in and around his file. I am instead creating and writing what I am calling *histoire*, the French word for story *and* for history. *Histoire* provides an alternative mechanism through which to deploy the personal to expose and uncover the broader sweep of law and its practices, to present a reading of law beyond its claim to a political rationality and its belief in its ability to render a perfected mode of administration. *Histoire* thus provides a conceptual space for an account that cannot be described as biography (Lee 2005), legal biography (Lacey 2004), or as law explained through fiction (Lacey 2008). Not pretending to function as history or legal history, *histoire* as I am using it draws on all of these methods and techniques. By taking the wisps of Neplen's/Morris' early life in Australia and reading them against the policies and legal interventions imposed upon Russians at the time, against the backdrop of a nascent federated Australia, this article will supplement the archive of law, the archive of memory, and the archive of paper and digital record (Mohr 2008), to render law lived and theatricalised (Leiboff 2010).

Figure 2: c 1961. Morris Leiboff (top left), my grandmother (top right). I am on the bottom left, my sister on the bottom right



This *histoire* recreates a lost moment in law. Drawing on my grandfather's story, it explores the deployment of law to manifest a political, social and community mistrust of one group of newcomers to Australia whose place in its early 20th century has been largely lost from view: Russians in Brisbane. Commencing in 1913 and ending in 1925 with the arrival of my great-grandmother,<sup>11</sup> I now start by shifting to a defining moment for Brisbane's Russians which occurred halfway through this period - in 1919.

## 1919

In March 1919 thousands of returned servicemen, encouraged by their former senior officers, attacked the Russian colony (Evans 1988). These anti-Bolshevik 'Red Flag Riots' had a profound and devastating effect on Brisbane's Russians who were targeted whatever their political allegiance or association.<sup>12</sup> In his seminal history of these riots, Raymond Evans recounts two contemporary reactions:

'I will not describe to you the details of the pogrom ... Yes, it was a formal pogrom, exactly like the pogroms of Jews organized during the

reign of the Czar. All the Russians are in a state of panic. They are being dismissed everywhere from work. The soldiers thrash the Russians in the streets. The Russians have all run away like rats.' Another Russian witness, apparently not in sympathy with the Bolshevik activists, wrote to a friend in Brisbane General Hospital ... 'I cannot describe all I have heard. Many Russians were beaten ... Through the fault of some silly Russians, it falls on all of us, and all is closed down. I met a Russian here and started to speak to him ... I was nearly beaten for speaking Russian — by Englishmen. We must be as far from Russia as we possibly can. There is danger for the Russians on every step and corner.' (Evans 1998: 138)

In the aftermath, Russians throughout Queensland lost their jobs, were unable to find accommodation, were evicted from rented properties and businesses, and were prevented from leaving even to return to Russia.

For Jewish Russians, the events must have belied Australia's reputation as a free country. The Minister of the Russian Synagogue (or 'Jewish Church' as he styled it), the Reverend Meerkin, wrote to one Brisbane newspaper on behalf of its members to distance them from 'the Bolsheviks'. In the letter Meerkin explained that this group had been persecuted by (ethnic) Russians, the reason for their emigration into Australia over the previous seven and eight years, and that he 'wanted to point out to the Australian public' that 'we have no connection or sympathy whatsoever with the Bolsheviks'. They prayed, he said, 'for the British King and Queen and Prince of Wales' and for the success of the Allies during the war, and identified themselves as 'true, loyal, and devoted subjects of the British Empire [who] never at any time wittingly admitted any one with Bolshevist views into our religious circle'. The letter concluded 'We hope and trust that we will be permitted to live in peace and quietness in our little community ... and that no one will in any way associate us with or molest us as part of the Russian Bolshevists who unfortunately are in Brisbane to-day' (*The Brisbane Courier* 25 March 1919: 10). Two weeks later, the Synagogue advertised its 'Easter' [sic] services, welcoming all to attend, and emphasised that special prayers would be offered for the Royal Family and the nation



*(The Brisbane Courier 14 April 1919: 8).*<sup>13</sup>

Brisbane's Jewish Russians keenly embraced their loyalty to King and Country, but from at least 1910, all Russians, alien and naturalised, loyal and disloyal, were subjected to intense overt and covert, lawful and unlawful governmental scrutiny. World War I provided an opportunity to formalise this scrutiny at Commonwealth level through the War Precautions (Aliens Registration) Regulations 1916 (Cth). By mid-1918, the Queensland Security Branch began to keep files on all male Russians resident in the State and closely monitored their associations (Dobrovskaya 1993: 76). Also, in 1918 a secret Commonwealth report on 'Conditions in Queensland' (unnamed but presumably the work of the Commonwealth Counter Espionage Branch) damned the Russians by asserting that they 'are the only organised alien section in Brisbane which would be likely to resort to force should the opportunity present itself, but if we get rid of the ringleaders, that opportunity will be unlikely to materialise' (NAA: A456, W26/241).<sup>14</sup> Reversing its previous stance, the Commonwealth now refused entry to Russians, a position which was not reversed until 1922 (Dobrovskaya 1993: 76; NAA: 1920/1094 PART 1).

Yet only five years before, in 1913, the Commonwealth had supported the Russians in the face of Queensland's desire to 'keep them out'. The Commonwealth knew that most Russian arrivals were religious dissidents, Jews fleeing persecution, and political prisoners who were escaping exile in Siberia (Dobrovskaya 1993: 72) and, before World War I, it had been 'sympathetic to political and religious exiles from the so-called last bastion of autocracy in Europe' (Dobrovskaya 1993: 76). Now, it was actively shutting Russians out of the country and, through the regulation of the movement of alien Russians, keeping them under surveillance.

## **Leaving Russia**

Given the circumstances surrounding his departure from the country of his birth, these regulatory requirements must have been the last thing my grandfather wanted. There would have been many reasons why

Morris wanted to leave Russia and, more particularly, why he would continue to conceal his identity after he left. Morris was the patrimony of the Russian military; his destiny predetermined through his father Moses, a forced Jewish child conscript into the Russian army. *Moses'* children (like Morris and his brother Alexander) became the patrimony of the military, conscripted into the army from birth (Petrovsky-Shtern 2010). By 1907, these Jewish soldiers constituted almost five per cent of the military from four per cent of the population of the Russian Empire (Petrovsky-Shtern 2010). Like many of the Russians who arrived in Brisbane between 1905 and 1917 (Stedman 1979: 201; Govor 2005: 23), Morris may have deserted the Russian Imperial Army in the early phase of World War I, although his naturalisation application said he lived in Harbin for a year after its outbreak (NAA: 1925/21468). This conflicts with oral accounts that he came to Australia directly from Russia. But desertion, for a Jewish Russian like him, was more likely to have been constructive than actual. Petrovsky-Shtern observes that like other soldiers of 'alien beliefs' — Polish Catholics, Finns and Lithuanians — Jews were harshly punished for minor deviations from military discipline; for example, a late arrival after a leave of absence constituted desertion. After 1905 (the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and a failed first Russian Revolution), 'the position of the Jewish soldiers in the army became precarious' (Petrovsky-Shtern 2010). Govor observes that for 'Jews who were in the Russian military, it was likely to be hard-going'. (Govor 2005: 57). They were the scapegoats of an inglorious defeat and, in Agamben's terms, were *homo sacer* within the sphere of the Russian Empire; they were *excluded* from law itself, while being *included* at the same time. Even for a minor infraction, their only hope of survival was to escape from Russia.

His military service aside, Morris' status as a Jewish Russian would have been enough on its own to prompt him to leave the country. In interviews conducted with descendents of Jewish Russian Anzacs as to why their parent(s) left Russia, Govor heard narratives of 'fear and flight from danger or the threat of it' (Govor 2005: 57 - 58). A member of a community subjected to hyper-regulation and persecution by the state, Morris' own position was nevertheless infinitely superior to most. He

was permitted to move relatively freely through the country because his father (my great-grandfather), Mosess, was a 'Nicolaiova',<sup>15</sup> or Nikolai or Nicholas I soldier. This meant the family was in the unusual and privileged position of being allowed to live outside the infamous Pale of Settlement where Jews were otherwise forced to live. But Morris, his father Mosess, mother Rebecca and brother Alexander still had internal passports setting out the details of their identities that marked them out as Jews. They were not allowed to move into certain cities, were under surveillance, and always lived with the fear that they would be subjected to physical harm through the infamous state sanctioned pogroms directed towards Jewish Russians.

This relative privilege was exacted at a dreadful price. Nicolaiovas were not soldiers by choice. They were conscripted into the army under a policy formulated by Tsar Nicholas I in 1827 to Russianise the Jewish population, and ultimately to convert them to Russian Orthodoxy. Conscripts included children who had been kidnapped to meet the quota of Jewish male conscripts, including those as young as six who were placed in special training and education establishments (Ofek 1993: 277). Very young children were recorded as being older than their actual age (Ofek 1993: 279). Mosess, Morris' father, was one of those children; he was taken as a seven year old. His birth date is unknown, but it seems probable that he was born around the middle of the 19th century, nearing the end of the 29 years the policy lasted. It is possible that he was an orphan, as he did not know his surname, and so the recruiting officer gave Mosess a surname, Leiboff, derived from his father's first name — Leib — a name Mosess knew.

By the time he was allowed to retire from the army at the age of 43, having spent the obligatory 25 years in the service after he turned 18 (Ofek 1993: 277), Mosess was fundamentally Russianised. He had spent 38 years away from his (unknown) community of origin but he remained Jewish in spite of attempts to force Jewish conscripts (as well as Lutherans, Catholics, Muslims and pagans) to convert to Russian Orthodoxy (Petrovsky-Shtern 2010). While initially informal, the practice became policy in 1842 and thousands of children were forcibly

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baptised while others endured beatings or starvation when they refused (Ofek 1993: 278). My father was told that an Orthodox priest told Mosess not to convert; some children taken near the end of the 29 years the policy was in place managed to avoid conversion (Ofek 1993: 280).

Figure 3: Mosess (bottom left), Morris (top left), Alexander (top right). The woman on the bottom right is probably Rebecca Leiboff c 1908. There are no identifying details on the photograph, though the board on which it is mounted says 'N' Novgorod (or Nizhny Novgorod).



Mosess would probably have been based in Nizhny Novgorod during his military service, which entitled him to remain there in retirement. It was only in 1840 that Jews were allowed to live there; and by 1913 their population was around 3000.<sup>16</sup> Like other Nicolaiovas, Mosess and his family spoke Russian and lived a largely secular existence (Govor 2005: 56), but they would also have spoken Yiddish. As the photograph in Figure 3 shows, Mosess looks like a man in his 50s or 60s, and is wearing a full beard in the Russian fashion. Morris on the left of the photograph looks as if he is aged around 15 or 16,

and is dressed in a 'Russian style' shirt. The studio image suggests a comfortable middle class existence.

But this image belies the controls placed over their lives. Morris and his brother Alexander were obliged to enter the military school system, and then the army. He had no choice in the matter, and no way out, other than to leave. It must have had an effect, for once in Australia, except when speaking with Russians with no English, Morris never spoke Russian again.

### **Going South to Australia via China**

The route to Australia out of Russia through China was still fairly new when my grandfather began his journey. It had only become a feasible option after the extension of the trans-Siberian railway - the Chinese Eastern Railway - was completed in 1903. By 1909, immigration to Australia through that route began in earnest (Govor 2005: 22-3), using Harbin as a staging post. This Russian city, located in China, was established to build the railway (Bakich 2000). Harbin's Russian inhabitants in the first two decades of the 20th century included railway builders and a Jewish Russian population induced to move there by the removal of the disabilities they experienced in Russia.<sup>17</sup>

While other migrants were given assisted passage to Queensland, the Russians were unsupported. Most endured difficult and uncomfortable voyages in the lowest class section of the ships (Govor 2005: 22), and not all could pay their way. In one reported instance, frictions spilled over in Brisbane in court proceedings where 'some Russian Jews were interested parties' — the matter concerned steamship tickets purchased by one Russian for another at Dalny as well as the loan of some money. It was said to be 'a tedious case' and an 'unsatisfactory one for both Bench and Bar'; there were denials and counterclaims, and the case eventually adjourned after 'rambling conversations in Russian' (*The Brisbane Courier* 30 November 1915: 6).

Harbin became a lifeline out of Russia and a conduit into Queensland in more ways than one. Russian passports were sent back to Harbin by new arrivals to Brisbane to assist others to make the journey

(Stedman 1979: 201). The implication is clear: Russians were arriving in Brisbane bearing false passports. Stories exist of 'Alexy' (aka the Consul) a deserter, who had 'left the army without giving notice of his intention', as Stedman quaintly puts it, and was not in a position to seek a certificate of identification from the Russian authorities in Harbin; he successfully produced a Moscow theatre program (presumably in Cyrillic) for immigration officials (Stedman 1979: 201; Doubrovskaya 1993: 74).<sup>18</sup> Before 1918, unlike now, passports contained neither physical description nor photograph and one Grisha travelled:

on a passport that made the trans-Pacific [sic] journey on several previous occasions. After allowing its current holders safely past the port authorities, the passport was sent back to Harbin ... to be used by the next Russian migrant, each time with equal success (quoted in Doubrovskaya 1993: 74).

At the time, very few arrivals from any country were expected to hold or produce passports, but on 23 June 1913, the Under Secretary of the Queensland Chief Secretary's Office informed all shipping agents that Russian immigrants from Asiatic ports without passports would not be permitted to land in Queensland (NAA: 1915/11795). Queensland asserted a power to impose border controls, drawing on a residual colonial power in order to do so.

### **1913 A Constitutional Triggerpoint**

During 1913, the Queensland Premier, Digby Denham, agitated for the Commonwealth to either allow Queensland to prevent Russians from landing there, or for the Commonwealth to use its immigration legislation to prevent Russians from landing anywhere in Australia. He attempted to garner support from the other Premiers, unsuccessfully asking them to refuse Russians entry to their states. Yet under section 51 (xxvii) of the *Constitution* the Commonwealth held the power with respect to immigration, and refused to accede to Queensland's demands that it prevent Russians entering Australia. Denham wrote to the Prime Minister, Joseph Cook, on 14 November 1913, insisting that the Commonwealth 'shut them out' (NAA: 1915/11795). He

labelled the Russians 'Asiatics' using Harbin's location in China to urge the Commonwealth to apply the White Australia Policy, under the *Immigration Restriction Act* 1901 (Cth), to European Russians who came to Australia through Asia.

The dispute between Queensland and the Commonwealth began in May 1913 with the arrival of a so-called 'Asiatic Russian' Peter Velsaoff. Customs officials did not declare him a prohibited immigrant but the Queensland police refused to let him disembark in Brisbane because he did not hold a passport. The ship's captain took him to Sydney where he was allowed to disembark. On 17 July 1913, Queensland police officers were instructed by state officials to 'visit every steamer arriving from eastern Asiatic ports on or after 1<sup>st</sup> proximate, and to prevent any Russian immigrant on board thereof, who has no passport, from landing in Queensland' (QSA: ID318869). Officers were directed to consult the Crown Solicitor if it was necessary to enforce the instruction (QSA: ID318869).

Denham's move was counter-productive. The Commonwealth instead threatened to legislate away any of the Colonial residual immigration powers relied upon by the Queensland Premier — what Denham called its inherent right — and take over the administration of alien entry into and out of the Commonwealth. This dispute is a little known relic in Australia's immigration law history. While now a clearly ascertained Commonwealth responsibility, at Federation the Commonwealth only administered immigration with respect to its racial policies and the states continued their colonial practices of recruiting, transporting, receiving and placing immigrants. It was only in 1920-1921 that the Commonwealth became responsible for recruiting and transporting immigrants before assuming a general immigration function from the 1930s onwards.

But even in 1913, the Commonwealth was clearly asserting its role in policy formation over immigration as a de facto extension of the nation-building role it was establishing through its external affairs power. In short, conscious of the repressive character of the Tsarist regime in Russia, it was creating, executively, a refugee policy. On 17

November 1913, the Prime Minister sent a terse and pointed letter in reply to Denham (NAA: 1915/11795). The Commonwealth was 'unable to see its way to exclude, under the provisions of the Immigration Act 1901-1912, Russians who are of pure European race, merely on the ground of their not being possessed of passports'. Further, the inability of a person to present a passport could not be used to determine the person's suitability for immigration:

it has been ascertained from enquiry that, whereas it is an easy matter for a criminal Russian to become the holder of a passport which does not rightfully belong to him, the non-possession may indicate nothing more than the person was a political offender, who under the different conditions of Australian life might prove a desirable immigrant (NAA: 1915/11795).

The Commonwealth was aware of the Harbin conduit (and presumably knew about the 'trade' in passports which Queensland's policy was, in fact, encouraging). The letter observed that Russians leaving Harbin 'en route for Dalny the chief port of embarkation for such persons coming from the East, are not required to produce foreign passports'. It noted that passports would be needed if they embarked at Vladivostok (the letter does not explain that the latter was in Russian territory, while the former was Japanese territory). The letter noted that Customs authorities had been instructed to 'exercise particular care in dealing with Russian immigrants from the East, and to question carefully those without passports' with the view of restricting them under section 3(ga) of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth) Special medical examinations would also be carried out on them. Finally, he reiterated that 'it is not the practice to apply the dictation test to persons of European race, and this Government does not consider it desirable to use that provision for the purpose of excluding Russians without passports' (NAA: 1915/11795).

The Queensland Premier received Cook's letter on 9 December 1913. On 23 December 1913, the Commissioner of Police issued a Circular Memorandum to police inspectors at all ports 'where these people may land' that no further action would be taken to prevent



Russians without passports from landing (QSA: ID317879). Yet, as the Commonwealth officer Peters noted in Memorandum 13/8162 of 30 July 1913, Customs officers continued to notify the (Queensland) police regarding Russian immigrants from the East who failed to produce passports on arrival (NAA: 1915/11795). The Queensland police now instead had to wait for instruction from the Commonwealth Department of External Affairs.

The Commonwealth acted knowing it had the ultimate power. In the Attorney-General's Department Minute Paper: Power of States to Prohibit Landing from Abroad of Persons Whose Entry is Not Forbidden by Commonwealth Law, 30 October 1913, the Attorney-General advised that while the States retained some powers with respect to the exclusion of certain individuals, the head of power under section 51 (xxvii) with respect to immigration and emigration, and section 51 (xxviii) with respect to the influx of criminals, would enable the Commonwealth to legislate to either admit or prevent the admission of aliens. Any state law inconsistent with Commonwealth law would be overridden: (NAA: 1915/11795). In the end, the Commonwealth did not have to act, but within three years it too would harden its stance against Russians in Australia.

### **Who to Trust?**

Why was Premier Denham so insistent in wanting 'to keep them out', and why, conversely, did the Commonwealth resist the State's demands? In short, the Commonwealth decided that Queensland had received false intelligence about its Russian population, and had used this compromised intelligence to determine its policy. The Commonwealth official, Peters, traced its source to a report by the Queensland police of 13 February 1913, which purported to show that 75 per cent of the Russian population were criminal escapees (NAA: 1915/11795).<sup>19</sup> Peters based his assessment on meetings with a Mr Petroff, 'an intelligent Russian draftsman who came from the East', who was of the view that no more ten per cent of those who landed were escaped criminals (NAA: 1915/11795). He also interviewed

a Mr Tardent, who had written a newspaper article explaining the circumstances surrounding the movement of the Russians to Brisbane. Mr Tardent spoke Russian and had mixed with a few of the arrivals; Peters concluded that 'on the whole they appear to be as satisfactory as any other class [of immigrant]' (NAA: 1915/11795).

The Queensland information was provided by Detective Sergeant O'Hara of the Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB). His short report to the Commissioner of Police, 30 June 1913, claimed that the Russians were criminals who passed themselves off as political offenders to obtain the sympathy of their countrymen and others once they arrived in Australia (QSA: ID318868). Moreover, gangs of criminals holding tickets to Australia had been arrested by Russian officials in the Japanese-Manchurian port of Dalny (Dalny, being Japanese territory, was not within Russia's jurisdiction). O'Hara concluded that all bona fide immigrants should have a passport signed by the Governor of the Province to which they belonged because they could not have left Russia without such a passport (NAA: 1915/11795). On request, Prince D'Abaza, the Russian Imperial Consul, advised the Department on 18 April 1913 that 'foreign passports' did not distinguish between different parts of Russia (NAA: 1915/11795). The passports to which O'Hara referred were internal passports used to determine if Russians were allowed to move within the Empire. The report was replete with other errors, but O'Hara acted in part based on information provided by D'Abaza and the Imperial Russian Consulate in Queensland, B W McDonald (QSA: ID318868). O'Hara received most, if not all, his information from one Mendrin. O'Hara did not appreciate the yellow character of Mendrin's intelligence. On 4 June 1914, he recommended that Mendrin be secured as a CIB spy based on a report Mendrin provided 18 months earlier about a gang of Russian Jewish counterfeiters. He had reported that 'one of the gang Isaac Mirkin' kept a boarding house in Woolloongabba (most likely to be Meerkin, the Minister of the Deshon Street Synagogue), and a number of Russians Jews were staying there who were believed 'to be of a most desperate type, who have little respect for life'. If remunerated, Mendrin could get in close contact with the counterfeiters. The Secretary rejected the

offer on the basis that it was 'not considered necessary, at present, that a special Russian agent should be permanently employed for police purposes' (QSA: ID318868).

Other sources on which O'Hara based his report were also suspect. In 1914 O'Hara met with a man called Erosh who claimed that the Russians were criminals and not real socialists (QSA: ID318868). But it was O'Hara's support for a young man called Bucknall that should have alerted the Police Commissioner to the character of O'Hara's reports. Bucknall, an assistant attaché of the Russian Consul in Brisbane, supplied negative information about Russians to O'Hara in 1914, especially concerning members of the Russian Club in South Brisbane (QSA: ID318869). The next year, Bucknall was charged with communicating information about troop movements to journalists at the *Herald* newspaper in Melbourne (*The Brisbane Courier* July 20 1915: 7). The newspaper's sub-editor, Kinsbury, to whom the document had been offered, had written to the Queensland Police Commissioner on 27 July 1915 and again on 23 August, setting out his concerns and warning him of Bucknall's activities (QSA: ID318868). In the meantime, CIB, through O'Hara, made its own report of the affair. The report dated 1 July 1915 observed that Bucknall had come under CIBs notice in March 1914 because he had stolen money from a Russian who could not speak English, under the pretence that he would send the money to Russia for him. Only £5 of the sum entrusted to him was sent. Though a very heavy drinker, the report insisted that Bucknall had an excellent character, and that he had provided willing and valuable assistance in connection with the provision of information about the Russian Club, which was being investigated because of its subversive political and seditious activities. In an annotation, without a trace of irony, it was observed that Bucknall was a 'very capable fellow' of considerable use to the CIB, 'but that they were very careful how far they trusted him' (QSA: ID318869).

The seed of distrust against Russians was sewn, despite subsequent Commonwealth investigations during 1916 and 1917 which showed that these and other reports about Russians were false. Sir George

Steward,<sup>20</sup> the head of the Commonwealth's Counter Espionage Bureau, found that it was actually *Mendrin* who was acting against the interests of the Commonwealth and that he should be deported. Steward's secret report to the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department noted that on about June 1916 Mendrin,<sup>21</sup> with 'Inspector Gabriel' of the Department of External Affairs, provided 'certain alarming statements' to the Censor which were 'utterly unreliable.' (NAA A35/1, A1606).<sup>22</sup> Just as he had done with O'Hara, Mendrin offered to investigate the Brisbane Russian Association. Steward found Mendrin's information was wrong and untrustworthy; he concluded, moreover, that Mendrin was supplying the same information about the Russian Association to D'Abaza.

With more than a whiff of impatience,<sup>23</sup> Steward noted that this was the third inquiry into the activities of the Russian association in two years and he was emphatically of the belief that it is 'not in any respect a menace to the commonwealth'. And in a final hurrah, before the profound shift in attitudes towards Russians that followed the Bolshevik Revolution, Steward noted that 'If these men are merely political offenders, they can naturally claim sanctuary here' (NAA: A1606). This was an ironic gesture in the extreme given that, in 1916, the Commonwealth had only just put its alien registration regime into effect with the War Precautions (Aliens Registration) Regulations 1916 (Cth) (NAA: 1916/32105) and, during 1917, cranked up the surveillance and management of aliens, including Russians, through a series of amendments to those regulations. The effect of this regime will be taken up later.

### **1915 The Mask of Name and Identity**

But Steward's reports were still two years away when my grandfather arrived in Brisbane in 1915. Three weeks before he arrived, a new Queensland Premier accepted the Commonwealth's assessment that, on the whole, Russian arrivals were, to use contemporary terminology, refugees. On 23 June 1915, the then Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, wrote to the new Premier, the barrister T J Ryan, 'on the subject of

the landing of Asiatic Russians in Queensland without passports'. Noting that the practice of requiring passports had been instituted in connection with representations made by his predecessor, the Prime Minister asked him if 'you have any objection to the withdrawal of the instructions issued to the Customs authorities in the matter'. On 5 July 1915, T J Ryan agreed, noting that he would instruct police to take no further action (NAA: 1915/11795). Instructions were sent out in July 1915 telling officers to 'not inquire whether immigrants from Asiatic Russia can produce passports' (QSA: ID319774). Three weeks later, Neplen Matanakes arrived in Brisbane. Seven years later and Morris Leiboff could not produce any documentary evidence concerning his birthplace and nationality (NAA: 1925/21468).

It is perhaps unsurprising that an individual would mask themselves and their true identity in the face of threat, but it was not threat from *Australia* that would have led Morris to assume the identity of Neplen. It was the ever present threat posed by representatives of Imperial Russia about which he needed to be cautious, and the possibility that Australia would force his return to Russia. Indeed, on 31 October 1916, Prince D'Abaza, the Russian Imperial Consul, wrote to the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs demanding that Russians be required to report to Russian consulates in order to 'establish beyond any doubt the identity and bona fides of all persons resident in the Commonwealth and claiming Russian nationality' (NAA: 1916/32105). A handwritten note on the file commented that 'this will be a very questionable course of action for us to take', a further annotation in a different hand indicated 'draft reply ... reject no power' (NAA: 1916/32105). In short, D'Abaza tried, unsuccessfully, to get the Commonwealth to spy for Imperial Russia.

It is within this frame that the legality of self as masked individual becomes problematic (Mohr 2008). The mask is important to preserve and protect an individual in the face of threat, yet the obligations and forms of legality presume, indeed insist, that a person conform to their true identity. So Morris hiding behind the mask of Neplen, for law, fails to meet the expectation of a properly constituted legal self;

he is an imposter, a fraud. The mask, as a protective device, is legally unacceptable. But as Connal Parsley has recently demonstrated, the characterisation of mask, identity and legality imposes a complex of existence that problematises these presumptions. Drawing on Agamben, he notes that:

the figure of the human is structured and produced by the *dignitas*: the image or mask which bridges the juridical, moral or 'natural' person, and the condition of their appearance within law and political life ... '*Persona* originally means "mask" and it is through the mask that the individual acquires a role and a social identity' ... The tradition of thinking the person from the direction of the mask and its categories of appearance is a long one, and it is marked by a tightly sedimented correlation between these two senses — metaphysical-moral and politico-juridical — of the 'person'. Within that tradition, the mask or *persona* is a technic — a device, *dispositif* or apparatus — through which a juridical relation to life comes to be engendered (2010: 12).

*Persona* that exists outside law is one which is always subject to the potential to be unmasked, and subjected to the strictures of law through a failure of self. False names (and false passports) were almost *de rigueur* for Russians in Australia (Stedman 1979: 201). The Russian Anzac, Moisey Kotton sought to exculpate any negative connotations that may be drawn from his use of a false moniker — Max Kotton — after his arrival from Russia via the 'Far East' because he was scared that he would be returned to Russia (Govor 2005: 59). It may be assumed that my grandfather experienced the same concerns.

But the mask of an identity that fails to conform to law is fraught with danger, and the alien's registration regime outlawed their use. The *Cairns Post* gleefully headlined a report that an Armenian, Simon Petroff, had falsely registered himself under the Alien Registration Act [sic] as 'Louis Francis, born in France of Russian parentage', as 'Another "Off" discovered: Bolshevist Agent run to Earth' (playing on the suffix 'off' in Russian surnames) (*The Cairns Post* 16 August 1919: 2).<sup>24</sup> My grandfather also reclaimed his own name of Morris Leiboff without informing the authorities in advance as required. He belatedly advised the Aliens Registration Officer at Beenleigh on 10 July 1920 that he

intended to change his name to Morris Leiboff under regulation 9A of the War Precautions (Aliens Registration) Regulations 1916 (Cth). He was well out of time, but no action was taken against him. 'Neplen', having retained one of Brisbane's most established law firms, had already successfully changed his name by deed poll to Morris Leiboff, executed by the Registrar of the Supreme Court, on 19 April 1920.

This requirement to advise of a change of name was not, however, merely bureaucratic. On 15 July 1920, Queensland Police Commissioner Urquhart (who incidentally had been injured by one of his own men in the infamous Red Flag Riots the year before) informed a certain Captain Ainsworth by letter of my grandfather's name change (NAA: Russian Leiboff M). What the letter does not reveal is that Captain Ainsworth had been appointed in 1917 as a secret intelligence officer to counter the action of any foreign agents operating in Queensland (NAA: G F Ainsworth reports). Ainsworth was the Commonwealth's chief spy in Queensland, and was still acting under a regime established in 1916 to monitor aliens in Australia.

### **1916 A Registered Alien**

On 1 October 1916, the War Precautions (Aliens Registration) Regulations 1916 (Cth) ('the regulations') came into force;. This meant that from 31 October 1916, all except exempt aliens had to be registered with the authorities. Aliens had to complete a range of forms covering everything from initial registration to changes of address. Once registered, aliens had to notify alien registration officers *after* they changed their usual place of abode, and a form was supplied to them at the time of registration for this purpose. Moreover, every keeper of a hotel, inn, boarding house or lodging house had to maintain a register of all aliens staying there, including their name, arrival and departure date, and previous place of abode. Every alien had to produce their certificate of registration to an officer on demand. Failure to do so would result in a penalty of £100 or six months imprisonment. An officer could question anyone suspected of being an alien about his name, nationality, place of living, movements or business, and

any failure to answer or provide false misleading information would constitute an offence.

Despite their seeming comprehensiveness, the regulations were quickly found to be wanting. They were amended fourteen times before being replaced by the *Aliens Registration Act* 1920 (Cth). The most significant amendments occurred in 1917,<sup>25</sup> including a requirement that took effect from June 1917 that aliens had to use a new Form E to report to police *prior* to moving from their old abode to a new place of abode.

Neplen Matanakes registered with the police on 14 October 1916 at South Brisbane, and was issued with Certificate No. 20. The certificate contains an official record about my grandfather at the time. He lived at Brook Street, South Brisbane and his birthplace was vaguely listed as 'near Moscow, Russia' (he either decided to not name Nizhny Novgorod or it was too hard for the police officer to type). He was a tailor and had entered the Commonwealth on 13 October 1915 (it was actually 10 October). His date of birth was listed (incorrectly) as 26 February 1890, he was 5'5", with hazel eyes, brown hair and no distinguishing marks, a stout build, dark complexion, and was clean shaven.

Queensland went about its job of registering and prosecuting aliens with vigour. By 19 November 1918, 18,348 aliens were registered there, 1234 informations for offences had been reported, and 1124 convictions recorded with fines ranging from 10/- to £20.<sup>26</sup> At the time, average weekly earnings were about £3. Noting that 44 cases had been withdrawn, ten dismissed and the balance pending, the report's author was pleased to note that 'this record, from the Commonwealth point of view is, in my opinion, a very creditable one.' (NAA: W26/241). Included in the tally of convictions was one Neplen Matanakes.

My grandfather had travelled on business to Mount Morgan, a rich mining town 600 km from Brisbane on the Tropic of Capricorn, just inland from Rockhampton, where he moved into the Grand Hotel. The town had a considerable Russian population which had been drawn there to work in the mines, but he was there in his capacity as a tailor. Mt Morgan had a poisonous attitude towards Russians, however, and



he may have been unaware that in 1916 members of the Mount Morgan Russian Association had sought help from the government because of victimisation. It was also claimed that the Mount Morgan Company requested that Russians working for them produce passports or lose their jobs. There were also claims that the police in the town were antagonistic towards Russians (NAA: 1915/11795).

On 13 October 1917, four months after the 1917 amendments to the regulations took effect, my grandfather reported to the police station at Mount Morgan to tell them of his change of abode and submit a Form C for this purpose. He then spent the night in the police lock-up; he had failed to use the new Form E to inform the South Brisbane police *before* he left for Mount Morgan (NAA: Russian Leiboff M). My grandfather was prosecuted and the case reported in a short paragraph in the Rockhampton newspaper (*The Morning Bulletin* November 15 1917: 10).

.Neplen appeared before Acting Police Magistrate Lindsay at the Mount Morgan Police Court where he pleaded guilty. The prosecutor said that the breach had not been committed with the intention of evading the authorities, but in ignorance. Mount Morgan, as it turns out from a perusal of local newspapers, vigorously prosecuted these kinds of infringements which were seemingly disregarded elsewhere. Neplen was fined 10/- and 3/- 6d costs, at the bottom of the scale for these offences, and well below the threshold for deportation. Morris would have had no reason to think that he had any grounds on which he could have argued the case, but nor would he have wanted to draw more attention to himself than was necessary. He would not have wanted to have been the subject of an investigation that would see him unmasked and returned to Russia. Curiously, all my family knew was that my grandfather was locked up in Mount Morgan for failing to report to the police. What none of us knew, of course, was that he was jailed as Neplen.

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Figure 4: Morris Leiboff (centre right, standing) at a picnic near Yeppoon central Queensland c 1918. This colourised postcard is redolent of the picnic scenes in the Norman Lindsay trilogy – *Redheap* (1930), *Saturdee* (1933) and *Halfway to Anywhere* (1947), an irony given Lindsay’s antipathies – or worse – towards Russians and Jews.



My grandfather left Mount Morgan for Rockhampton the day after his case was heard, and reported at Rockhampton three days later, on 17 November 1917. He lived in the Central Queensland city until he returned to Brisbane in February 1920, before moving to Beenleigh, then a small town to Brisbane’s south. He was not in Brisbane during the Red Flag Riots, and only returned to the city in March 1921, moving first to Hope Street in South Brisbane before making his final move, as an alien, to Fisher Street in East Brisbane in August 1921.

### 1920 Reclaiming Morris and the Step to Naturalisation

As noted earlier, Neplen changed his name to Morris by deed poll. The Notice of this change was dated 12 June 1920 and published by his solicitors, Morris & Fletcher, on page 7 of *The Brisbane Courier* on Saturday 19 June 1920. The notice states that his birth name was Neplen Matanakes, but he had also been known as ‘Neplen Morris Matanakes’.

He would be known only as Morris Leiboff from 7 June (*The Brisbane Courier* June 19 1920, 7; NAA: 1925/21468). There is a delicious irony here: Morris resorted to law to rehabilitate and claim his identity and, in doing so, drew upon the law as a device and technique to act for and not against him. He, in a sense, continued to live behind the mask, to claim that his false name was indeed his birth name or 'Christian' name. Yet none of us knows whether he was known as Morris in Russia or if this was an Anglicised version of his name, but his decision to return to his own surname (albeit with the transliterated suffix 'off') could now be made safely; three years after the Russian Revolution and he was now seemingly secure and no longer threatened by the now non-extant Imperial Russia.

Figure 5: Morris Leiboff (top right) c 1925



The return to the Leiboff name was a prelude to Morris applying to be naturalised as a British subject in 1922, which would give him a

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new status. The documents contained in his application uncover some more details about *Morris*. His date of birth is now revealed as two days *later* than claimed originally; his father's surname is Leiboff, he was born in Nizhny Novgorod, and his nationality was that of Russian Jew. His naturalisation application was made under the *Nationality Act 1920* (Cth); he had to show that he spoke English, that two British subjects had known him for at least five years, and that *their* characters could be supported by a Justice of the Peace. Two men, including his business partner, Mr Holman, testified to his good character, and their characters were also of good repute (NAA: 1925/21468). His reasons for applying for naturalisation were to attain the rights of citizenship and acquire property. He had published notices in both the Brisbane newspapers the *Daily Standard* and the *Telegraph* advertising his intention to be naturalised. He renounced his Russian nationality and took the oath of allegiance before a Police Magistrate on 22 July 1922. He was now a British subject.

Figure 6: Morris Leiboff (top left) c 1932. This is an 'outtake' of a more formal photograph of the staff in his factory in Adelaide Street Brisbane



But Morris was now also asserting his legal interests. Three weeks before he was naturalised, on 30 June 1922, the son of one of Holman and Leiboff's contractors pleaded guilty to stealing property belonging to them (*The Brisbane Courier* July 1 1922: 9). Morris was no longer under the eye of the law, but he would deploy the law to protect and assert his rights and interests.

In 1924, Morris was living within the boundaries of Russian colony in Church Lane, Woolloongabba. He had married my grandmother Sonia that year but no extant documents exist with respect to her arrival in Australia. Also from Russia, Sonia had lived in Harbin from around 1910, but none of us know how she knew my grandfather. After the ban on Russians coming to Australia was overturned, she came to Australia. Morris was also able to bring his mother, Rebecca, to Australia. Rebecca (my great-grandmother) arrived in Brisbane in 1925 (NAA: Leibova R).<sup>27</sup> But unlike the circumstances of her son's arrival, Rebecca Leiboff - or Leibova - carried a visaed passport issued, now, by the Soviet Union. Rebecca had to forfeit her passport on arrival in Australia to deny a repeat of the Harbin conduit in passports between China and Australia.

Rebecca's passport sat unnoticed for 85 years until I opened the plain brown envelope which revealed one of the earliest passports used by a Russian woman travelling to Australia. This document conformed to the requirements imposed by the Commonwealth Department of Home and Territories, established in 1917, including the requirement that a photograph had to be duly affixed and stamped, which occurred during transit at Harbin. Her photograph was supplemented with a description — she was a widow, had white hair, grey eyes, was of medium height, and had an ordinary nose.

The passport was written in both Russian Cyrillic and French (the former incomprehensible to me, the latter a language I can read). When I transliterated her name in its Cyrillic form into Latin characters, it conformed to the French transliteration of her name — Leibova, the feminised version of the patronymic Leibov, rendered into the phonetic Leiboff in English. This was the first time I had seen my name in its

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original, now understanding its spelling and pronunciation. Morris had reclaimed his name and identity by returning to his Russian name, my own name bearing the conscious traces of his identity and movement nearly 100 years ago.

## Notes

- 1 My thanks to the staff of the National Archives of Australia in Brisbane, particularly Greg Poole, who were preparing a seminar on the migration of Russians to Queensland when I arrived looking for files relating to Morris Leiboff and Rebecca Leiboff in January 2011. The staff of the Fryer Library, University of Queensland, directed me to the Poole-Fried collection, an extensive resource about Russians in Queensland, and the staff at the Queensland State Archives patiently found a vast array of material for me. I would like to thank my colleague Charles Chew and student Olga Stoutchilina for translating Mandarin and Russian sources respectively. My special thanks must go to my father, Moses Leiboff, for telling me stories about my grandfather, and providing the photographs used in this account. I thank Nan Seuffert and Tahu Kukutai: what started as a personal curiosity about my grandfather's early life in Australia turned into a full-blown exploration of the treatment of a group of 'mobile people under the eye of the law'.
- 2 This introductory account has been sourced as follows: Morris Leiboff Statutory Declaration, 17 May 1922 (NAA: A1, 1925/21468), and a report that the *SS Empire* arrived in Brisbane from Kobe, Japan on 10 August 1915 (*The Brisbane Courier* 11 August 1915: 4). *The Brisbane Courier* contained numerous advertisements and reports about the Brisbane National Show over that week; it is unknown if Neplen/Morris had any idea about the events going on in Brisbane the week he arrived. The name 'Neplen Matanakes' is in a listing of all Russians in Brisbane (including naturalised Russians) as an attachment to a letter dated 2 October 1919 from the Chief Secretary, Premier's Department, Queensland. It was compiled in the aftermath of the Red Flag Riots: see '1919' (QSA: ID862699). The listing is inaccurate: it lists Neplen as arriving in the Commonwealth on 13 August 1914 when he arrived 13 August 1915; and it reports that he was lived in Brisbane when he lived in Rockhampton in 1919 and only returned to Brisbane in 1920 (NAA: Russian Leiboff M).

- 3 I use 'Russia' and 'Russian' to denote the state and geographic locality.
- 4 The passengers on the *SS Empire* who arrived on 1 August 1915 comprised *two* Russians and ten Chinese. Twenty-four named passengers departed the same day including Mrs Chown and infant, Mesdames O'Dowd and Donaldson, 'and *three* Russians' (*Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 5 August 1915: 8).
- 5 In 1917 the population in the Brisbane area was 173,504 (*Commonwealth Yearbook 1918*: 124).
- 6 The Russian General Consul in Australia in 1914 reported that there were 12,000 people from the Russian empire in Australia out of a total population of 4.5 million (Govor 1997).
- 7 This number is deduced from the list described at note 2 above. The document's purpose was to firstly, list all Russians and, secondly, identify those who were members of the Russian Association and/or were assumed to have Bolshevik links. Like most of those listed, Neplen had no mark against his name.
- 8 By 1919, a Russian Jewish Worker's Association and a Russian Jewish Association existed; it is unknown when they were established (*The Brisbane Courier* Friday 12 March 1920: 4).
- 9 My grandfather occasionally misspelt his signature 'Matakes' on his alien registration forms (confirmed as his hand by my father).
- 10 Not everything can be obtained through the archives. Morris's deed poll application is subject to a 100 year non-disclosure rule; the same information is freely accessible through extant newspaper records and other archival sources.
- 11 Brisbane was unified in 1925 from existing councils and shires including South Brisbane, a process that started in 1915.
- 12 Letters and documents to the Commonwealth demanded the deportation of Russians and complained about the 'increase of Russians in Queensland'. Russians were prevented from arriving in Australia in 1917 (NAA: W26/241 Brisbane Riots; Trouble in Queensland and Question of Russian Colony; Queensland Disloyalty).
- 13 Easter is commemorated at roughly the same time as the Jewish Passover and is not part of Judaism. By the late 1920s a number of Russians joined the anglicised Brisbane synagogue, including Morris, prompted by political

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and personal antagonisms; the Brisbane synagogue and its social events figured with those of other denominations in the social pages of the newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s.

- 14 This report is scathing about Irish recruits to the Queensland police force and their loyalty, an observation that marks the report as one of Steward's, who was hostile to Sinn Fein.
- 15 My imperfect rendering of the Russian word is purely phonetic and is not a transliteration. It is likely to be wrong.
- 16 His wife, my great-grandmother Rebecca, was born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1857 (NAA: BP313/1, Leibova R).
- 17 Morris/Neplen, his mother Rebecca (in 1925) and 'uncle' Alexander (in 1927), transited through Harbin; my grandmother's family lived there from around 1910 until the mid-1920s.
- 18 Orlov, a professor, became Kluchin, who carried sides of beef at the Cannon Hill meatworks; Skvirsky, a highly educated and qualified lecturer, became Taranov-Skvirsky, a labourer who cleaned railway carriages; Alexy (the Consul), who arrived bearing a theatre program, worked on the railway in North Queensland and was dead within a year (Stedman 1979: 202).
- 19 Memorandum 13/11772, 25 August 1913
- 20 The Governor-General's official secretary, Steward, established the Counter Espionage Branch to hunt out members of the International Workers of the World and members of Sinn Fein (Cunneen 1990). He was particularly scathing about Irish police in Queensland.
- 21 25 April 1917 (NAA A35/1, A1606)
- 22 Steward clearly did not trust Gabriel. In the same secret letter to the secretary to the Prime Minister of 5 March 1917, he observed that there are 'good reasons why "Inspector Gabriel" should not be consulted in this matter, and under no circumstances should he be informed of the reference of these papers to me, nor encouraged to interfere with these matters'.
- 23 Memo 17/2785/3, 24 April 1917 (NAA A35/1, A1606)
- 24 At least 27 'Petroffs' are listed in this period in the archives. It is unlikely to be the same Petroff Mr Peters met six years earlier.
- 25 Commonwealth Statutory Rules Nos 7, 97, 107, 125, 156, 260 of 1917



- 26 In its secret report on 'Conditions in Queensland', 21 December 1918, it was noted that they had 'continued to receive every assistance' from the Queensland Commissioner of Police and his officer in connection with the administration of the Aliens Registration Regulations.
- 27 Until her passport was brought to me, none of us knew what document the National Archives in Brisbane held on her. None of us had seen a photograph of her. The archivist who advised me about her file was astonished and excited by her passport. It was the earliest passport he had seen of a Russian *woman*. This document was a large piece of folded paper and was valid for only one year. But it was retained by the government all the same; the document could have been sent out of the country like the passports of Russians a decade earlier.

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