

Nation statement. Twice in the week before next year's target was announced, he endorsed the Australian Council of Trade Unions' line precluding more, or any, emphasis on the skills component — even though his Minister's April 21 letter claimed skill shortages had been identified — but endorsed a larger intake of, by definition, unskilled migrants.

That line cut right across the *Working Nation* hypothesis that a skilled and trained workforce will, if not guarantee full employment, at least be an essential pre-requisite. It is tantamount to saying we do not have enough unskilled residents and will

therefore supplement the supply with immigration.

The program finally announced for 1994-95 cut 2,000 off the skilled component, added 2,000 to family reunion and 10,000 to the aggregate. Almost all the extra 10,000 can be attributed to recognising formally the Chinese who were in Australia when the Tiananmen incident took place. If that is regarded as a one-off, the program's size has not really increased. The danger is that the extra 10,000 will be incorporated into the ongoing program and that the 80,000 aggregate will become the base figure in future years, from which upward bids only will be accepted.

A NEW CONSTITUENCY OR A GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM? A NOTE ON RECENT AAFI FEDERAL BY-ELECTION RESULTS

■ Nick Economou

The anti-immigration party, AAFI, achieved an unusually high share of the vote for a single-issue party in recent Federal by-elections. The context of these by-elections, however, suggests AAFI will find it difficult to reproduce these results in future.

Traditionally a venue for the expression of voter dissatisfaction, by-elections have typically provided the space within which exceptional results have emerged that have been able to send reverberations through the political process. The axiomatic approach to by-elections is that such contests in which the fate of the government is rarely at stake provide voters the opportunity to register their dissatisfaction with the government. Indeed, it is possible to argue that by-elections can provide opportunities for voters to register their feelings on a range of other issues besides the questioning of the government's record.

The whole question of the role of by-elections has been thrown open again by the performance of the Australians Against Further Immigration (AAFI) party in the spate of by-elections that occurred between January and March in 1994. This performance — the broad contours of which are outlined in Table 1 — was remarkable. It appeared to register a not insignificant degree of public support for the party (an average primary vote across the four contests of 8.9 percent), a support that also seems to be rising. Certainly the extent of the party's vote in the by-election for the outer southern-Sydney suburb seat of Werriwa in January (7.2 per cent)

Table 1: AAFI performance in 1994 federal by-elections

Date	Locale	'genuine party contest'	AAFI vote (%)	Position on ballot
29/1/94	Werriwa (NSW)	no (Liberal & ALP only)	7.2	4th
19/3/94	Bonython (SA)	yes	6.8	1st
26/3/94	Mackellar (NSW)	no (Liberal & Democrat only)	8.2	5th
26/3/94	Warringah (NSW)	no (Liberal & Democrat only)	13.6	1st

* 'genuine party contest': election contest which included the ALP, the Liberal party and the Australian Democrats
 Source: Australian Electoral Commission

surprised commentators and succeeded in putting AAFI and its policy platform squarely onto the political agenda, at least up until the Warringah and Mackellar by-elections two months later. AAFI candidates won primary votes well in excess of those obtained in general election contests (see Table 2) and maintained that vote over a period of time. These results are unprecedented amongst other specific-issue minor parties in recent by-election history.

As Table 1 shows, the party established something of a beach-head at the Werriwa poll in January. From this it was able to make a strong assault on the political perceptions of voters in the subsequent contests, culminating in the substantial 13.6 per cent won in the Warringah contest. Thus, it was argued

in the press, if by-elections can be voter plebiscites on government performance, surely they can also function as straw polls of community opinion about particular policy issues (see for example *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 19 March 1994). AAFI's apparently remarkable performance in these by-elections led to speculation that the community was increasingly coming to support this minor party's anti-immigration agenda. As the *SMH* editorialised after the Werriwa poll:

Perhaps that vote was driven by misperceptions about 'foreigners' taking jobs from Australians ... Whatever the case, this protest vote must not be dismissed as a mere glitch in the system. It may be an early warning of a social trend that needs to be addressed ...¹

Table 2: AAFI electoral performance, Menzies by-election and general elections compared

Year	Election	Result (% primary)
1991	Menzies by-election (Liberal & Democrat only)	6.80
1992	Wills by-election ('genuine party contest')	0.90
1993	NSW - Senate	0.67
1993	NSW - Senate (Werriwa only)	0.90
1993	Victoria - Senate	0.69
1993	South Australia - Senate	0.38
1993	ACT - Senate	0.21

Source: Australian Electoral Commission

Taken at face value, the apparently steady rise in AAFI's primary vote between the 1993 federal election shown in Table 2 and the last of the 1994 by-elections suggests the type of growing societal concern outlined by the *SMH* (see Table 2). However, it must be stated from the outset that making sense of by-elections is a complicated task. We need to take into account the randomness of the poll (a sudden one-off electoral contest in a specific area, as distinct from the broader aggregatory competition of a general election), the unlikeliness of the outcome affecting the critical question of which of the major parties will provide the government, and the problematic question of how the major party 'machine men' plan their strategies. All these factors help obscure any message coming from such contests. For example, the failure of one of the two major parties to stand candidates in a by-election simply exacerbates the rate at which electors will give their primary vote to non-major-party candidates. Indeed, if the established third party, the Australian Democrats, does not run, the results will also be distorted.

As Table 1 shows, only one of the four by-elections under review, Bonython, represented genuine political contest with all three mainstream parties, the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the Liberal Party and the Democrats, running candidates. In by-elections for the north-shore Sydney seats of Warringah and Mackellar the ALP failed to nominate a candidate. In the case of Mackellar, the opposition to ex-Senator Bronwyn Bishop (Liberal) came in the form of a high-profile independent, Bob Ellis. But Bob Ellis did enjoy a significant level of media coverage (and, from reports, some ALP assistance). In Warringah, however, there was little publicity for any candidate other than the Liberal, Tony Abbott. It

should be noted that the AAFI candidate, Robyn Spencer (who had contested the Werriwa by-election), also received a certain degree of media attention. This, combined with the lack of a Labor candidate, may help account for the 13.6 per cent primary vote that Spencer gained in Warringah. Table 1 also reminds us that the AAFI enjoyed the benefits of being on top of the ballot. It is worth noting that, notwithstanding these advantages, the AAFI trailed both an independent (15.4 per cent) and the Australian Democrat candidate (16 per cent) on the primary vote.

Of the New South Wales contests, the AAFI's Werriwa result in January is of greatest analytical utility. This election involved a two-major-party contest and the AAFI candidate (Robyn Spencer) won her 7.2 per cent primary vote from fifth position on the ballot. But the Australian Democrats did not run a candidate. While the Democrats had won only 4.9 per cent of the primary vote in Werriwa in the 1993 general election, one previous result strongly suggests that there is an active anti-major-party dynamic to the Werriwa electorate. In the 1990 election — in which, admittedly, anti-major-party voting behaviour was evident nationally — the anti-major-party primary vote in Werriwa comprised 17.9 per cent with the Australian Democrats accounting for 10.2 per cent. This precedent of a significant anti-major-party vote in Werriwa somewhat complicates interpretations of the AAFI's by-election performance in 1994. The significance of the AAFI vote in the by-election cannot be denied; it may suggest community concurrence with the party's agenda. But an alternative explanation is that Robyn Spence benefited both from the absence of a Democrat candidate and from a local tradition of voting against major parties.

If this is so, Bonython may provide the best test of the AAFI's performance. In addition to the full complement of the three mainstream parties, the Bonython election was also contested by an independent and a Grey Party candidate. The 6.8 per cent won by the AAFI's Denis McCormack appears to be an impressive result similar to the Werriwa vote, an important fact for those seeking to identify continuity in the AAFI's recent electoral performance. However, a number of other special factors also qualify the Bonython result. McCormack's primary vote may well have been inflated by an advantageous position on the ballot (the AAFI had top position). It is also interesting to note that though the AAFI primary vote was greater than that of the Australian Democrats (6.2 per cent) and the independent (1.4 per cent), it was lower than the 7.3 per cent won by the Grey Party. Moreover, the Bonython election took place against the backdrop of serious developments in 'ethnic affairs' as significant tensions between the Greek and Macedonian communities spilled over into violence. In the light of the public outcry over this inter-'ethnic group', rivalry one might have expected a solid AAFI performance. Given this, and given the fillip in media interest in the wake of its Werriwa result, the AAFI's Bonython performance looks less impressive.

The AAFI has achieved similar results to Werriwa and Bonython before, albeit in a contest where one of the two major parties (the ALP) was absent. In 1991 Denis McCormack stood for the AAFI in a by-election for the Victorian seat of Menzies. (Menzies, at that time, took in the outer-eastern Melbourne suburbs of Bulleen, Doncaster and Templestowe and was regarded as a safe Liberal seat.) McCormack won 6.8 per cent of the

primary vote amidst a total non-major-party vote of 32 per cent. If nothing else, this Menzies result at least set a precedent showing that the AAFI could amass a primary vote well in excess of the paltry total it obtained in a later general election (see Table 2).

The only other by-election contested by the AAFI before 1994 (Wills, 1992) produced a different result. The AAFI's Angela Walker was one of 22 candidates who contested the seat after the retirement of Bob Hawke (former ALP Prime Minister). Of course the dominant character in this electoral contest was the independent, Phil Cleary. Though all three mainstream parties ran, Cleary received vast amounts of media attention and was successful. His impact on the contest was significant in two ways. First, his candidacy unravelled the solidarity of the major-party vote, with the ALP suffering the greatest rate of defection. Second, in the light of Cleary's role as the primary focus of anti-major-party sentiment, there was very little room for any other non-major-party candidates to share in the realignment of voting behaviour. This included the AAFI, who won a mere 0.9 per cent of the primary vote.

If we add Menzies (held in 1991 where AAFI won 6.8 per cent) and Wills (held in 1992 with the AAFI winning 0.9 per cent) to the four 1994 contests the general picture is rather sporadic and inconclusive. It ranges over time and socio-geographic locations and fails to give any conclusive indication of the level of firm electoral support for the AAFI. There can be no denial of the fact that, in by-elections at least, the AAFI is capable of winning a primary vote well in excess of that which it obtains in general House of Representatives and Senate elections. But do these votes represent an expression of community opposition to the

government's immigration policy, an expression of disillusionment with major-party politics, or a combination of both? Of course, by-election results in themselves cannot give definitive answers to these questions. What the record does indicate, however, is that the AAFI does best where there is at least one of the three mainstream parties absent from the contest. The data are insufficient to suggest any socio-economic causal factors, although it is noticeable that the AAFI's performance in more affluent areas, such as Menzies, Warringah and Mackellar, was stronger than in the blue-collar seats of Wills and Bonython (see Table 3). Werriwa poses something of an analytical problem given the relative strength of the AAFI performance in what is essentially a blue-collar, manufacturing-based seat. Unlike Bonython and Wills, however, Werriwa is fairly average in terms of its ethnicity, being in the middle third of federal seats as ranked by their ethnic diversity.

A second major theme emerges from the AAFI's recent by-election performance. The failure of minor parties to obtain and/or sustain media interest is traditionally a source of frustration to non-major party politics, and indeed the AAFI have complained of perfunctory

media attention in the past. It could be argued that the 1994 results were substantial given the history of media indifference, but the real significance of the Werriwa result lay in the catalytic role it played in initiating substantial media scrutiny. Though not all of this coverage was positive (see *Herald-Sun*, 15 April 1994), there is nevertheless a certain truth to the old axiom that there is no such thing as bad publicity. This was certainly born out by the dramatic increase in the AAFI's vote in Warringah and Mackellar vote compared with Werriwa.

Whilst it is true that AAFI would be looking at a Senate presence if it could match its vote in Warringah, Mackellar or even the Werriwa result in a general election, the changed dynamics that occur in a national general election would probably squeeze the AAFI, and many other minor parties and independents, back into a very minor role. The only contest in this cluster to give an insight into levels of voter support for the AAFI in the context of a genuine competition was Bonython, but even here the value of the result was affected by some structural and incidental considerations. The AAFI has certainly been able to exploit the political space for minor parties that by-elections

Table 3: Socio-economic characteristics of the by-election seats

Seat	State	% workforce prof. employed	% workforce trades & labourers	% population overseas-born or parent/s overseas-born	% families with annual income \$40,000+
Menzies	VIC	32.1	21.4	46.1	41.3
Wills	VIC	21.4	35.0	51.0	19.6
Werriwa	NSW	16.0	37.6	34.5	18.6
Bonython	SA	3.0	49.0	42.2	11.1
Mackellar	NSW	28.1	26.0	31.6	32.6
Warringah	NSW	34.4	20.1	35.4	36.7

* Income data is drawn from the 1986 census, whereas all other data is derived from the 1991 census

Source: Australian Electoral Commission

create. But it is extremely unlikely that the party would enjoy the luxuries of absentee major parties, a prosaic policy debate and a bored media looking for any fresh angle on an otherwise

uninteresting contest, in the context of a national general election.

References

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 January 1994

WELFARE DEPENDENCY AMONGST RECENTLY ARRIVED AGED MIGRANT PARENTS

■ Samantha Evans

Australia faces a growing welfare bill providing for recently arrived migrant parents not eligible for the aged pension. This bill will escalate with the projected increase in parent flows from China.

The Australian government has indicated increased concern in recent years about the financial burden of the immigration program to the Australian tax-payer. The high level of dependence of recently arrived migrants on unemployment benefits is well known; however, another less publicised problem lies within the Humanitarian and Family Reunion migration categories, in particular, with aged migrant parents joining their adult children already residing in Australia. These parents are the focus of this article. The dilemma is simply: How do we provide for recently arrived migrant relatives who are not eligible for social welfare benefits? Before entering this discussion, the phrase 'not eligible' must be explained.

'Not eligible' refers to those migrants who are 'not residentially qualified' to receive the Age Pension (normally a ten year period). All aged migrant parents, aged persons, and migrants experiencing other specific circumstances (detailed subsequently), are required to enter an Assurance of Support (AOS) before being accepted into Australia. An Assurance of Support is an agreement signed by a close friend

or relative already residing in Australia (the assessor), and the prospective migrant, whereby the assessor must agree to support the migrant during a specified residency period. If the migrant utilises any benefits or services provided by the Commonwealth or State governments, or by a public institution during the residency period, the assessor is obliged to repay all costs. The purpose of the Assurance of Support is to limit the financial burden to the state of newly arrived migrants during the residency period.¹

An Assurance of Support is required for the following groups of people:

1. Aged, dependent parent or other dependent relatives;
2. Special need cases (for example orphans or relative in special need);
3. Last remaining relative;
4. People applying under Lebanese Concession.

From 20 December 1991, the residency period was reduced from five years to two years. Also, from this time the Assurance of Support was accompanied by a bond and health levy. The bond is lodged with a bank for the two year residency period and, if not used,