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## **The FitzGerald Report on immigration policy: origins and implications**

The extraordinary paradoxes associated with the Committee to advise on Australia's Immigration Policies (CAAIP) can best be unravelled if we begin with the committee's origins.

It was an outcome of ethnic community concern that 'their' communities were being prejudiced as the Hawke government sought to enlarge its immigration program and make it more economically rational. Under Mr Hurford's direction the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) had increased the numbers of immigrants in 1985 and 1986. But at the same time a new selection system was introduced in mid 1985 designed to select only the more qualified and 'employable' of brothers and sisters sponsored from Australia. Though this system was only partially successful in achieving this goal, it was seen by leaders of ethnic communities as challenging earlier gains.

By late 1986 the ethnic press and politicians representing the ethnic communities, particularly the Italian and Greek, were insisting on change. This pressure intensified after the August 1986 Budget, when the government decided to abolish the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, to reduce funds for English language training and to raise the option of amalgamating SBS and ABC TV. These cuts involved three different federal departments (Immigration, Education and Communications). The fact that they all affected 'ethnic' areas was probably coincidental. Nonetheless leaders of ethnic communities felt under threat. Their reaction was to attack Hurford—to call for his dismissal—and to press for a change in the immigration selection system.

*Il Globo* (15/9/86) demanded that the government 'collectively and effectively isolate the by-now discredited Hurford'. The paper insisted that the very low level of Italian and Greek migration was due primarily to 'the frustration generated by the restrictive measures taken in the last few years, in Hurford's inability to abolish NUMAS<sup>1</sup>, the most shameful and discriminatory system after the White Australia Policy and Dictation Test'. This call for action was taken up by some politicians within the Labor government, notably Dr Andrew Theophanous, and ethnic activists. One of the most influential was Dimitri Dollis, of the Victorian Ethnic Affairs

Commission. Dollis appears to have been a significant influence on Hawke's subsequent support for a re-examination of the selection system.

Hurford considered an internal inquiry which would be aimed at producing a government 'Green Paper'. But before putting this into effect he was replaced by Mick Young as Minister for Immigration early in 1987. As Shadow Minister from early 1981 to early 1983, Young had built strong links with the migrant communities. His appointment was a conciliatory gesture to them and it had other advantages as well because it was he who had presided over the formal development of bipartisanship on immigration with the Liberal/NCP Coalition government in 1981. There was the prospect of an election in the air and his appointment slowed further action. But prior to the election in July 1987 Hawke made a commitment to the ethnic communities that there would indeed be a Green Paper. This was understood to mean that the government would address ethnic community concerns.

Past practice suggests that these expectations would have been met. This happened, for example, when the 'Committee of Review on Migrant Assessment' reported in July 1981. This committee had been initiated by the Fraser government after leaders of ethnic communities had complained about the 'British bias' of the established NUMAS selection system. Following the Report the Liberal government increased concessions to brothers and sisters sponsored by Australian residents.

This time it was not to be. Following Labor's success in the 1987 election the government did indeed establish an inquiry (CAAIP), but it was a public and wide ranging inquiry chaired by Dr Stephen FitzGerald, and it delivered recommendations quite contrary to those widely anticipated by migrant communities.

## **The CAAIP recommendations—three paradoxes**

### *Paradox One*

FitzGerald's Report did not support the extension of family reunion rights. On the contrary, to the disappointment of those seeking the inquiry, it recommended a reduction in family reunion privileges. Moreover, in the course of making this recommendation it challenged the core symbol of ethnic community status in Australia—multiculturalism.

This remarkable outcome arose because the committee took as its prime goal the maintenance of a high immigration policy. Following their community consultations and review of Australian opinion the committee concluded that high immigration could not be sustained without wider support from the Australian public. Australian public opinion was hostile to migration and the committee believed that this hostility had been caused by multiculturalism, in that many 'Old' Australians saw immigration as part of a program to perpetuate separate ethnic communities. It followed that multiculturalism must be sacrificed on the altar of high migration.

Likewise if high migration were to regain public support it must be structured to appeal to 'all Australians'. The committee understood this to mean that immigration should deliver economic benefits. To this end it was argued that

the selection focus must be on technical and entrepreneurial skills vital to a more internationally competitive Australian economy.

In reviewing this issue the committee accepted the findings of Dr Graeme Hugo, who was commissioned to examine the skill level of recently arrived migrants. Hugo concluded that the existing family reunion concessions were generating a relatively low skilled brother and sister intake (CAAIP, Vol. 2, Hugo, pp. 62-66). This led to the key recommendation that the selection system be toughened.

This recommendation ran directly contrary to the recommendations of the peak ethnic community association—the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA). The Federation's submission to the committee argued for the abolition of 'the current points test for brothers and sisters' and replacing it with 'no points test for family members wishing to be reunited with family in Australia (within an appropriate definition of which family members can apply—but to include at least brothers and sisters)' (FECCA Submission—15/1/1988, p. 3). The committee also appears to have rejected the submission of Dr Theophanous, who likewise argued for a liberal family reunion policy, but in addition recommended that separate quotas be allocated 'by allowing a *minimum number* of persons from every region of the world to come, subject to flexible criteria'. (Theophanous Submission, 15/1/88, p. 20.)

It is no surprise that the FitzGerald Report has been received with great hostility in ethnic quarters. Mr Con Sciacca, Labor MHR from Queensland, declared it to be an insult to millions of migrants. One of its greatest flaws was its 'thinly disguised attack on multiculturalism'. The Victorian Minister for Ethnic Affairs, Mr Spyker, labelled it 'the most superficial and negative statement on migration' ever put before the public. These and many other similar responses were given great prominence in the media following the tabling of the Report. We return to this prominence when we explore the third of our paradoxes.

### *Paradox Two*

The public discussion stirred up in the aftermath of the CAAIP Report has focused on Asian migration. Much of the media comment implies that the Report itself favours a reduction in the Asian intake. This follows from the prominence of stories that the government (which has affirmed its commitment to multiculturalism, and to a non-discriminatory selection system) opposes the Report's recommendations, while the opposition (which favours the opposite policies) is often reported as favouring FitzGerald's views. Some of the attacks on the Report include claims that it is 'racist', and these have no doubt also contributed to the perception that it favours a reduced Asian intake.

The Report, however, makes it quite clear that a non-discriminatory selection system should continue, and that Asian migrants should be welcome. This must be seen in the context of the economic rationale which the Report argues should become the basis of any future immigration program. Migrants are seen as important in facilitating Australia's readjustment to a more inter-

nationally competitive and less commodity dependent economy. As Helen Hughes, the one economist on the CAAIP committee argued in her 1985 Boyer lectures, Asian migrants are likely to provide just the sort of ambitious, entrepreneurial and competitive characteristics needed to jolt a sleepy, union regulation bound economy out of its lethargy. She has also argued that Asian migrants will contribute to establishing new trading links within our region. Though there is no specific references to Asians filling this bill in the CAAIP Report, it is implied in comments like 'Immigrants must be selected so as to stimulate business formation, new technology and good management and to introduce new skills and favourable work practices' (CAAIP, 39).

That a Report as pure on non-discrimination as this one is, with a chairman whose career has long been associated with breaking down Australian barriers to communication with China, should now be associated with an anti-Asian position shows what a Pandora's Box has been opened. This brings us to the third of the unexpected outcomes of the Inquiry.

### *Paradox Three*

The CAAIP Report is very likely to lead to lower immigration intakes, the opposite of its recommendation. This is because by contributing to a renewed immigration debate it has left both the government and Opposition only one realistic option in defusing or exploiting the issue. For reasons explored shortly the public has hardened its opposition to immigration—and while the debate continues is unlikely to shift from this stance.

As governments in Europe have found when dealing with similar public feelings about immigration, there is only one response possible, and this is to reduce the overall intake. It is simply not acceptable for ethical and international relations reasons to target particular immigrants by race or national origin. Thus successive Labour and Conservative governments in Britain have, at their electoral peril, had to cut back on Asian migration but, despite all sentiment to the contrary, they have had to do it universalistically. This is why Australians too can no longer work as residents in Britain.

FitzGerald and his colleagues thought that by recommending an economically oriented, nationalist program they would defuse opposition. Clearly, the very opposite had occurred—in ways that they never anticipated.

Why should this be? When the Report was first published it received a generally favourable media response. Most editorials approved its emphasis on policies which would allegedly promote the well-being of all Australians, and not just 'ethnic-Australians'. But after this brief honeymoon the tone of the response changed. Leaders of ethnic communities, recognising that its implementation would mean a setback for family reunion and multiculturalism, became much more prominent in the debate. They were quick to brand the Report as racist and to assert that the only way to define contemporary Australia was as a multicultural society.

This vigorous ethnic backlash introduced the very themes FitzGerald had been at pains to mute. To the Australian public the debate was once again being presented as a conflict between ethnic advocates of cultural pluralism

together with a diverse and presumably Asian oriented immigration program, and those advocating a 'one Australia', low Asian migration policy. It is this definition of the debate that the Liberal/NCP opposition has seized on and cultivated. Their leaders have been aware for some time that majority Australian opinion was opposed to cultural pluralism. The revival of the debate finally precipitated—whether through accident or design—Mr Howard's decision to take up an anti-multicultural position.

This has caused a media sensation which has brought the debate into greater prominence and moved its terms further from those outlined by FitzGerald. By August the issue was Asian immigration and multiculturalism versus 'One Australia' and Asian migration control.

Public opinion on immigration has hardened since the late 1960s. In 1968 26% thought the number of migrants was too high, now roughly two-thirds of Australians favour a decline in immigration and in Asian immigration. It seems very likely that the position on the former reflects the latter. People believe that immigration means more Asians and that it means multiculturalism. In our view this opinion is not primarily due to fears of economic competition, but rather to Australians feeling that their identity as Australians is threatened. Their reaction is an ethnocentric one. Like the people of all modern nations they define themselves as members of a national community possessing identifiable and distinctive national traits. These traits, naturally enough, are looked on with pride—since they are part of their personal sense of identity. Similarly, Australians, like most other peoples, like to think they share an affinity with fellow Australians and most of them believe that this affinity should be cultivated.

A majority of Australians are opposed to multiculturalism when it is understood as meaning that cultural differences should be maintained indefinitely. And they are especially opposed when it is presented in terms which denigrate their native culture as parochial and without interest or merit. The recent influx of Asians has given this concern a new edge because Asians are seen as manifestly different in race and culture. They are believed to be clannish and their zeal for achievement seems to challenge a cherished element in the Australian identity—the easy going, uncompetitive style of life.

With the new intensity of the immigration debate following the intervention of Mr Howard, we would expect most Australians to become more concerned. The incessant preaching by well meaning activists on the virtues of Asian immigration and multiculturalism and renewed assertions that Australia was a boring culturally inferior place before immigrants refined it only intensifies the process. As one letter to the editor puts it, in the 1940s we had not yet benefited from the cultural wealth brought by the migrants. Australia was 'crude, parochial and dull . . . since then what a marvellously rich country Australia has become' (*Age*, 26 August 1988). The very first poll taken after Howard's intervention showed 77% wanted fewer Asian migrants.

The CAAIP Report was wrong in its interpretation of Australian feelings. FitzGerald seems to have begun his inquiry with a strong dose of wishful thinking. In October he stated that the debate raised by Blainey in 1984 had

passed and that 'if the race issue was critical it would not have died away as it did after the first controversy' (*The Age*, 27 October 1987). The Report concludes 'doubts expressed about Asian immigration have in many instances been no greater than those about immigration in general. It appears that attitudes to both have converged and reflect reactions to some third factor, like the economy or the labour market' (CAAIP, 25). This opinion derives from an analysis of the opinion polls by Murray Goot published in Volume 2 (see Goot, CAAIP Vol. 2, 15). But Goot does not substantiate the point. Nor does he address the experience in Britain, Germany or France where nationalists have successfully mobilised opinion against immigration largely independent of economic conditions. The Australian polls during the 1980s show a broad cross-section of Australians—including Liberal/NCP and Labor voters, and all classes—favour reduced migration. This is consistent with our interpretation: the main reason for opposition to migration is ethnocentrism. The only clear cleavage on the issue is by education. People with higher education tend to favour Asian immigration and to share with members of ethnic communities an enthusiasm for multiculturalism. Job threat may intensify attitudes but it is not a necessary precondition.

The CAAIP Report also cites its consultants' views that though a majority favour reduced immigration, the question is not an election issue. 'The issue of the various nationalities coming to Australia was in itself a non-event' (CAAIP Report, p. 26). This has been true in the past. But with the current intensity of the debate it is likely that the threshold of interest will be raised and that henceforth Australians will be much more likely to say that immigration policies will influence their vote. This in turn will heighten the determination of the Liberal/NCP to sustain the issue—thereby keeping the threshold level high.

It is for these reasons we believe that, to quieten an aroused electorate's fears, the overall immigration level will have to be reduced.

### **The dynamics of the FitzGerald Report**

How is it that a committee that was established to calm ethnic interests, inflamed them and in turn inflamed the larger Australian electorate?

When the time came after the 1987 election to deliver on the promise to establish an inquiry, Mr Mick Young was the Minister in charge of the portfolio. He had to be mindful of immigration officials' concern that any broadening of family reunion concessions could be economically painful; despite the tougher selection criteria introduced in 1985, by 1987 it was clear that the system was generating a sharp increase in low skilled brothers and sisters. Hurford had argued for increased numbers and tougher criteria for brothers and sisters on economic grounds. It would be hard to justify large numbers and more liberal criteria for family reunion on the same grounds.

Having decided to establish a wide ranging public inquiry, the government appointed a secretariat drawn from within DIEA. It reflected the bureaucracy's concerns. The Secretariat drafted Terms of Reference which highlighted the linkage of immigration with the 'significant economic readjustment' which

is underway in Australia (CAAIP, ix). But even more important, the Secretariat was influential in proposing prospective members of the Inquiry. For though the terms of reference put immigration in an economic context, they were still broad enough to enable an independent committee to pursue its own inclinations.

In choosing a Chairman, Young turned to FitzGerald as a man with impeccable credentials as an Asian scholar and diplomat, and as a man with strong Labor links. FitzGerald had joined with Whitlam in visiting China prior to 1973; moreover he was a 'mate' of Young's. Their involvement went back to the late 1960s when they both worked within Whitlam's office.

This appointment was to be crucial, for FitzGerald brought a somewhat unusual set of values to the Inquiry. Though an international traveller, knowledgeable about Asia, he did not cease to be an Australian nationalist in the Whitlam mould. His nationalism, perhaps reflecting some Irish blood, was of the Australian/Australian variety, hostile to the British cringe. During the inquiry he made clear his distaste for any British-Australian or Celtic-Australian tag. His instinct, apparently quite strongly and sincerely felt, was as an independent ethnic Australian. This made him responsive to the idea that immigration should be seen to be relevant to all Australians, rather than just to a sectional ethnic interest, and it facilitated a critical view of multiculturalism. FitzGerald's nationalism also propelled him into territory that few in the government would have anticipated. For more than a decade the official definition of an Australian had been that he or she was a part of a multicultural mosaic. All Australians were hyphenated Australians. FitzGerald looked for an alternative.

Another major appointment was Helen Hughes, Professor of Economics at ANU. She was born in Czechoslovakia, but had no links with the organised ethnic communities. She was an economic moderniser of the free market variety. She brought to the Inquiry an extreme version of the theory that the Australian economy needed the jolt of enterprising migrants to set it on a dynamic growth path. As the only economist, she was in an influential position and it was she who was mainly responsible for the Committee's support for high migration. It was indicative of her position that when the Inquiry began she specified that the secretariat provide immigration scenarios producing an Australian population of 35 million and 50 million by the year 2030. Subsequently, a third scenario giving an Australian population of 26 million by 2030 was added. This last, the smallest, required a net annual intake of 125,000, a 25% increase on the existing figures which already represented considerable growth.

Though these scenarios were absurdly high, they remained influential during the committee's deliberations. When consultants were commissioned to advise on the economic implications of immigration they were given three options to consider—net 125,000, net 280,000 per annum for 35 million in 2030 and net 540,000 per annum for 50 million in 2030 (CAAIP, Vol. 2, 97). This meant that the consultants could not even consider the merits of reasonable lower figures like net 40,000 or 75,000 per annum.

A third significant appointment was that of Mr Tony Bonnici, at the time Chairman of the Victorian Ethnic Communities' Council and a man with a long record of service to the ethnic cause. He was the only representative with this background. Dr Pucci (a businesswoman) played little role in the Inquiry, and when she did was more interested in issues of high technology than ethnic community concerns.

Bonnici proved to be the surprise packet. After years as an ethnic spokesman he appears to have been ready to embrace a broader commitment to Australia than the defensive, cultural maintenance stance adopted by most of his ethnic colleagues. In his own words he felt he 'had outgrown' this position. Bonnici readily responded to FitzGerald's nationalist stance—particularly FitzGerald's rejection of any Anglo cringe. FitzGerald's public criticism of Blainey illustrated by his comment that 'he [Blainey] has a nostalgia for the period of Anglo dominance' (*Bulletin*, Nov. 24, 1987, p. 76) indicates his attitude. This stance can have an appeal for people of non-English-speaking background because it offers them the chance to participate in constructing a new Australian identity in opposition to the presumed 'Anglo establishment'.

The only other significant appointment was Alan Matheson of the ACTU. He brought to the Inquiry long experience as a principled supporter of migrant advancement. In this regard his views were closer to ethnic concerns than FitzGerald or Hughes. He also brought the trade union worry that domestic training could be jeopardised by high migration. This conflicted with Hughes' position and it was the outcome of this conflict which decided the committee's position on the size of the immigration intake. The last and as yet unmentioned appointee, Mr Jim Hullick of the South Australian Local Government Association, played a low key role, though his vote was important in swinging committee support for the contentious recommendations on multiculturalism.

### **The Inquiry in action**

Though there was much press comment just prior to the Report's publication that the government had ordered a rewrite, in fact the committee operated relatively independently of both bureaucrats and politicians. Right from the beginning FitzGerald took a critical stance towards immigration officials, which they regarded as 'arrogant'. This meant there was little testing of the committee's ideas against the experience of senior officials.

The positive side of this was a refreshingly frank and nationalistic Report cutting through the DIEA's nervousness about offending its ethnic clientele. The negative side—which has become increasingly evident with time—is that the Report misjudged the audiences it was addressing, sometimes needlessly provoking hostility. The lack of detailed official assistance also limited the committee's capacity to develop a detailed exposition and justification of its argument, or to produce concrete proposals for a new selection system in line with its philosophy. From a nationalistic standpoint the Report's willingness to advocate reliance on foreign skills seems inconsistent with its general stance. This undermines faith in our own capacity and perpetuates a mentality of dependence, a part of the very problem FitzGerald sought to rectify.



## The size of the intake

Two major sets of recommendations emerged, concerning the size of the program and its composition. Since the recommendations on composition depend heavily on those concerning size, we consider them first. The composition of the committee was crucial on this issue. There was no representative who was knowledgeable about the environment, and thus no one to consider the effects of growth on cities, natural resources and conservation. To the extent that such views were considered, they were represented by the Secretariat. The brief paper by Tom Havas, published in Vol. 2, represents the only formal attempt to address these concerns. The Report itself denotes a mere 200 words to them, cavalierly dismissing any anxiety with the comment that environmental objectives 'can be achieved together with continuing immigration' (CAAIP, 43). But there are no recommendations as to how governments might bring about this happy state of affairs.

Nor were there any representatives of the majority Australian view that immigration should be reduced—not expanded. There was no one who could articulate this view and no one who had any sympathy for the vague mainstream Australian concern that Asian migration was threatening their sense of Australian 'identity', 'way of life'.

This meant that Helen Hughes was able to set the numbers agenda. Thereafter it was a matter of the committee gradually moving back from her initial 200,000-300,000 annual targets. The Report produced by the consultants evaluating the economic consequences of immigration was crucial here. The consultants concluded that there was no clear case for the radical increase favoured by Hughes. However, they did confirm the belief that it was important to emphasize skills if there were to be any chance of a net benefit. The consultants' key conclusion was that 'without a significant improvement in workforce quality the gains expressed in per capita income terms, from the contribution immigration can make to increasing the size of the workforce relative to the population, appear only modest' (CAAIP, Vol. 2, p. 64).

This put an end to the prospects of really large numbers. The final decision was to recommend an intake of 150,000 gross, for 125,000 net, the lowest of the options considered, but still a very high number. This reflected ACTU reluctance to accept anything higher, and the committee's anxiety not to recommend anything likely to be strongly opposed by the ACTU.

The ACTU was concerned that the committee's decision to recommend a sharper skills focus might mean that domestic training would suffer. There was some drama just prior to the Report's publication when Matheson argued that on just these grounds the program should be limited to around 120,000. He was dissuaded from this, but has since claimed that the Report does not endorse an open-ended program of 150,000. In his view the statement that the entry of skilled migrants must in no way 'lessen the commitment and obligation of employers and education authorities to train and re-train Australians' (CAAIP, p. 40), and the accompanying recommendation that 'there should be concomitant measures, including particularly, negotiated

arrangements to ensure these obligations are fulfilled' (CAAIP, p. 40), means the program figure of 150,000 is a contingent one.

So in regard to size the outcome was (a qualified) affirmation that immigration should be increased, though with an emphasis on skill. This latter commitment fundamentally shaped recommendations on selection.

### **The composition of the program**

In recommending the guiding principles for future immigration the committee took account of the majority view that immigration was a special policy for the 'ethnics'. In the Report's words, 'The fact that multiculturalism is so linked in the public mind with immigration and that it is perceived negatively, as sectional and divisive, cannot be ignored in the framing of immigration policies' (CAAIP, p. 59). This led to the conclusion that if immigration were to gain public support a new rationale would have to be spelled out.

The public was told that a sharper economic focus involving 'a requirement that a major component of the immigration program should select young, skilled and entrepreneurial people with language skills' (CAAIP, p. 56), would deliver significant benefits. This focus led inevitably to a rejection of ethnic submissions that extended family reunion (including brothers and sisters) should be given priority. The committee argued that the evidence before it showed that those entering under this category simply did not meet the required skill criteria. Cherished ethnic aspirations were summarily dismissed. The Report states that 'it was put to the Committee by some that extended family reunion, in particular reunion of brothers and sisters and adult children, is a right'. In response it declared, 'Extended family reunion is not a right, and has not been accepted as such either by the major political parties or by the Australian electorate' (CAAIP, p. 86).

The Report recommended that the many sub-programs under which migrants are now selected should be combined into one, except for immediate family reunion and refugees. In this new 'open' category, prospective migrants should be ranked according to the following order of priority (CAAIP, p. 90):

1. Labour market skills
2. Entrepreneurship and special talents
3. Age
4. Language capacity, including English
5. Kinship in Australia
6. Links with Australia
7. Attributes of spouse.

Extended family linkages were given a low priority. This, of course, was a profound disappointment to ethnic advocates. But it was not the only bitter pill that had to be swallowed because the committee went on to recommend that multiculturalism, too, be de-emphasised. Immigration must be seen not as a policy for members of ethnic communities, but as a policy for all Australians, and Australians' fears about more and more migrants simply feeding separate communities should be allayed by a re-emphasis on Australian national loyalty. Ethnic communities were taken to task for being sectional

in their outlook and politicians were criticised for pandering to these sectional interests. 'No one disputes the right of a politician to chase votes, but vote-chasing on immigration matters tends to be directed at the 'ethnic' vote and not at the constituency at large' (CAAIP, p. 13).

### **The rejection of multiculturalism**

The search for a high migration rationale likely to appeal to the Australian electorate led FitzGerald to further recommend that migrants be encouraged to show loyalty to Australia. The Report recommended the affirmation of a distinctively Australian (or 'ethnic Australian') identity that would appeal to all—migrants and non-migrants alike. The committee went to great lengths to define this Australian identity. Prominent writers, including Keneally, were consulted. They ended up with the claim that being Australian signified being part of 'a society which is open, easy going and relaxed, dedicated more to what life can offer than to fiercely competitive pursuit of what may be necessary to improve it' (CAAIP, p. 5). Other characteristics identified were the absence of 'old world feuds' and an 'unconfined' outdoor lifestyle.

The committee implied that this was an identity all intending migrants should affirm. This took them into the contentious territory of suggesting incentives calculated to enforce this commitment. The central recommendation was that immigrants be encouraged to become citizens and that in the course of this they should affirm a declaration 'to respect [the] fundamental institutions and principles in Australian society, and that this declaration be foreshadowed when immigrants are selected' (CAAIP, p. 68). The proposed declaration included an undertaking 'to accept and respect the institutions and principles of Australian society including parliamentary democracy . . . freedom of religion, equality of women, universal education'. This implied that migrants such as fundamentalist Muslims must give up their beliefs about the restricted role of women. The committee agonised and wrangled at length over this declaration, with Matheson, in particular, reluctantly swayed by a majority vote on the issue. In addition it was recommended that those reluctant to become citizens might be penalised by restricting access to certain 'non-survival benefits' (CAAIP, p. 68). Moreover, only those who were citizens should have the right to sponsor their relatives as immigrants (CAAIP, p. 92).

All this implicitly attacked the concept of Australia as a nation of many distinct and diverse cultures. To remove any doubt that this was FitzGerald's intention the Report declares that the word cosmopolitan best defined Australia (CAAIP, p. 5). This term, with its implication of intermixing and cross-fertilisation, ran directly contrary to the ethnic interest in cultural maintenance.

### **The political response**

FitzGerald appears to have believed that his Report, by developing a new national rationale for immigration, could itself contribute to a more favourable public response, and that this would outweigh any hostile ethnic response. But this presumed that 'old' Australians were capable of organising politically in support, and that they would be convinced his recommendations addressed

their concerns about multiculturalism and the ethnically diverse nature of the intake.

There was never much chance of either of these responses. FitzGerald misjudged the depth of feeling about Asian immigration and made no attempt to dispel Australians' belief that increased immigration would mean a continuation of present immigration trends including increased Asian migration. Second, the emphasis on bringing in skilled, entrepreneurial and competitive migrants was hardly calculated to placate Australians concerned that migrants represent a challenge to Australian job seekers or to their 'Australian way of life'.

But more importantly, FitzGerald was naive in believing Australians had the capacity to respond to his recommendation. It is true that distaste for immigration and multiculturalism is diffused widely across the community. But apart from certain fringe groups, notably the RSL, there is no organisational basis for this discontent to be mobilised.

On the other hand the ethnic lobby, though its concerned constituency is small, is very well organised. Moreover, it has the support of almost all Australian opinion leaders in academia, the churches, the media and the trade unions. The Hawke government, even though favourably disposed to Fitzgerald's recommendations on economic grounds, has embraced the ethnic lobby and, to a degree, has been taken over by it. Its political judgment has been that there were votes to be gained through fulsome support to the claims of ethnic community leaders. These leaders now have direct representation within the Labor government. The Chairman of the Labor Party Caucus Committee on Immigration is Dr Theophanous—who has built his career around advocacy of ethnic causes—and its Secretary is Con Sciacca, a politician of Italian Sicilian origin from Queensland, who appears to be building a similar profile.

They have the vocal backing of the ethnic press and the many ethnic communities' councils and individual national associations. In addition, the Labor Party now has a number of ethnic branches. There are sixteen in Victoria alone, eight Greek, seven Italian and one Maltese. In contrast, the Victorian Liberal Party has three: one Greek, one Italian and one that is multi-ethnic. One index of their influence is their success in preselection battles. For instance, in Victoria, Dimitri Dollis of the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission has recently won preselection for the ALP for the safe state upper house seat of Richmond (previously held by T. Sideropolous). Theo Theophanous (brother of Andrew) has also won preselection for the upper house seat of Jaga Jaga. Another is Andrew Theophanous's success in getting Cabinet to agree to a 50/50 split in the Independent/Concessional component of the intake for the 1988/89 immigration program. This advantages relatives (mainly brothers and sisters) sponsored from Australia, because it means that they will need lower skills to pass the selection test than independent applicants.

The release of the CAAIP Report instantly mobilised the ethnic lobby. FitzGerald challenged much of what they saw as their achievement in winning recognition for the maintenance of their cultures and for the status of their

communities. He had criticised multiculturalism, recommended that family sponsorship privileges be curtailed, and also implied, in what was the deepest cut of all, that members of ethnic communities, in their preoccupation with sectional interests, were disloyal to Australia. The rejection of open-ended entry rights for family members also raises anxieties among Greek and Italian leaders about community survival. The number of overseas born Greeks and Italians in Australia has been declining in recent years. This, plus the process of assimilation of the second generation, threatens community viability. Already, newspapers like *Il Globo* and *La Fiamma* are reducing circulation.

It would be difficult to overstate the strength of feeling on these issues. The Greeks in particular are fiercely ethnocentric. This reflects their strong nationalist traditions and the strength of the Greek orthodox church as a separate religious institution. It also reflects their bitterness at Australians' past dismissal of their claims for national dignity. First generation Greeks remember their low social status as unskilled non-English-speaking labourers in the 1950s and 1960s and being dismissed as 'wogs' or worse. The memory still rankles. They are also afraid that they may lose their children to the Australian way of life, which they see as uncaring and probably immoral. They fear that if their children assimilate they will no longer honour their Greek family obligations in the traditional way. Though people of Greek origin in Australia constitute only 2% of the population, their ethnocentrism, drive to succeed, and capacity to mobilise on ethnic lines makes them formidable political campaigners—as Theophanous's career attests.

Theophanous has been at pains recently to proclaim that multiculturalism means no more than a 'fair go' for immigrants. This does not withstand scrutiny; he has advocated a discriminatory immigration policy favouring Southern Europeans by the allocation of regional quotas based on the existing numbers of migrants from particular regions here in Australia. This policy addresses Greek and Italian anxieties about the maintenance of their communities and has been endorsed by their newspapers. For example, *Neos Cosmos* (11/4/88) in an article entitled 'The Hawke Government ignores submissions by Southern Europeans' states:

In order to see how much Australia's door has closed for Europeans, it is worth reminding our readers that from 1949 to 1986 non-British European migrants to Australia constituted 41% of the total while in 1986/87 the rate dropped to 7.92% . . .

On the contrary, Asians who had for 40 years constituted 4% of the total, rose to 40% in 1986/87 . . .

It is worth emphasising here that the proposal to the FitzGerald Committee by M.P. Dr. Theophanous calling for more migrants in proportion to each community does not appear to have been considered.

In this light it is not surprising that leaders of ethnic communities have condemned the FitzGerald Report. Bonnici, in particular, has been the subject of bitter criticism. He was accused by fellow members of the Victorian Ethnic Communities Council as a 'turncoat'. He made a strong attempt to persuade them to endorse the Report. However, they rejected the greater part of its recommendations and he was, in effect, forced to resign as Chairman. The

following Italian responses give something of the flavour of this reaction. *Nuovo Paese* (July 1986, p. 2) comments that 'The CAAIP Report is a singularly insulting and dangerous document. It denies any recognition of the contribution made by migrants to Australia in economic as well as cultural terms and is the most nationalistic and inward looking official document on immigration since the elimination of the White Australia Policy'. *Il Globo* comments (11 July, p. 1) that 'Italian migrants should have adopted a higher profile in the political life of the host country; they should have aimed at objectives of maximum socio-cultural impact. The general decline in the importance of the Italian language would not have occurred. The federal government and the 'FitzGerald Committee' would not have been allowed to discriminate in such direct and offensive ways against political migrants from Italy'. On the 16 and 17 July the leading ethnic groups held a conference in Sydney to consider their response to the FitzGerald Report. (Other organisations like the Australian Council of Churches, the Australian Council of Social Services, and the ACTU were also involved.) The conference resolved to form a permanent national lobby group, to be called the National Immigration Forum, to keep their views before the government.

This intense reaction was all too much for the Hawke government, which quickly moved to distance itself from FitzGerald and to affirm its commitment to multiculturalism.

But when all seemed lost from FitzGerald's viewpoint, along came Mr Howard with his offer to act as the mobiliser and spokesman of majority opinion. Howard correctly judged that he could capitalise on the emotions stirred up by the debate following the Report's release and especially by the ethnic lobby's strident assertion of its position. Suddenly there was a real prospect that Australians' feelings might find an effective political channel. If the Liberals do not tear themselves apart in the process, Howard's championing could be politically very potent. In one stroke he has stolen the middle ground from Mr Hawke. Howard now stands for 'One Australia', leaving Hawke carrying the flag for the very unpopular multicultural and Asian migration cause.

Nevertheless, as indicated in our analysis of the paradoxes of the debate, Howard is acting as a spokesman for ends which FitzGerald and his colleagues never dreamed of endorsing—namely the reduction of Asian immigration.

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> Numerical Multi-Factor Assessment System. This selection system, introduced in January 1979, assessed migrants on occupations, skills, English language competence and other factors. Non-English-speaking applicants with low skills had little chance of passing.

### References

- Immigration Commitment in Australia*, The Report of the Committee to Advise on Immigration Policies (CAAIP), Australian Government Publishing Services, Canberra, 1988.  
*Immigration Commitment to Australia*, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, Consultants' Reports.