

Evolution of a Policy

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Preface

This booklet describes the working of Australia's immigration policy in relation to the admission of persons of other than European descent.

It is intended to facilitate and clarify public discussion of the issues involved and to provide a basis for an informed public opinion, which is essential to the continuing evaluation of our policies for the 1970s and beyond.

Every country has a right and duty to determine its own immigration policies.

In March 1966 the Australian Government revised its policy concerning the immigration of non-European people to Australia.

Non-European people are now settling in Australia at the rate of 3,500 annually; and people of partly non-European descent at the rate of 6,000 each year.

It is obvious from these figures that the Government's policy is allowing people of diverse ethnic backgrounds to settle here; but with due care to ensure that all will integrate into a cohesive Australian community.

Introduction

The modern history of Australia is in large part the story of immigration. The peopling of our country has called for a great variety of programmes and policies, and has been subject to many trends and influences. They cannot be

described usefully in short compass. Here I wish to discuss one feature of historical, general and current interest - the migration to Australia of people of other than European descent. An account of its historical background and a description of our present position will contribute to an informed evaluation. There will always be room for further discussion, and constructive criticism; this must recognise that in recent years policy has been considerably modified and developed to meet new circumstances. We are doing now what some advocates suggest, without realising how much has changed.

I do not attempt to forecast or prophesy the course of change. Future policies must evolve from our experience yet to come, just as present policies find their origins in our living past.

This evolutionary approach may seem cautious. But impetuosity has no place in those areas where we have a duty to learn patiently - not only from our own history, but from the experience of other countries. Immigration policy is recognised everywhere, both in law and in practice, as for decision by each Government for application within its own borders. Immigration policy cannot remain static, but it should be carried forward carefully and with prudence, particularly in an area where decisions have so far-reaching an effect on the total community in its life, work and attitudes, both now and in generations to come.

Today's Australia is a nation proud of its cultural and social enrichment by migration, intent on the avoidance of racial, colour or religious prejudice among its citizens. The issue of non-European immigration does not now resemble that which was raised in the 19th or even in the earlier part of the 20th century. But we live still among the echoes of our past.

Background of a Century

Historically, the first strong advocates of non-European immigration were the squatters of the 1840s who found themselves deprived of convict labour and faced with severe shortages of manpower.

The population of the colonies then was scarcely equal to the total of 185,000 settlers who arrived in the Commonwealth last year alone.

During the gold rushes of the 1850s there was of course neither Migration Act nor Federal immigration administration. In fact no legislation existed for the control of immigration. People flocked into Australia as they pleased. Among them came large numbers of Chinese, mainly to Victoria. When the Victorian legislature enacted controls, they came through South Australia and New South Wales. Those two colonies in turn passed ad hoc legislation. As the gold rushes died away the Acts were thought to be no longer necessary and were repealed. The same sequence of events took place later in Queensland.

The Chinese gold-seekers did not intend permanent settlement. Indeed, their determination to take home all the gold they gained was one of the factors which aroused hostility towards them. There was another factor, more important for the future - the Chinese lived on the gold-fields as closed communities. Suspicion and ill-feeling were rife, reaching the stage of violence more than once. It was a most unhappy episode.

Haphazard entry of this kind is not possible today. When it happened it taught Australians something of the social dangers of settlers unable or unwilling to become full and equal members of the community. We have increasingly learnt that new settlers and the host community must be ready to accept each other.

The arrival of indentured labourers from the South Pacific in the Queensland canefields from

1863 onwards had great political impact. They were seen by some as essential to the sugar industry, but their recruitment, employment and living conditions disgusted many Australians. The words "indentured labour" still arouse abhorrence, suggesting exploitation of workers and threats to the dignity of the men concerned as well as to the aspirations of the Australian worker.

As a result of these and other chapters of our history, the movement towards Federation was reinforced by a desire for a national immigration policy and administration. In the minds of many the two causes were identified. A policy of virtual exclusion of non-European immigrants was adopted with near unanimity by all parties in the new Federal Parliament. The Immigration Restriction Act passed in 1901 embodied provisions enabling the Government to execute this policy. An ingenious, indeed notorious, device provided by the Act was the "Dictation Test", which could be given in any European language. As intended by the legislators, this test was carefully given in a language of which the would-be immigrant had no knowledge.

The policy remained essentially unchanged until after the War of 1939-45. There were some provisions for temporary entry - including that of visitors, students, merchants and assistants to Asian business in Australia.

These conditions of temporary entry were eased considerably in the years just after the War. The owners of market gardens, cafes, and other businesses were readily able to bring in assistants, usually relatives. Ostensibly they entered as temporary residents, but were in fact able to remain indefinitely. Very real problems of administration were raised as the years passed.

From July 1956 the Government admitted a small number of persons who were defined as "distinguished and highly qualified". It became possible for non-Europeans to become citizens.

In 1958, the old Immigration Act (1901-1949) was repealed and the "Dictation Test", by then

an obnoxious but still damaging relic of historical events, was omitted from the new Migration Act, which adopted a machinery of control of all immigrants that was at once simple and respectful of the individual.

Changes of 1966

Early in 1966 the Government undertook a comprehensive review of non-European immigration policy and made two major decisions. First, it decided that residents for long periods on temporary permits, who previously could qualify for resident status and be joined by their families only after fifteen years' stay, could now qualify after five years. This removed the personal hardship involved in the old so-called "fifteen years' rule". It was not designed to permit the permanent stay of persons who had no rightful expectation of indefinite residence, e.g., students and holders of business appointments. Second, the Government decided, in the words of the announcement in Parliament on 9 March 1966 by the then Minister for Immigration, Mr. Opperman (Sir Hubert as he now is):

Applications for entry by well-qualified people wishing to settle in Australia will be considered on the basis of their suitability as settlers, their ability to integrate readily and their possession of qualifications which are in fact positively useful to Australia.

This was a most important change in the policy which had been maintained by all Governments since 1901, probably of equal importance with that by which non-Europeans could become citizens. Amplifying the decision, Mr. Opperman stated:

No annual quota is contemplated. The number of people entering - though limited relative to our total population - will be somewhat greater than, previously, but will be controlled by the careful assessment of the individual's qualifications, and the basic aim of preserving a homogeneous population will be maintained. The changes are of course not intended to meet general labour shortages or to permit the large-scale admission of workers from

Asia; but the widening of eligibility will help to fill some of Australia's special needs.

The announcement of the revised policy was made in Parliament and was followed by a full debate such as had not taken place for many years. It showed unanimous and bi-partisan support for the basic concepts of the revised policy - a moderate increase in the numbers of non-European settlers coupled with the preservation of a predominantly homogeneous society in Australia. The leading spokesman for the Opposition stated his party's support for the revised policy in a speech which was acclaimed from both sides of the House.

Generally, the revision of 1966 was well received in Australia and abroad as practical and sensible. Some few critics thought a mere gesture was being made without intention of real change. Most recognised that only time would tell the implications.

Policy Administration

Australia now has diplomatic, consular or trade representatives in 77 cities overseas. It is their duty to assess whether applicants who come to them have a real possibility of approval. Those positively assessed complete an application form and an interview takes place. Then the application is considered carefully in Canberra.

If there seems real doubt as to whether the applicant will be able to follow his usual occupation at a level acceptable to him, he or she is fully informed and given an opportunity of deciding whether to pursue the application.

Rightly, the administration of the policy reflects that care and deliberation with which it was decided. We must ensure as far as humanly possible that approved applicants have very good prospects of vocational success awaiting them in Australia. Our experience in immigration of qualified people from all over the world has demonstrated the basic importance of satisfaction in employment. Neglect of this point would involve men and women and children in grave disappointment if

not actual hardship. In common justice we must avoid this. Very few cases of disillusionment among those who have joined us since 1966 are known to my Department and many have specifically commented on the absence of prejudice.

In Australia there is some sentiment in favour of welcoming more widely professional or white collar workers who are surplus to the needs of their own countries, more or less regardless of their specific training. Buoyant employment in Australia has encouraged some to believe that larger numbers of such people should be allowed to come without too careful study of available openings or the acceptability of their qualifications.

This attitude seems, on the basis of my Department's experience, over-confident. Qualified men and women usually find settlement much more difficult if they are required to accept unskilled or even semi-skilled work. To think otherwise is both to invite trouble and disappointment and to disregard the natural self-respect of prospective immigrants. It would be positively harmful to their interests to encourage such people in large numbers to see their futures in Australia, especially where their professional qualifications are not equivalent to ours or acceptable in principle here.

What has resulted?

From March 1966 to 31 December 1970 overseas posts sent nearly 6,900 applications to Canberra for consideration. Of these well over 2,700 applicants, and their dependants, were approved - a total approaching 7,000 individuals. Of the applications sent to Canberra, 2,800 were refused and the remainder are still being assessed.

The details and characteristics of those men, women and children approved for admission are of particular interest:

- as to ethnic and national origin about 3,160 were Indian, 2,230 were Chinese, 340 Ceylonese, 380 Filipino, 180 Indonesian, 170

Malay; the rest were spread over twelve other ethnic and national groups;

- as to countries of last residence, a third of the approved Indians were living outside India when they applied; the approved Chinese were living principally in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore; but 27 per cent of the Chinese were living in 27 other countries;
- as to professional occupations, over 22 per cent were medical practitioners, 16 per cent engineers, 5 per cent university lecturers, 5 per cent nurses, and 13 per cent teachers; the remainder were spread over 65 other vocations;
- 80 businessmen were approved to come here to engage in substantial international trading.

Necessarily there is a time lapse between approval of applicants and their arrival in Australia. As with other migrants, they need to arrange their affairs and secure passages. Some decide to settle in other countries. During the period in question of 7,000 approved, 3,200, including 720 Chinese and 950 Indians, arrived in Australia.

At present more than 200 individuals per month are being approved and about 140 per month are arriving. As time passes, there is of course some increase in the ratio of arrivals to approvals.

Clearly the numbers coming from any one developing country over the past four years cannot give rise to real concern about depriving such countries of badly-needed and highly-qualified people.

None of these figures relates to the admission of non-European people on the basis of relationship to residents of Australia. Decisions from 1951 onwards progressively enabled Australian residents to bring dependants here. From March 1966 people here under temporary permit with an expectation of indefinite stay could acquire resident status, and citizenship, after five years' residence instead of fifteen.

Naturally, this decision resulted in a notable temporary upsurge in applications for resident status, citizenship and entry of dependants, which is reflected in the statistics.

The numbers of people granted resident status after entry (mostly many years before) as temporary residents have been:

1967 - 1,563
1968 - 1,135
1969 - 1,056
1970 - 1,006

The numbers arriving as relatives of residents have been:

1967 - 1,382
1968 - 1,029
1969 - 669
1970 - 822

Summarising the figures for 1970, a total of 3,500 non-European people settled in Australia - some fifty per cent of whom were in the well-qualified category, thirty per cent were granted resident status after initial entry on temporary entry permits, and the remaining twenty per cent were relatives of residents. In addition, during the post-war period over 33,000 people of mixed descent have settled here and they are now arriving at an annual rate of 6,000.

It may be noted that up to 1964, people of mixed descent, if they satisfied the usual requirements for migrants including predominantly European appearance, were approved for permanent residence. Since 1964, applications have been considered on an entirely different basis, including the skills and present circumstances of applicants, and, whenever appropriate, the presence of relatives in Australia.

They largely come from former British dependencies. This means that they are usually English-speaking and influenced by British attitudes in their customs and traditions. Integration in Australia has posed few problems for them and produced no difficulties for our

community.

In general, it is clear that the revision of policy in March 1966 has allowed an increase in the number of well-qualified non-European people settling in Australia, subject to careful assessment of their ability to integrate here and to contribute positively towards the attainment of an aim well accepted throughout the Australian community - a socially homogeneous and cohesive population.

Australia is not to be thought irrational or narrow because it seeks unity and opposes division. The Government's decision of March 1966 represented a distinct, though not revolutionary, change from the policies of the previous 65 years. No longer can it be said in truth or with justice that Australia totally excludes non-Europeans as settlers. This fact I believe has reduced the risks of unnecessary misunderstanding and ill-feeling and has also undercut comment that exaggerates those risks.

A quota system?

Australia has consistently rejected the concept of a quota system of migration - that is, the determination of a number of persons who may be admitted annually from each source country. The most notable example was the former quota system in the United States. It is ironic that in Australia a system should be proposed after the most notable example of it anywhere in the world has been abandoned as unsatisfactory.

Australian advocates of such a system for Asians have usually disclaimed wanting large-scale non-European immigration to Australia. They have suggested that the establishment of a quota for each non-European country would help counter and reduce the possibility and extent of resentment against existing policies. This has never been established to my satisfaction. The fatal flaw in the argument is that such a quota system would clearly discriminate between non-European and European countries. Indeed, it would be obviously and by definition discriminatory in its nature and character. Quota systems necessarily stimulate the criticism

that certain countries have been allocated quotas which are too small and as a consequence citizens of those countries are subject to discrimination. A quota system on the basis of countries of origin of settlers already in Australia at the time of its introduction would introduce grotesque imbalance.

Even assuming that a basis considered satisfactory were found for determining quotas for each country, the difficulties in administering it would be considerable. It could involve different criteria for countries listed to ensure reasonable filling of quotas.

A quota system which to any degree cut across and qualified our effort to see that every new settler can find congenial work and become integrated with the Australian community in one or two generations would involve a heavy price in rigidity even if claims for its advantages were otherwise valid.

The present policy is more effective and has greater flexibility. The number of migrants admitted from any particular country is not limited as would be the case with a quota; the criteria apply to all non-Europeans irrespective of their country of origin. We are now receiving substantial numbers of non-European settlers without the embarrassment and problems of a quota system.

Recently there have been suggestions, not widespread but requiring to be noted, that we should assist financially the transport to Australia of any settlers who are approved for permanent residence here.

Successive Governments, in Australia over many years, indeed over the past century, have distinguished completely between the conditions of eligibility for entry to Australia and the conditions of eligibility for financial and other assistance to Australia. These are two distinct questions.

Assisted passages are among the methods by which Australian Governments, both long before Federation and almost always since that

date, have sought to attract migrants to build the Australian nation and which it would not otherwise secure in sufficient numbers to meet its need.

It is logical that we assist with transport those we actively seek.

However, it would be illogical to promote by financial assistance migration which is essentially limited or restricted by the policy of successive Governments.

It would also lead to greatly increased applications by persons whose applications for entry were subject to strict control and likely not to be successful, thus creating quite unnecessary embarrassment.

A substantial proportion of migrants, amounting to about one third, do in fact pay their own fares to Australia. They come from many countries, the largest numbers being from Britain, Italy, Greece and Lebanon.

Overseas students - an important group

In addition to people coming here to settle permanently, many are admitted temporarily for a variety of purposes. Examples are tourist visitors, for whom visa procedures have been progressively simplified, executives for branches of overseas companies, and other businessmen.

However, overseas students are a particularly important group among our temporary residents.

There are some 2,000 students here sponsored under Government awards such as the Colombo Plan and 10,000 as private overseas students.

Although these private students pay fees to the universities and other institutions, the amount of subsidies to these institutions attributable to the presence of private students from overseas is about \$A8,000,000 per annum, without taking account of capital costs.

The Government's purpose in this field is to assist the countries concerned by helping to add to their numbers of people qualified in areas of special need, and to promote relations between Australia and those countries. Increasingly, leaders in these countries will be able to say they studied in Australia as some now say they studied in other host countries.

The great majority of students return to their home countries. In certain circumstances however - for example, where a student marries an Australian - permission to remain here permanently is granted.

Maintaining a cohesive community

Immigration policy must be reviewed from time to time because it deals with human beings in a country which is developing to maturity both in its internal growth and in close relationships with other nations.

The Australian nation over the past generation has demonstrated its ability to welcome large numbers of new settlers and to help them to adjust to our society; we ourselves, as a host community, have in turn also adjusted to a considerable degree. So far this has taken place largely in terms of people socially and culturally similar to the Australians of 1939. The integration of a continuing large flow of such men and women with native-born Australians within a generation or two is not a subject of serious apprehension. Rather it can be confidently expected - provided we maintain a purposeful progress, paying increasing attention to specific and changing needs in education, welfare and employment - and assuming of course that we meet the broad economic and social challenges of our rapid growth.

My purpose in this paper has not been to make judgements concerning policy determinations in the future. But we must ask ourselves against what vision of Australia's horizon we should move forward? What type of society should we seek? Where ought we head socially and culturally and into what type of economic and

political development?

What type of people do we wish to be? All our immigration and social policies are for our own decision in the light of our aims and response to our needs - as we assess them. They are now clearly and firmly based on the belief that all Australians want Australia to be an essentially cohesive society notable for political democracy, for the rule of law, for economic opportunity and social mobility, without self-perpetuating enclaves and undigested minorities.

By undigested minorities, I mean substantial groups of ethnic origin very different from the host community; proud of that difference and determined to perpetuate it; seeking to discourage intermarriage; desiring to have separate political representation; and ready to dispute the efforts of the national Government to encourage integration.

This is the undesirable antithesis of the ideal of a united and cohesive community. At the same time I am not advocating a dull and mindless uniformity. No one wishes every Australian to conform to an identical pattern of life or culture. Most of us welcome variety in our developing national identity. But we would also abhor the concept of complete, permanent and hostile segregation of one part of our population.

No one would gain if the economic and financial organisation of Australia followed permanent patterns of national and ethnic origins and affinities. Though we belong to a society which is generally Christian, we would all suffer if the freedoms of conscience, belief and religion we value were denied to any citizen.

The English language should be a common link used in primary and secondary education throughout the country whether in State or independent schools. But measures must also be taken to preserve and strengthen the cultural heritage of newcomers so as to enrich and develop the sensitivity of the resulting new community.

All who settle in Australia express by so doing their confidence in our future prospects and stability and their hope to share in the advantages Australia offers. They must become full and equal partners in our national life as quickly as possible, and no later than through their children in the next generation.

To us, the dignity of personal labour is cardinal, freedom of employment is universal and the need to work everywhere recognised. We want a society that will be proud of its achievements and ready to learn from its mistakes and to observe to its own advantage both the successes and failures of other countries.

In such an orderly, liberal, humane and purposeful society the influences others bring from many sources will be to our general benefit. They must all be essentially capable of early integration into Australia as we know it, adding their own contribution towards evolutionary change and improvement in our traditional attitudes and ideals and to our shared national experience.

President John Kennedy called his country - a "nation of immigrants." We are equally so. After more than a century of British migration we undertook an ambitious social experiment in massive European migration. While it is proceeding commendably, there is no compelling reason to add unnecessary problems to it without forethought or planning. But its success and resilience will continue to bear other elements flowing into it, gradually and cohesively as we meet real needs and absorb change in an intelligent evolutionary pattern.