Immigration Hypocrisy

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Australian immigration debates have always been full of weasel words and smarmy cant, but seldom have politicians and editorial writers covered themselves in less glory than over the past three weeks. The self-appointed elite---may the gods forgive them---used immigration to advance their prejudices, settle old scores and win political advantage while protesting that this one issue was above politics.

Australians are quite mature enough to debate the ethnic composition of their society and indeed no good can come of sweeping any issue under the carpet. The criticism that Howard politicised the issue is an anti-democratic joke. Further, the line that it was he, and not the sanctimonious interpreters of what he said, who caused animosity does not bear examination.

One may disagree with Howard---in part I do---but he had a duty to raise the issue. I admit that he would have been smarter to have anticipated the use that would be made of the debate and to have prepared himself and his party to fight off both the red-necked racialists and the divisive multiculturalists. As it was, far from fighting two external enemies, coalition members fought each other.

Before we go further, let us straighten out two confused words. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "racism" as "the theory that human abilities are determined by race." Until a Chinese boxer wins the world heavyweight title we are all racists. It defines "racialism" as "belief in the superiority of a particular race". We are not, I hope, racialists.

Behind debates about immigration are international boundaries which mark divisions in standards of living and liberty. Our high standards of both are not accidental; they are the consequence of several generations of governments which allowed liberty and enterprise.

Governments cannot ignore large population movements. Some, who find their brightest people fleeing, restrict exit. Others, such as Australia, have so many people knocking on their doors that, to preserve the liberty culture itself, they must restrict entry. Few people dispute that much: the real

arguments are about the overt and covert criteria we use to restrict entry.

Mankind is genetically and culturally divided. Diversity is potentially a source of progress but also of factionalism and misery. Unfortunately, preserving a degree of peace sufficient to permit liberty is not as simple as preaching tolerance.

Cultural diversity is not an unmitigated good. Unlike genetic traits, which for practical purposes we may assume to be neither good nor bad, some cultural traits are so bad as to be incompatible with the sort of Australia which would continue to attract migrants.

Extreme racialism is one such cultural trait. There are others---for instance, the sectarianism which not only tolerates but encourages those cowardly Irish bombers and murderous Sikhs and Hindus. Shiite fundamentalism is another. Our present immigration policies are subtly administered so as to minimise the numbers drawn from those cultural, and therefore ethnic, groups which would bring conflicts to Australia. If we were not so prudent, then the number of people we could safely absorb would be reduced.

In the interests of avoiding Notting Hill riots and worse, of course we discriminate on racial grounds---so does almost every other country. The skills and family reunion migration programs, whatever may have been said about them, were designed to preserve the ethnic balance. The present argument arises because the programs did not work out as they were intended. The program designers did not foresee how many more Asian family members and skilled persons, than Europeans with the same qualifications, would want to come to Australia. This is particularly the case after six years of excellent economic performance by Britain. Now, as Professor Blainey has pointed out, 48% of net migration comes from Asia.

Here I part company with the professor, Senator Stone, Mr Sinclair and indeed most Australians. I am not worried by this figure because I see no signs of serious racial tensions involving Asian immigrants, such as are all too apparent in the case of Aborigines for whom we make special arrangements.

The best case for granting land rights to Aborigines rests on the fact that many Aborigines are not coping with aspects of our culture which other Australians are not prepared to compromise. So long as Aboriginal Land Rights offer a reasonable prospect of alleviating distress, then in the name of humanity, land rights should be granted. But we could not afford, in the future, to grant Vietnamese, Burmese or African land rights; our newcomers must adopt a great deal of the culture that is already here. In the process the Australian culture will change and improve by selective adoption of what is most useful in newcomers' cultures.

A large part of the Asian Australian population are refugees from Vietnam. These people are surely deserving of

our special consideration. Unable to go home, they have an unswerving commitment to Australia. They are not wimps. A small boat on the South China Sea is a better filter than anything the Department of Immigration might devise. The excellent results of exams, taken in English by their children, would seem to indicate that their strength of character and industry are passed on. Aren't these the traits we want?

We fought alongside these people in a war we lost and we left without even giving refuge from a barbarous regime to our Vietnamese embassy staff. Since then, some of our former allies managed to flee. Now they occupy miserable refugee camps in Thailand, Hong Kong and Malaysia. We are failing them as our fathers failed the Jews who fled Hitler.

I see no reason to reduce Asian migration yet. But, since most people disagree with me, I cannot but welcome the debate. Mr Howard was right to talk of "One Australia". A government is sensible, not racialist, if it takes care not to ask more tolerance of its people than is likely to be forthcoming.

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