



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**MIGRATION LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2) 2000**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 6 February 2001

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Albanese, Anthony, MP

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Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (8.02 pm)—The Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2000 is an attack on a person's right to seek justice. The government are trying to take away a generally accepted right from a very vulnerable group of people. If they get away with it, who will they target next? People seeking judicial review in the area of social security, perhaps. We have already seen attacks on the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. This government attacks legitimate legal rights whenever it is convenient. That is the context in which this bill must be considered. It is a context involving a minister who has, I must say, had a proud history in the past, crossing the floor over the issue of a racist or discriminatory immigration policy. This is a minister who stood up to his own party.

Unfortunately, with bill after bill before this House, it is very difficult to distinguish the views of the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs from the views of the former member for Oxley in terms of political intent. Let us have a look at some of the things which have been wound back. First of all we had the three-year waiting period, a measure which has seen a number of migrants to this country left in poverty, left homeless and left relying on charity to provide the basic essentials of life. With regard to refugees, we have seen them vilified. We have seen a linking of the onshore applications with offshore applications so that the minister has been able to go around and say, 'These people who are applying onshore are illegal,' which is not true and he knows it is not true under the United Nations definition of refugees. We have seen a minister who has said that people should wait in an orderly way in the queue overseas, when he knows that is simply not possible for people from countries such as Afghanistan, where the Taliban regime is abhorrent to any decent democratic person who supports human rights. To suggest that it is possible to wait in orderly queues in some of those countries is simply not feasible. We have seen, with that linking, the minister arguing that these people are taking the places of those people who are applying offshore. That is only the case because the minister has linked those two numbers which previously were not linked. That is consistent with the vilification that has occurred. These people have been branded as illegal. They have been branded as criminals and drug peddlers, when there is no evidence that the refugees themselves are in that situation.

The fact is that the Labor Party, and anyone who supports the plight of refugees, does not support the people smugglers, who are prepared to make profit out of people's misery. That is not in question, and action against people smugglers is something that I support. However, the vilification of the refugees themselves that has occurred is entirely inappropriate, and the treatment of these detainees is entirely inappropriate. My colleague the member for Chifley, Roger Price, has pointed out in articles published this week that a three-year-old boy and his father have been held in isolation in a dark, dank hellhole at Port Hedland detention centre. This man was being punished for a hunger strike, and he and his three-year-old son were held for 14 days in Third World conditions in a locked cell in the isolation block. What sort of nation are we that in the year 2001 tolerates that in order to appeal to some rednecks in our society? What sort of society are we when we have a minister who advocates giving people injections and drugging them—a minister of the crown who once stood up for human rights and has the hide to wear an Amnesty International badge on his lapel?

Many of these detention centres are run by private enterprise, but the only growth in building and construction announced by this government in three budgets has been the building of detention centres. Other countries do not do that. There are more people going to countries such as Italy in a week than come into Australia and make onshore applications in a year. Yet this minister pretended that there were whole villages packing up and coming to Australia. What happened to them? They did not arrive. We hear very little from this minister about the hundreds of people who have been so desperate that they have drowned, people who have died on their way to Australia. That shows the desperation of these people. It also shows the callousness of the people smugglers who are involved, but let us not blame the victims of oppression in reactionary regimes such as Afghanistan for wanting a better life.

The Vietnamese boat people who came in the 1970s have made an outstanding contribution to Australian society. Just as some people objected to that occurring on narrow, bigoted grounds, so this minister is prepared to appeal to the bigots, to the point where he goes overseas and says, 'If you come here, you will be the subject

of racist attacks. You are not welcome. This is an intolerant society.' That is what the minister said when he toured these countries. But it is not uniform because the minister has also made a decision to grant 200 special applications to members of the SLA, the South Lebanon Army—people who were engaged in militant conduct and violence against the people of south Lebanon on behalf of the Israeli occupation. That occupation had been roundly condemned and, under UN resolution 425, finally Israel has withdrawn. These people can be settled either where they are in Israel or in other parts of Lebanon, but no, we have a special category introduced.

Those 200 special applications will result in many more than 200 people coming here. What do they have in common? What they have in common is an extreme right-wing view. They are people who have been involved with the Falangists in Lebanon and have been responsible for violence against the Lebanese people. Yet that is okay, according to the government: 'We will open up immigration for them because they may settle in marginal seats and will tend to support the conservative side of politics.' Many of them are right-wing reactionaries, but that is okay, according to the government. This minister has compassion for those people but not for women escaping places where they have enforced clitoridectomies and such barbaric behaviour. It is time that the minister stopped the vilification of refugees. It is time that we Australians reasserted ourselves as a compassionate nation, in recognition of the fact that we are the country we are because, whether people be Irish Catholics or Vietnamese refugees or any other race, wherever they have come from, people have come to Australia and made it the great country that it is today. *(Time expired)*