



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Social Cohesion

SPEECH

Thursday, 2 October 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 2 October 2014
Page 11176
Questioner
Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (15:27): I am glad this matter was put forward for public debate in this chamber today. It is a matter of public importance that we debate these issues. I am disappointed that the debate has been started with a call to unity while the Leader of the Opposition spent quite a big part of his time engaging in partisan commentary on this issue. I do not intend to follow that example. I intend to follow the example of Sir Henry Parkes, who said many years ago:

What we are doing by this great Federal movement is not for us, but for them, for the untold millions that will follow us; until this land of Australia shall gather within its bosom all the fruits of the culture of the world; and until the flag of freedom shall be planted here so firmly and guarded with such a fervent patriotism, that all the powers on earth shall never assault it.

That was the father of Federation, and he is a leader to whom I think we can all look as someone who played such a significant role in the formation of our nation.

Sir Henry Parkes's vision, I am pleased to say, is a reality today. It is something that continues to be built on. It is something that, although achieved in so many respects, carries an aspirational virtue to it that drives us all on to continue to meet the worthy words of Sir Henry Parkes at that time.

Australia in my view—and, I am sure, in the view of all members of this House—is the most successful immigration country on earth. It is the great legacy of Parkes and others who followed him—Calwell and Menzies and others—and, indeed, the Father of the House, the former minister for immigration, the member for Berowra, that this vision, this dream has been realised over generations.

And it is not just in the postwar period. We have had over 200 years of successful immigration to this country. We are all immigrants or children of immigrants unless we are Indigenous Australians—all of us. More than 50 per cent of Australians today are either born overseas or the child of someone who was born overseas. More than 50 per cent of Australians today have a direct or personal experience of being born overseas or being the child of someone who was born overseas. Over seven million immigrants have come to Australia since the end of World War II. But it does not stop there, because we all—other than in the case of Indigenous Australians—have this migrant experience, and it is important that we identify the links between our various migrant experiences to build and maintain the social cohesion for which Australia is so famous around the world.

The success is based on the fact that people have come to this country to join us. They have come to this country to join us and to make a contribution. Through that contribution they continue to create the Australia of the future that others who follow us will inherit. We are a nation of joiners. I am not terribly interested in what is in people's wardrobes; I am interested in what is in people's hearts. I am interested in the values they proclaim and stand by. I am interested in the contribution they make to this country because in this country you are judged on what you get done, what your contribution is and how you participate.

Participation in this country is what defines us as Australians. It is about the values we hold. It is about the way of life we have. It is about the contribution that we make. There is one law for all. There is freedom of religion enshrined in our Constitution. These are the very things that make up the society today and that all Australians cherish so deeply. This is Australia's immigration experience.

But what has driven this cohesion? This cohesion has been driven by the economic and social participation of migrants over centuries—over generations. And we need to continue to encourage that participation because that is what separates Australia as an immigrant nation. From the different stories that we read, we are aware that in Europe, the United Kingdom and Germany there is a debate which is, frankly, not relevant to this country because we have a very different experience in this country of being an immigrant nation. And we have followed a very different immigrant path. Our results are completely different. If you look at the experiences of migrants—and particularly the experiences of the children of migrants—you will see in the research that they have an as

great or greater level of workforce participation; they have an as great or greater level of education attainment; and they have an as low or lower level of unemployment. That is the experience in this country, but it is the inverse in many countries overseas.

That has been achieved because in this country we have always run an immigration program that has invited people to come here to make a contribution and to be involved, particularly economically. In this country our immigration program has been a success because it has been predominately an economic program, not a welfare program. And people overwhelmingly come here to make that contribution. That is why we have had so much success—and research studies show it.

The success shows through the participation in the economy, particularly. And it is reinforced because we have a national language. That is not to say there cannot be many other languages. There should be. I would hope in future generations that more Australians speak more and more languages, but there must be one national language, because that gives us the ability to come together—whether in a workplace, a social space, a religious space or any other space—and to have the cohesion upon which we depend.

What we find, particularly in our settlement programs—the former Minister for Immigration, Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, Mr Burke, who is at the table will know this—is that where you focus on getting migrants into jobs, improving their education and improving their English language skills, they have greater success. That is what we have to focus on in addressing the issues that are the subject of this debate here today.

In Australia we have always focused on the skills side of this paradigm. That has been a key economic objective of this country over many generations. But we have also sought to have people integrate socially into this country. And 'integration' is a word we should never surrender. There have been other words that have been used in this debate in the past and they have been surrendered, but integration is about participation.

When communities participate, as the overwhelming majority of communities do, then we see the success. Multiculturalism, when it works—when it is done properly—is about bringing people together. When it is done the wrong way it becomes an excuse for people to be remain separate, enclaved and disengaged. That is a recipe for social disaster, and that is something I am sure no person in this House wants to be the future of this country.

We have had periods in our history where the divide has been on issues of ethnicity and race. Australia is such an overwhelming idea that it overwhelms those divisions of ethnicity and race. But from time to time the dividing line of religion has presented itself. I am an optimist because this is not the first time that the dividing line of religion in social cohesion has been present in this country. There was once a time when there was a religious community that was accused of being a danger to Australia, of not being loyal to Australia. They were even accused, by virtue of their religion alone, of being terrorists. It was the Catholic community of the 1800s. And now they are running the joint! Now they are running the joint on both sides. This demonstrates the great success. And this is why I feel so optimistic about the challenge we face today, where we have similar religious divides and misperceptions in the community.

I know that Australia, as an idea—as an ideology even—and as an experience, will overwhelm these divisions, through improved understanding and improved engagement. We cannot be naive to the fears. We cannot be naive to the risks in all elements of this debate, but we also must be optimistic in engaging.

Next year we are going to have a great opportunity with the centenary of Anzac. I have engaged in mateship treks with the member for Blaxland over many years. The one thing that we see every time is that the diggers died for the future of Australia, and we now live in it. We are the inheritors—the beneficiaries—of the sacrifice: each of us in equal measure, no greater, no less. Regardless of our religion, ethnicity or race we are the inheritors of their legacy and we have the responsibility of continuing to strive for a better Australia—one that strives to uphold the values that those diggers lived by. Those values can be embraced by every Australian, regardless of their race, regardless of their religion and regardless of their ethnicity.