

How Many Australians Tomorrow?

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Excerpts

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I have written this book provocatively without regard for whom it hurts or pleases, because I think it my duty to awaken my fellow Australians to the perils that will always hang over them unless this land is peopled to its carrying capacity.

If the experience of the Pacific War has taught us one thing, it surely is that seven million Australians cannot hold three million square miles of this earth's surface indefinitely. We shall indeed be fortunate if our right to possess this continent is not challenged again in 25 or 30 years - maybe even sooner. Australia can increase her population three-fold or more and provide full employment and adequate standards of living for everybody. We have known that fact for nearly half a century, but we have lived in a world of illusion and never thought that with even that number of people would have difficulty in keeping an invader from our shores.

Population is our number one problem. If we are prepared to bleed slowly to death in the national sense, as we have been doing for more than a decade, our end is certain and inevitable. If, on the other hand, we are determined to develop our country, maintain and increase its living standards, and avoid depressions, those of us who will be alive when the next storm breaks over the Pacific Ocean may have less reason to be as apprehensive than we were about our lives and our liberties when the Japanese stood on

the wrong side of the Owen Stanley Range less than 40 miles from Port Moresby - and when bombs were falling on Broome and Townsville, and Darwin was being reduced to rubble.

Others have put forth their views on population increase and immigration in books and pamphlets, notably, A. E. Mander in "Alarming Australia," J. H. Gaffney in "Populate or Perish," Rev. Fr. Mayne in "Exit Australia," and W. D. Forsyth in "The Myth of Open Spaces." Dr. J. Gentile, Lecturer in Statistics in the University of Western Australia, Mr. W. D. Borrie, Lecturer in Social History in the University of Sydney, and Dr. W. G. K. Duncan have made their contributions in various articles. Professor G. L. Wood, of the Melbourne University, is one of others who have lectured from time to time on immigration. The Workers' Educational Association have published a number of pamphlets dealing with this problem.

I set forth, in the following pages, my interpretations of the same facts and figures as were used by the people I have mentioned in the hope that our combined contributions will do something to awaken the consciousness of present-day Australia to the fate that awaits it if our population problem is not solved.

Arthur A. Calwell,
Minister for Immigration and Information.

Chapter 1 Population

"For when men gave themselves up to pretentiousness and indolence, and would neither marry nor rear children born from marriage, or at most only one or two, in order to leave these rich and bring them up in luxury, the evil soon spread imperceptibly, but with rapid growth.

"In our own time the whole of Greece has been subject to a low birthrate and a general decrease of population, owing to which cities have become desolate and the land has ceased to yield fruit, although there have been neither continuous wars nor epidemics."

Polybius (B.C. 204-124)

I wonder how many of us have ever thought how much we Australians are like the koalas. We both belong to dying races and both are well on the way to becoming museum pieces, along with the extinct moa and great auk.

When Captain Cook sailed along our coast there were many millions of native bears; today, there are only a few thousands. In 1945 there are over 7,000,000 Australians; but by 1965 there will be only about 8,000,000 if we go on reproducing at our present rate.

And after that, according to the statisticians, our population will come to a standstill and get smaller and smaller every year.

Unless we do something about it.

The koalas don't know they face extinction; nor, for that matter, do most of us. For years we've heard the slogan "Populate or Perish," and it has become part of the small talk to be used jokingly whenever we talk of population problems.

But it is really no joking matter. We need more people to defend our continent and to develop its resources. A population of 15,000,000, for instance, would at least treble the industrial output of Australia, according to the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.

Even more important than the defence argument is the fact that any country which can't maintain itself by its own efforts without the adrenalin of immigration is necessarily unstable; there is something wrong somewhere, and if we want to preserve and improve our society, we shall have to seek out the causes of declining fertility and remove them.

We face the gloomy future of being a small nation surrounded by many millions of other peoples looking enviously at our large continent.

At Canberra, towards the end of November, the National Health and Medical Research Committee told us:

"Data indicates that natural increase in population will dwindle rapidly after 1950, and by about 1980 deaths will exceed births... In about 20 years the population will reach 8,000,000, remain temporarily stationary and then decline, returning to the present level about the end of the century."

That, of course, leaves immigration out of it, but we shouldn't hope for too much there; and, in any case, immigration when our birthrate is tumbling does not, and cannot, arrest the decline. Immigration in such a case is only a palliative - not a cure. Moreover, the best migrant is the native-born child.

Here are some of the facts behind the warning of the National Health and Medical Research Committee.

Australian mothers were not bearing enough children in the 10 years before the war to replace us in the next generation - let alone increase our numbers. In order to replace a generation each marriage should have an average of two and a half children.

The half is to provide against what we might call accidents: some children die and some people don't marry or don't have children if they do.

In 1939 the average Australian family had 2.2 children; the figure dropped below the critical 2.5 after 1930.

You can get a good picture of what has happened from these figures:-

Year	Average size of families
1875	6 children
1905	4 children
1925	3 children
1930	2.5 children
1939	2.2 children

Nor is this the full picture. The age structure of a population is important. At the moment we have comparatively few old people. But it will not always be so. We are what the experts on these questions call an "ageing" people - that is, the number of old people is increasing rapidly, and the number of young people is decreasing. This always happens when birthrates are slumping.

That means that each year the number of potential mothers will be getting smaller. At present about 63,000 girls turn 18 each year; by 1950 (if present trends persist) there will be 50,000 reaching 18.

These census figures show what has been happening:-

Proportion of Population.

	% under 15	% 15 - 65	% 65 <
1871	42.09	56.17	1.74
1901	35.14	60.88	3.98
1933	27.48	66.04	6.48

In the six years before the outbreak of war the number of people over 45 in the community increased 250,000; those between 15 and 45 rose by 180,000; the number of children under 15 fell by 100,000.

If you check up on the average age of men and women, you will find the same thing. The average age of men rose between 1921 and 1933 from 28.54 to 30.44 years, and that of women from 28.29 to 30.62 years.

Here is the serious aspect of an "ageing" population - there will be fewer potential mothers year by year, and therefore each mother

will have to bear more children in the future than in the past, if the stock of mothers is not to grow smaller.

The average mother, according to the experts, must in the near future bear four children if we are to increase our numbers.

In 1860 we had a robust crude birthrate of 42.6 in the thousand. This is how it has slumped since:-

1870	— 38.7
1880	— 35.3
1890	— 35
1900	— 27.3
1910	— 26.7
1920	— 25.5
1930	— 19.9
1940	— 19

The 1939 birthrate was 17.6. I know some of you find it hard to believe the situation is really as bad as this. I assure you it is. But (you are saying) the number of births in 1944 (153,346) was a record. That's true; but the conditions today are abnormal. The statisticians fear that the present crude birthrate of 20.99 (for year ending 31st December 1944) will not be retained for very long; they point out that the increase is largely due to first births; and, as we saw earlier, the trouble is not that we lack first and second births, but third and fourth births. Moreover, the experts point out that the marriage rate is now 12 in the thousand, but has seldom exceeded 8 in the past. In other words, there are a lot of war marriages.

If the 1914 natural increase in births over deaths could have been maintained during the last 20 years, we would have nearly a million more people today.

The war has shown us - if it wasn't clear before - that our numbers are dangerously thin for the defence of 2,974,581 square miles and 12,210 miles of coast. We could not have fended off the Japanese without America's aid. With their help we have pushed back our enemies. We have a breathing space and a second chance to set our

house in order. History will tell what use we make of that second chance to survive.

If we don't - well, enemies need not launch planes, robombs and invasion craft against our coasts - they need only sit down and wait patiently for us to die out.

Perhaps there are some optimists who think that 1965 is a long way off and that something may turn up - like a win in a lottery. Well, you know the story of the idiot optimist who fell out of a 12th storey window; as he passed the third storey he was heard to exclaim: "Well, I'm all right so far!"

In one important thing we Australians differ from the koalas. We can arrest our fate; we can do something about it. The koalas can't. They can only sit in their gum trees and wait for things to happen. We can get down off our perches and help to shape our fate.

It is clear Australia has too few people. How many then should she have - or more realistically how many can she have because it does amount to that.

In the past some people talked airily of 100,000,000 Australians.

These "prophecies" were based on a naive belief that ours was a land of rich empty spaces and that there were millions of migrants to be plucked out of the air.

In an aptly-named book "The Myth of Open Spaces" (1942) Mr. W. D. Forsyth debunked both of these beliefs. He pointed out that in one hundred and fifty years of settlement less than 10 per cent of our land has been thought worth purchasing and that today not much more than one per cent is cultivated; and that over one-third remains "entirely unoccupied because it is economically valueless."

He showed, too, that the main springs of our migrants, in the past (chiefly British) were drying up; there were no millions but a few thousands which we would have to compete

strenuously for.

The truth is that Australia is a comparatively "poor" land - though not as poor as some. We inherited a dry continent, poorly supplied with great rivers, with few areas of perpetual snow, without a single glacier, with potential catchment areas of low elevation. Here are figures of our average annual rainfall distribution:-

Rainfall	Square Miles.
Under 10 inches	1,067,357
10 to 15 inches	603,605
15 to 20 inches	358,458
20 to 25 inches	308,881
25 to 30 inches	225,885
30 to 40 inches	213,195
Over 40 inches	194,423
Total area	= 2,971,804

These rainfall figures show, then, that more than a third of our land area has an average rainfall under 10 inches a year, and that more than half has less than 15.

This continent of ours must be farmed scientifically; its water and its soil conserved. It is going to be a full-time job. Let us make no mistake about that.

While Mr. S. M. Bruce and others were talking rosily of 100,000,000 Australians, the scientists were talking more quietly, claiming that Australia could carry about 20,000,000. They arrived at this figure by considering the geographical and physical features of Australia, by our capacity to produce clothing and food and export goods which could be used to purchase food and clothing, and still preserve a reasonably high standard of living.

All such estimates, of course, are to some extent hazardous because it is impossible to guess what technological improvement in agriculture and industry will be made in the next few decades.

It is quite possible Australia could support

100,000,000 people on a high standard of living. But the 20,000,000 goal is more realistic and may even then be beyond us unless we strive hard.

There's one last point I want to make. We shall be more secure if we have 20,000,000 Australians but mere numbers aren't enough. The security of all nations of the world depends on the collective goodwill of all.

Chapter 2 How We Reached Our Seven Million

“For in cases where there was only a child or two in a family for war or disease to carry off, the inevitable consequence was that houses were left desolate, and (Greek) cities by degrees became like deserted hives. There is no need to consult the Gods about the mode of deliverance from this evil. Any man would tell us that the first thing we have to do is to change our habits and to rear children.”

Polybius (B.C. 204-124)

Now, what is happening in Australia isn't unique. It is happening among all European and European-descended nations where there is a high standard of living and a highly industrialized economy.

It will help us to understand our Australian population problem if we look at the growth of world populations in the last few hundred years.

A certain amount of guesswork enters when we go back before 1800 because there are no reliable figures. Even with world figures today there is bound to be at least a 10 per cent margin of error in any estimate. In themselves these possibilities don't matter so much because, as we'll see, rates of increase will be more interesting than exact totals.

Probably, the most accurate estimate of world growth is that of Professor Carr Saunders in his book "World Population." Here it is:-

Continent	(Millions)					
	Year					
	1650	1750	1800	1850	1900	1933
Europe	100	140	187	266	401	519
North America Central and South America	1	1.3	5.7	26	81	137
Oceania	12	11.1	18.9	33	63	125
Africa	2	2	2	2	6	10
	100	95	90	95	120	145

Chapter 4 Remedies

Part 1. - What About Immigration?

“If you want us, we'll come. But both parties have to take trouble about each other, and to be intelligent.”

Lieut.-Colonel I. M. English, an English Army Officer, in The Argus, March 17, 1945.

This chapter and the following one have caused me some of my hardest thinking. It isn't easy even to suggest what lines a population policy might take; I don't pretend to know all the answers because we are all searching for them. But I have attempted to outline the problem and possible remedies in the hope that our thinking will not be muddy and unrealistic.

Some may think my review of immigration is unduly pessimistic: I do not think we can hope to overcome the population crisis by a retreat into Cloud Cuckoo Land with rosy visions of hundreds of thousands of migrants clamoring to be let in.

So with the problem of natural increase; if we're to get anywhere we must probe deeply to get to the root of the disease of a declining fertility.

That is why my previous two chapters have gone into so much detail; they should furnish us with a reasonably solid background in discussing migration and the problem of stepping up our birthrate.

C. Hartley Grattan (probably the best informed of all Americans about Australia) says this in

"Introducing Australia" (1942):

"There are signs that Australia is reverting during the present war to the easy optimism about immigration prospects (preferably British immigrants) which beguiled her during the last war and on into the ensuing peace. How false these hopes turned out to be, what millions of money were wasted trying to turn them into reality, what a number of disgruntled people were finally assisted to emigrate from Australia - all these things are being forgotten.

"There will be just as many difficulties after this war. The emigrants from Europe, who will be numerous, will hardly appeal to the Australians. The types they want either will not want to emigrate or will be induced by their governments at home to participate in reconstruction."

Here I think we might go again over some of the ground we covered earlier. In 1788 Australia had slightly over 1,000 people; in 1870 1,500,000; and in 1939 about 7,250,000.

Our big period of growth by immigration was during the 'fifties and early 'sixties of the last century when the gold discoveries boosted our population from 400,000 to 1,100,000 by 1860.

Here are some figures showing our net gains by immigration over various periods:

	Net immigration	Yearly average of period
1788-1851	317,000	4,905
1852-1861	554,000	55,400
1861-1900	763,989	19,099
1901-1930	561,029	18,700
1931-1940	31,242	3,224

Compare the 1852-1861 and 1931-1940 figures.

From 1788 to 1861 immigration supplied 74 per cent of our country's growth; in the last 40 years natural increase has provided 82 per cent.

After some good years following the first world

war, immigration dwindled to a trickle in the last decade, indeed, during 1931-1935 because of the depression, 10,886 more people left Australia than came in.

Even during the 50 years of "buoyant and unrestricted immigration" from 1842 to 1891, the net annual average gain by immigration was only 29,300 a year.

If we want immigrants we shall have to make Australia so attractive that they will want to settle here. An attractive Australia will be one that will guarantee them full employment and an assured future; moreover, it will be one that will be friendly towards newcomers. I don't want to be critical, but we haven't been as friendly to immigrants, say, from Britain in the past as we might have been; for one thing, we should immediately drop that nickname "pommy", which so many British people find offensive.

Unless we make Australia very attractive with good housing, work, security, emigrants from Europe may prefer to go to North or South America - if only for the reason that these lands are closer to the old world.

In the past most of our immigrants came from Britain; moreover, most of them were in the 18 to 30 age group. Today, this possible supply of young migrants has dwindled; Britain's birthrate has been falling even more seriously than our own. The average mother, as I pointed out before, should bear two and a half children to replace the present population in the next generation; today, the average English mother is bearing about 1.8 children as against our pre-war 2.2. A falling birthrate means, as I pointed out earlier, an ageing population, and more older and fewer young people. Indeed, Dr. Enid Charles predicts that by 1980 one person in every three in Britain will be over 65. This means that Britain can ill afford to lose emigrants and will make every attempt to keep her people at home.

Moreover, that factor which many believe to have been the great motivating force behind

emigration from Britain in the past - fear of over-population - will not exist in a post-war Britain.

Mr. W. D. Forsyth in "The Myth of Open Spaces," after a careful analysis of the possibilities of immigration from Britain, arrives at the conclusion that "it is unlikely that British people will be available in significant numbers."

We have been slow to realise this although British committees on immigration before the war advised the Dominions that they would have to look to non-British sources for substantial supplies of immigrants.

As against these factors, there is a very strong one in our favour. "Lieut.-Colonel I. M. English," an English Army officer who has been stationed out here, claimed in the Melbourne "Argus" on March 17th that there were tens of thousands of young people in Britain who wanted to get away from England and the quarrels of Europe.

"Colonel English" wrote:

"An increasing number of English men and women are anxious after the war to get out of England to settle abroad. One of the first places they think of is, naturally, Australia.

"This desire to emigrate is much larger than is generally supposed. Careful researches into the subject by the social research group known as Mass Observation, and by other bodies, suggests that the number of potential emigrants from Great Britain runs into hundreds of thousands, including some of the pick of the men and women in the services, particularly the younger ones. That is just what your population needs, of course, if it is to grow and prosper - as most Australians now apparently agree it should do.

"These younger and brighter people want to get abroad largely because they feel that Europe is going to be in a frightful mess after the war. They are fed up with the squabbles and uncertainties of Europe. They want a society with more security, more opportunity, and more equality. Australia can offer

all these things, and in abundance. I have not the least doubt that if Australia set about it the right way it could attract surprising numbers of these people. It could attract them even if the English Government did not want them to go. After all, ours is a democracy, and this is all one Empire."

It is pointed out in the Post-War Reconstruction Booklets that even if we could get large numbers of British people it might be a shortsighted policy to look to Britain alone. Britain needs her people and it may well be that "a strong Britain may again be a very important factor in Australia's future security."

What do you think?

Some will say, what about immigrants from Northern Europe? Norway, Sweden and Denmark have altogether only 13,000,000 people and they have falling birthrates. They also have high standards of living and advanced social services. Moreover, comparatively few Scandinavians have left their countries in recent years.

Others talk optimistically of getting immigrants from the United States - a few Americans may come back here after the war but we should not expect any great outward flood of people from a country that is the world's greatest creditor nation and has a very high standard of living.

Mr. Forsyth suggests that future emigration may be possible from Holland, Eire, Italy, Poland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria and Russia because these countries are still more than replacing themselves each generation, although here too, birthrates are slowly falling.

From the other European countries, the prospects aren't good. War weariness and political conditions may cause some to emigrate, of course, but most governments will try to keep them home.

Immigration from Central, Eastern and Southern Europe is a controversial question, but we would do well to look the facts full in the face. Britain and most of Northern Europe have

tumbling birthrates and consequently fewer possible emigrants. But Poland and Bulgaria are more than reproducing themselves.

The Southern and Eastern European immigrant question is set out squarely in the post-war Discussion Notes on "People," issued by the Department of PostWar Reconstruction; I quote from the fourth and final booklet at some length:

"In Southern Europe reproduction rates were still above replacement level before the war, and the majority of the emigrants from Europe were going from these areas. It should be noted that Southern Europe supplied over 30,000,000 immigrants to the United States of America over the last 5 years, and that Italians and Greeks provided the bulk of permanent settlers in Australia from 1929 to 1937 - during which years, incidentally, more British settlers left this country than entered it.

"Southern Europe may thus provide us with some immigrants. But are Australians willing to accept more of these people if settlers are not available from British sources?

"We have to make up our minds now. If we want thousands of migrants we will have to liberalise our whole outlook towards non-British people and be prepared to help them become assimilated to our way of life. We cannot pick and choose as we have done in the past, but we must be prepared instead to take more of the limited number of people offering. Are we prepared to face such a change of attitude?"

By the way, the world-famous Professor Carr-Saunders has made this comment on our treatment of aliens:-

"The trouble which Australians experience with aliens is not unconnected with their attitude towards foreigners, which cannot be regarded as welcoming or encouraging. France, whose tolerance is well-known, has little difficulty. The same was true of Americans until recently."

Both the statements I have quoted must force us into some hard thinking. What are we going to do?

Even if we can get immigrants of the kind we want, there is still the problem of absorption. Australia today is highly urbanised with only one worker in every five directly on the land; the typical Australian is no longer a farmer or a drover, but a factory hand or a clerk. We shall have to ensure an expanding economy in the post-war years - more factories, new industries, decentralisation and so on. So you see that the success of immigration, like everything else, is tied up with how we solve our immediate post-war problems.

One of the advantages of the Commonwealth Government's child migration plans which were announced at the end of 1944 by the then Acting Prime Minister, Mr. Forde, is that these children will not immediately be competitors in the employment field. Moreover, children are more adaptable than adults.

When we bring alien children here they can be more readily assimilated, will learn English and will absorb the Australian point of view more quickly than adults.

The plan is to bring at least 17,000 children a year, and I hope the number will be increased to 50,000 a year. It is gratifying to read that the London "Daily Sketch" has hailed Australia as the coming "greatest foster-father of children the world has known"; but the "Sketch" also warns us that "there is no vast pool of children: child welfare groups interested in emigration number their children in dozens or scores, while Australia is to deal in thousands."

This plan is but a first instalment of a broad immigration policy now being formulated by Cabinet and its advisers.

We must be realistic. Let us try to entice all the immigrants we can absorb; we need all the people we can gain this way. But we must not lose sight of this important point: that even if we could absorb 70,000 immigrants a year (and I'm sure we can), our numbers would only reach about 12,000,000 by 1980 if pre-war birth and death rates persist; we are bound to agree with Mr. W. D. Forsyth in his book "The

Myth of Open Spaces" that "the principal population problem of Australia is not immigration but fertility."