

## References

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## THE MANAGEMENT OF THE IMMIGRATION PORTFOLIO UNDER SENATOR BOLKUS

### Ernest Healy

*The outcome of the 'Meradue' Review of the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research (BIPR) and Senator Bolkus's intervention in shaping the BIPR's 1995 Outlook Conference raise serious questions about the continued independence and impartiality of the BIPR.*

Recent decisions by the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Senator Bolkus, raise serious questions about the Minister's preparedness to tolerate open debate about immigration and multicultural issues, and about the measures he has taken to control the debate. Our main focus is the Minister's interference with the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research (BIPR), but to set the scene we review recent Immigration Review Tribunal (IRT) appointments.

### IMMIGRATION REVIEW TRIBUNAL APPOINTMENTS

On October 20th, Liberal Senator and Shadow Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Jim Short, put a motion before the Senate calling for an inquiry into '...the manner and method of appointment, re-appointment and non re-appointment of members to the Immigration Review Tribunal...'

The Shadow Minister's concerns were triggered by the recent round of Department of Immigration and Ethnic

Affairs (DIEA) tribunal appointments and reappointments, principally to the IRT, by Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Senator Bolkus. Senator Short claimed that Senator Bolkus's appointments were tainted with a political nepotism which had seriously compromised the impartiality and integrity of the IRT in the eyes of the community.<sup>1</sup> The motion also called for an investigation into the effect of these appointments on community confidence in the ability of the tribunal to perform its duties. The Senator's motion was passed. An inquiry is currently being conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration.

Central to these claims is the fact that several of the appointments for the Victorian arm of the Tribunal were people with strong Labor Party connections. Of the new Tribunal appointments in Victoria, two were preselected Labor Party candidates.<sup>2</sup> Also newly appointed was Niki Dollis, wife of Victorian State Deputy Opposition Leader, Demetri Dollis, who had recently been best man at Bolkus's wedding.<sup>3</sup>

Amongst the reappointments to the Victorian arm of the Tribunal was a member of the ALP Labor Unity faction, an endorsed Labor candidate of the same faction, and a former staffer to Senator Ray.<sup>4</sup>

The new Principal Member in Victoria, it was claimed, was a former Labor Party staffer.<sup>5</sup> The displaced Principal Member, Mr Clothier, an expert in immigration law, subsequently lodged a submission to the Joint Standing Committee inquiry. It reiterated Senator Short's criticisms. He too claimed that many of the appointments were political, having little relationship to the appointees' expertise.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Clothier's replacement,

Michelle Scott, had no comparable qualifications and experience. According to Clothier, who had been an IRT member since 1989, Bolkus had continued a practice of political patronage inherited from the previous minister, Senator Ray. Jostling between Labor factions, he contended, had become a significant factor in determining tribunal appointments.<sup>7</sup> High quality candidates were being rejected as a result. He went on to argue that:

If the Joint Committee were to take the time to study those who applied in Victoria, [and compare them] to those who were 'short listed', it would be evident that the selection panel was not making bona fide selections of candidates but was following a secret political agenda at the behest of the Minister.<sup>8</sup>

Pam O'Neil, former Deputy Leader of the Labor Opposition in the Northern Territory, previously appointed as the national Principal Member by Senator Ray, was re-appointed in this capacity. Her position here was used by Bolkus to justify appointing her to a three person appointment advisory panel as well. A second member of the advisory panel was one of Bolkus's staffers.<sup>9</sup> Senator Short's complaint, that the advisory panel had become little more than a 'political screen' for Bolkus's political favours, appears justified. Clothier's inquiry submission also expressed such concerns.

The Minister's own comments on the appointment process, to the Senate on October 20th, did not help to remove the impression of political patronage. He insisted that appointments were totally within his discretion, and appeared to claim that this discretion rendered him immune from the possibility of cronyism:

As is evident, the discretion in all tribunal appointments is mine and I fail to see how

it is possible for me to politically interfere with my own decisions.<sup>10</sup>

It is not clear how, or if, Senator Bolkus reconciles this logic with his claim to have made tribunal appointments on the basis of the candidates' talent, independence of mind, and the promotion of diversity of opinion.

Senator Bolkus's behaviour needs to be explained in context of recent changes in Labor politics. These changes involve an interplay of ethnic, ideological and party allegiances, and short-term political opportunism. They appear to be affecting immigration policy, and particularly the independence of the BIPR.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since the mid-1980s, the Federal Labor government has sought to fundamentally reconstruct Australian society through a program of internationalisation and economic renewal. It attempted a rapid engagement with the global market — the Asian region in particular — on the basis of free-market principles.

From the beginning, it was recognised that a basic conflict existed between the Government's market-driven objectives and Australia's national culture and inherited institutional structures. It considered that the strong protectionist orientation, a lingering ideal of self-reliance, the expectation of extensive public sector involvement (big government), and a strong trade union ethos were obstacles both to economic renewal and to participation in the Asian region.

During the 1980s, economic restructuring has been accompanied by an offensive against the inherited national culture. Inherited cultural norms were often demonised in the course of asserting a new, 'outward-looking', pluralist orthodoxy. Hostility towards

inherited cultural and institutional norms was frequently conveyed implicitly through the propagation of the concepts of cultural 'diversity', and 'openness/flexibility'.

The adversarial disposition towards mainstream Australia has been evident in the Federal Labor Government's support for high immigration and for cultural pluralism. Virtually from its beginnings, multiculturalism was an integral component of the Australian government's free-market utopianism. It was claimed that the more culturally diverse our society became the better Australians would compete within the new global economy. The following statement by Paul Keating in 1992 illustrates Labor's position:

We can draw a parallel between multicultural policy and economic policy in the 1980s. As Treasurer I saw my role as the necessary one of opening Australia up to the world...Just as we are an infinitely more interesting, rich and rewarding society because we are now multicultural, so the rewards will be greater — infinitely greater — because our economy has joined up with the world."

An ideological affinity and interdependence has been evident between many economic rationalists and multiculturalists in their call for a fundamental cultural rupture with the past. The humanitarian moral high ground, typically assumed by multiculturalists, was frequently transferred to the economic rationalist agenda. Ethnic leaders were actively incorporated. Many of these leaders learned that the Government's program offered them unprecedented opportunities for prestige, and patronage within the state. Minority elites, who had previously felt themselves to be marginalised were now deemed pivotal to the reconstruction of Australian society.

The beneficiaries of such patronage did not have to be Labor Party members — ideological fellow-travellers with sufficient reach into minority communities could play a useful role as well.

Political bi-partisanism on these policy areas, through much of the 1980s, enabled Labor to push ahead with an unpopular immigration program, and with cultural pluralism. Bi-partisanism made it possible to neutralise public discontent, to largely avoid public debate, and to depoliticise decisions concerning immigration and multiculturalism. These policies thus acquired an air of inevitability. The deliberate nature of this unrepresentative course was acknowledged by Prime Minister Hawke in 1988 when he asserted the moral right to advance an unpopular policy. Reacting to the break in bi-partisanism by Opposition Leader John Howard, Hawke characterised bi-partisanism on immigration as having been '...a triumph of principle over populism, reason over fear, statesmanship over politics...' (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup> At a Bureau of Immigration Research conference in 1993, Hawke subsequently confirmed the existence, during the 1980s, of a tacit bi-partisan agreement to suppress public debate on immigration:

There are no other issues on which the major political parties have been prepared to act in this way, with the common cement of ACTU support, to advance the national interest ahead of where they believed the electorate to be...<sup>13</sup>

It is important to recognise the sense of high moral purpose which characterised Labor's retreat from the 'errors' of the Australian past, and the rejection of the living culture derived from this past. This certitude was shared by many multiculturalists. As a result, the strategic location of individuals within state structures on the basis of party,

ideological, or ethnic allegiance has not been perceived by the people involved as improper. Rather, it was a moral duty. Senator Bolkus may be both captive and an advocate of this tendency. Under his regime, the politics of patronage appears to have continued.

#### THE 1994 BIPR REVIEW

This year the BIPR underwent a review of its performance and its basic brief. The BIR was established in 1989 by the then Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Senator Ray, as a result of a recommendation by the FitzGerald Report.<sup>14</sup> Although located within DIEA, its formal charter was as an autonomous body, required to conduct high quality independent and objective research on immigration and population issues. Since its establishment, the Bureau had not been subjected to any formal comprehensive scrutiny.

The degree of objectivity of the Bureau's research activities is open to question. This aside for the moment, the review process itself lacked independence and objectivity. The Committee was chaired by John Menadue, a former permanent head of the Department of Immigration. Menadue's pro-immigration position and his hostile disposition towards the Australian past can be described as extreme. In Menadue's opinion, Asian immigration would provide the 'dynamism' and 'will' to overcome the perceived Australian cultural deficit:

The achievements of countries like Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore are based upon the will and dynamism of the societies. They have grasped their limited opportunities and made most of them.

This is where immigration can play a role for us. A bold immigration program is the only tool readily at hand to challenge our complacency, smugness and

parochialism. That is where we must look to the future development of this country and effective use of its resources.<sup>15</sup>

As committee chairman, Menadue was in a position to play an influential role in evaluating the Bureau's past performance and shaping its future directions.

Niki Dollis was also appointed to the review. Her appointment provides an instance of the convergence of ideological, party, ethnic, and perhaps personal allegiances. It also provided the Minister with a direct link to the Committee's deliberations.

The remaining four members of the Review Committee consisted of the Director of the BIPR, Dr Nieuwenhuysen, and departmental representatives from DIEA, DEET, and Finance.<sup>16</sup> It was odd that the Director himself should be on the Review Committee, but the secretariat was also made up of BIPR staff, which further ran the risk of compromising the independence of the review process.

The possibility of genuinely independent research on immigration issues being conducted by the BIPR was always problematic given its institutional location within DIEA and the Government's expectations of it. As Senator Ray put it in 1988, when he announced the establishment of the Bureau, its task was to inform the public, '...educating them about the benefits of the immigration program and multiculturalism'.<sup>17</sup> That 'objective' research would confirm the existing government position on immigration and multiculturalism was taken for granted.

Nevertheless, the BIPR had become relatively more open to alternative opinions about immigration in recent years. For example, the 1992 BIPR biennial conference saw a marked opening up of debate relative to the first Outlook Conference in 1990. But, this

more balanced stance has, under Senator Bolkus, led the BIPR into conflict with Labor's deepening commitment to political patronage, and with the Minister's desire to control the public debate over immigration policy.

#### THE MENADUE REPORT

On October 28 1994, Senator Bolkus launched the Menadue Report on the BIPR. The Report concluded that the Bureau had successfully established itself as a credible research institute, having provided comprehensive, independent, and objective analysis on immigration and population issues. It had, the Report claimed, generated more balanced and informed community debate.<sup>18</sup>

Changes were proposed, however, which would further erode the independence of the Bureau, exposing it to the influence of sectional interests important to Labor's ideological and electoral imperatives.

The Menadue Report recommendations formalised and made explicit the pressures bearing on the Bureau which had previously been implicit. While the Report reasserted a commitment to intellectual and professional independence on the part of the Bureau, it also called for greater 'stakeholder' and 'community organisation' involvement in determining the Bureau's research activities and future directions. There would be more research projects 'with and for' 'community groups'. Bolkus was happy to announce that this enhancement of community-based arrangements was already under way as a result of the review:

The Bureau has already increased its emphasis on working with community groups...I am pleased to say that four out of the nine grants for 1994-95 approved by the Bureau...were sponsored by community agencies.<sup>19</sup>

The review recommended a three year Strategic Plan be formulated. This plan, however, was to be reviewed annually, and be subject to quarterly consideration at meetings between the BIPR Director and the Minister. The Strategic Plan was to be open to input from a range of 'stakeholders', such as 'community organisations'. This reflected the Menadue Committee's desire '...to improve the policy relevance of BIPR research and to foster closer ties to its constituencies...'.<sup>20</sup> To these ends, the BIPR ought regularly to canvas the views of major 'stakeholders', including 'community groups' on BIPR activities.<sup>21</sup>

The Bureau of Immigration Research Advisory Council (BIPRAC) was to become the Bureau of Immigration Research Advisory Board (BIPRAB). BIPRAB, consisting of seven or eight members, was to provide guidance through its assistance in developing the Strategic Plan. Compared to BIPRAC, it was to have a greater role in determining the nature and direction of the Bureau's research agenda. Strangely, the Menadue Report claimed that the reformed Advisory Body would increase the independence of the BIPR.

The usage of 'independent' is misleading; it does not imply a concept of a national interest that overrides the advocacy of special interest groups. Given the persons envisaged as members of BIPRAB, it becomes clear that they will have strong vested interests as representatives or advocates of specific constituencies. The Report recommends that these representatives be drawn '...from business, trade unions, academia, community agencies, (e.g. refugee Council), ethnic communities...' <sup>22</sup>

The recent pattern of the Minister's appointments to BIPRAC hardly inspires confidence. During 1993 Senator Bolkus

appointed Stephen Castles as Chairman, and included Mary Kalantzis as a member — both have written disparagingly of Australia's past, and have been zealous advocates of the globalising, pluralist agenda. Those dropped included Bob Birrell and the former chairman David Cox. Cox had been an advocate for refugees, but not of high immigration or multiculturalism.

The Menadue Report also recommended that the BIPR's role in policy development be increased. It is disturbing that the distinction between providing research findings as a basis for policy development and policy development itself is blurred in the Report's discussion. The dangers here are great. This recommendation, together with the intention to involve vested interests in the formulation and execution of the Bureau's research agenda, runs the risk of the Bureau becoming a vehicle for the political and policy predispositions of influential minorities, and of the government itself.

#### THE 1995 BIPR CONFERENCE — A COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC DEBATE?

In the Menadue Report the BIPR biennial National Outlook Conference, scheduled for February 1995, is cited as an important vehicle for promoting informed public debate. However, the BIPR's preparations for the 1995 conference provide another example of political interference into the organisation's operations.

In the latter half of 1994, the BIPR had formalised its plans for the 1995 conference. Themes were established and speakers invited to participate. Late in 1994, six people who had been given written invitations to speak were dis-invited. This action was decided by the Minister.

The Minister's motives appear to have been varied. Three of those disinvited worked in the refugee area. These were Margaret Piper, Executive Director of the Refugee Council of Australia, Nick Poinder, Co-ordinator of the Refugee Advice and Casework Service in New South Wales, and Hermione Partamian, refugee worker with the Anglican diocese of South Australia. Senator Bolkus had inherited an uncomfortable relationship with the refugee lobby from Gerry Hand's time as minister. It seems that Senator Bolkus wanted to rid the conference of speakers who had previously criticised the Government's refugee policy, especially in relation to the detention of asylum seekers.

The disinvitation of Margaret Piper represents a serious omission in the conference speaker program, since the Refugee Council of Australia is the peak body in this area, with a continuing role in decisions about the size of and settlement arrangements for the humanitarian program. This disinvitation of refugee spokespersons was not a consequence of a decision of the Bureau, or the Minister, to restructure the topics being discussed at the conference. The session at which Margaret Piper was to speak, 'Australia's Humanitarian Program', remains. The resulting panel of speakers, however, contains no comparable substitute on Refugee issues in Australia.

The Director of Monash University's Centre for Population and Urban Research, Bob Birrell, was also disinvited from speaking. Birrell is an active critic of the Government's immigration policy; his disinvitation seems to reflect Senator Bolkus's intolerance of any independent stand on policy.

The written explanation given by the BIPR for disinviting Birrell was that the Minister had required changes to the

format of the conference, in order '...to give more emphasis to business and trade aspects of temporary and permanent migration, and the cultural diversity aspects of our business skills base'.<sup>23</sup> However, as with the refugee panel, Birrell's session, 'Australia's Migration Program', remains within the program, but with a substitute speaker slotted in. The participating chair and other speakers are unaltered.

The substitute speaker is Helen Hughes. Hughes is an extreme pro-immigration advocate, one of whose claims to fame is that, when she was a member of the 1988 CAAIP Committee, she required the secretariat to include population projections involving annual net immigration intakes of 280,000 and 540,000 persons. Hughes' stance as an enthusiast for Labor's globalising agenda and high immigration makes her a congenial Labor Party choice for a panel reviewing the overall migration program.

The remaining two disinvited speakers were Max Bourke, Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and Paula Cristoffanini, Director of the Office of Multicultural Interests, Western Australia. The underlying pattern with these six disinvitations seems to be an insecurity about engaging with alternative sources of policy input on immigration outside of ministerial control.

BIPRAC is the BIPR's independent advisory committee. It is chaired by Stephen Castles and should act to protect the BIPR from political interference. Members knew about the Minister's rearrangement of the National Outlook Conference, discussed it, and yet to date have taken no action either as a body or individually.<sup>24</sup>

As it now stands, the 1995 Outlook Program is skewed in favour of

continuing immigration, ethnic pluralism, and Labor's internationalising agenda. For example, for the session, 'Is there Social Cohesion in Australia', all speakers are supporters of multiculturalism.<sup>25</sup> No serious debate about whether multiculturalism impedes social cohesion is possible with this panel.

The proposed 1995 program as it now stands is laced with high profile ideologues supportive of the Government's policies. One such person is Phil Ruthven, Executive director of Ibis International Pty Ltd.

Ruthven, a previous Outlook Conference speaker, is hostile to what he has described as Australia's 'centrally planned', and 'socialist' past. The 'problematic' past is contrasted with:

...the prospect of higher population growth based on immigration mainly from the Asia Pacific region, where long-term thinking, the work ethic, and productivity are ways of life.<sup>26</sup>

Any deviation from Ruthven's borderless, market-driven world is deemed an obstruction to human progress, universal harmony, and prosperity. Commitment to the national interest and a national identity is seen by him as a form of prejudice. He contends that:

...the courtroom-of-the-world in a global economic village...will not tolerate the view that Australians have a right to determine the use of national resources, or to maintain a small population.<sup>27</sup>

Ruthven is to appear on a panel which is supposed to seriously discuss Australia's population size and the environment! In past such debates Ruthven has advanced a population objective for Australia of 150 to 200 million, at the same time claiming that this would not damage the environment. Such views have no scientific credibility whatsoever. By contrast, the panel does not include any

of the experts who recently contributed to the Australian Academy of Science's evaluation of Australia's carrying capacity.

## CONCLUSION

The events described regarding the IRT and the BIPR indicate a pattern of political incorporation of supposedly independent state agencies. In the case of the BIPR under Senator Bolkus, a body originally set up to provide impartial advice to the Government and to inform the public has been compromised.

This does not represent a victory for access and equity on behalf of suppressed minorities, as minority elites and Labor power brokers claim, but the continued advancement of Labor's economic rationalist agenda.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> J. Short, Media Release, 12th October, 1994
- <sup>2</sup> Lyn Kosky, Labor candidate for Altona in Victoria; Garth Head, Labor candidate for Waverley in Victoria
- <sup>3</sup> Likely a member of Victorian socialist left faction of ALP, as this would be expected of the wife of an aspiring socialist left politician.
- <sup>4</sup> Peter Bruce, Labor Unity faction member; Joe Italiano, labor Unity faction member; endorsed ALP candidate for Werribee; Pippy Watson
- <sup>5</sup> Michelle Scott, *Hansard*, Senator Short, Senate, Oct. 11, 1994
- <sup>6</sup> M. Clothier, Report Sydney Morning Herald, Nov 10 1994, p. 3
- <sup>7</sup> M. Clothier, Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Nov. 8, 1994
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4
- <sup>9</sup> Lisa Hunt
- <sup>10</sup> *Hansard*, 20th October, page 2169
- <sup>11</sup> Keating, Speech 1992
- <sup>12</sup> R. Hawke, 'A Nation of Immigrants', *Australian Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. 59, no. 11, November 1988, p. 501
- <sup>13</sup> R. Hawke, Address, BIR Politics of Immigration Conference, Brisbane, 24 May 1993. pp. 3-4
- <sup>14</sup> The Bureau's title was subsequently changed to include the term 'Population'.

- <sup>15</sup> J. Menadue, Address, 'People — Immigration and Australia's Development', Australian I.M.M. Conference, Melbourne, August 1983
- <sup>16</sup> Dennis Richardson, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs; Joan Kennedy, Department of Employment Education and Training; John Ryan, Department of Finance
- <sup>17</sup> R. Ray, Media Release, December 1988
- <sup>18</sup> N. Bolkus, Speech, Launch of Menadue Report, October 28, 1994
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Evaluation of the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research*, AGPS, Chair: John Menadue, October 1994. p. xiii
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Letter, Nieuwenhuysen to Birrell, Aug. 8 1994
- <sup>24</sup> Current BIPRAC members are: Mary Kalantzis, James Cook University; Ian Lowe, Griffith University; Vivian Lin,

- Vic. Dept of Health and Community Services; Sheila Rimmer, La Trobe University; Ross Barker, Queensland Dept of Housing, Local Government and Planning; Alan Matheson, ACTU; Helen Tuen, South Australian Dept of Premier and Cabinet; Ross Tzannes, Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils Council, NSW; Stephen Castles, (chair), Univ. of Wollongong.
- <sup>25</sup> Senator Cheryl Kernot, Leader, Australian Democrats; Professor Mary Kalantzis, Member of BIPRAC, James Cook University; Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya, University of Western Australia; Sam Lipski, Editor, The Australian Jewish News; Professor Trang Thomas, Chairperson, Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission
- <sup>26</sup> P. Ruthven, 'Australia and the Global Economy', 1991
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

## AN OVERSTATED ELECTORAL IMPORTANCE? A NOTE ON 'ETHNIC' VOTING AND FEDERAL ELECTORAL OUTCOMES

**Nick Economou**

*Many commentators have argued that the Liberal/National Party coalition has alienated some 'ethnic' communities and that, as a consequence, this has harmed its electoral performance. An examination of the electoral geography of 'ethnic' voters suggests this argument is incorrect.*

Recent analyses of the federal Coalition's failure to win the supposedly 'unlosable' 1993 general election have raised the issue of 'constituency' or 'block' voting. This is the phenomenon whereby voters categorizable by their particular socio-demographic characteristics and/or their particular interests in common are viewed as voting 'blocks' that party strategists view as vital to winning general elections.<sup>1</sup> Whilst some of the work on this form of politics relates more to interest group-government interaction, there is increasing interest in the role voter 'blocks' may play in determining

election outcomes. It was argued after the 1993 election, for example, that the federal Coalition paid a high electoral price for alienating important interest-groups and their associated constituencies.<sup>2</sup>

Of the blocks identified as critical to the 1993 federal election, 'ethnic' Australians (broadly defined as persons from non-English-speaking-backgrounds) have emerged as one of the more prominent in the minds of commentators and strategists. Indeed, some writers have claimed that the Liberal-National Party coalition's alienation of 'ethnic' voters in the lead-up to the 1993 federal