

To the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

Please accept this as my formal submission **against** the government's latest bill propositioning changes to citizenship and language standards: The Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Commitments for Australian Citizenship and other measures) Bill 2018. I do not support the bill in any aspect and in particular I strongly reject the proposition of a harder English language test, and an 8 year wait for citizenship.

I would like to start by introducing myself as an Australian, from Australian born parents - whose parents of my mother are Italian migrants. If not for the migration process they were afforded - I probably wouldn't be writing this and I wouldn't be living in this country, contributing and working to keep a living in this country. My mother's parents migrated here in the 50's; they worked, contributed, paid their taxes, bought a home and became a part of the community. Their first language was Italian, they did not speak fluent English and yet this did not stop them from exercising their lives in this country, from contributing both through labour and through sharing of culture.

Through that process of naturalization I am here today - and like so many like me the proposed bill is insulting. It insults me because it is discriminatory and setting a standard that tells me and others like me, that their parents or grand-parents were good enough then, but not now. The history of this country tells us that a university grade level of English is not required for anyone to make a contribution to this country or be a good citizen. A university grade level of English is certainly not required for a person to exercise the basic utility of the language to get through day to day easily.

Secondly, I would like to introduce myself as one who is partnered with another who is a migrant. I met my partner almost 2 years ago. They are Asian and they have been here for over 5 years already. They have worked here, studied here and now have made the decision that they would like to stay here. The proposals by this government last year and now again this year is intimidating, disappointing and discouraging to my partner and many, many others like him. The attention, fear mongering and vilification of migrants in relation to job's and security tells thousands of people like my partner that Australia doesn't want you to come here anymore. That is the message these propositions send out not only within our borders, but outside of them - and as someone who has recently travelled to parts of Asia - the anti-migrant sentiment by this government is noticed and is embarrassing and shameful.

Allow me to exemplify much of the expenditure involved in my partner's case. I'll start with visa fees, for the current application for de-facto partner visa: \$7000, without a guaranteed result and an unjustified 2 year waiting period (and this fee goes up significantly each year). This process requires him to take a medical (provider of the medical is privately outsourced to Bupa and Bupa alone) - and so after paying \$7000 we are hit with a \$200+ bill to fulfil this requirement. The tuition and study fees to satisfy past visa's - tens of thousands of dollars - fees heavily overpriced for the content they receive which isn't necessarily recognized by employers or overseas institutions - quite often after studying in Australia they leave Australia with a course only recognized....in Australia. Universities are worse -charging sometimes 2-3 times the price for the same content delivered to a native Australian (before FEE-HELP / HECS is considered for a native). Then on top of this, they have working restrictions - and the work they do perform they pay tax on. My partner worked for over 5

years and was taxed for 5 years - on top of all the fees and tuition - tell me how these people are not contributing?

My partner has completed working holidays. I can show you the receipts of what they are actually paid on these 'working holidays' at these 'farms'. No native in their right mind would work for so little. So not only are our migrants taken advantage of through the cost structure of our universities and private colleges, they are directed to poor working and pay conditions. Please ask any MP how this is ethical? Chances are the strawberries you're eating were picked by a migrant labourer on the cheap. Despite all this, the government has the gall to 'tell them' to make sure they have enough money to sustain themselves - a class assumption that migrants coming here are loaded with finances and cash - or that they should be. On applying for any visa migrants must declare that they acknowledge this, and that they acknowledge Australia has a high cost of living. Anyone who says migration is easy or that these people do not contribute are ignorant of the system in place and its discrimination and violations of fair work and fair pay.

My partners case is one of thousands, and there are many more with harsher stories to tell - but they keep quiet as they don't want to be a target for visa refusal. Migrants like my partner have been through this system of systematic discrimination for sometimes in excess of 5 years. Pauline Hanson's proposition to extend the wait for citizenship to 8 years is just a nail in the coffin for many people going through this system. It's an attempt to create a class divide of migrants - only those with the time and money get to stay here. There is nothing reminiscent about Australian values with these propositions. It is a discouragement for anyone looking to start a life here. It sends a message that Australia is happy to take your money, take your labour and your taxes for years and years, and then send you on your way home. It is disgusting and I am ashamed of this government.

After all the years invested, then 2 year wait for a permanent residency and then a further 8 years proposed for citizenship? What possible justification beyond xenophobia could there be? These amendments are merely extensions of the racist and xenophobic political personalities behind them that have fooled the electorates into supporting them through migrant blaming in regards to job security. Migrants did not cause histories recessions, and they will not cause the next.

There are some myths surrounding the propositions for the changes in citizenship standards, and these myths also fuel the anti-migrant sentiment in this government.

The first is that migrants take our jobs. Evidence to the contrary. A bigger workforce means more consumption, more demand - more jobs. Perth suffers from this because of its geographical isolation. Contrast to Melbourne - a wealth of migratory culture and business generation that this government is forgetting. Our countries history and economy is build on this.<sup>1</sup>

The second myth is that cheap migrant labour will force wages down. A study by the Centre for Immigration Studies found this to be untrue. Other studies have seen domestic profit go up due to migrant labour - though it wasn't determined if it was because they were paid less. A boost in productivity could mean a boost in pay<sup>2</sup>. A study by the World Bank actually found the emigration out of Europe had a negative effect on wages.<sup>3</sup> where the confusion lies is when private companies 'outsource' work to already oversee entities - and migrants here in Australia are being unfairly blamed for this corporate behaviour. Migrants are also blamed when Australian companies do not tax them correctly or neglect to tax them at all and though

this they are vilified as tax evaders by the media, when the true villains are the employers perhaps attempting to hide their business activities.

I made a previous submission last year against the 2017 'version' of these amendments and I am appalled that we have to stand up against discrimination of race and class, again in this country. Have we been too happy, spoiled and sheltered for too long that we have forgotten the value in diversity and our neighbours? Are we forgetting our global position? Why this attack on migration such a focus – cant this government be using our tax for a more meaningful purpose? Healthcare? Transport? Education? Why do we pay tax? For this rubbish? We have already fought against the likes of this bill last year and are forced to do it again – atrocious – these politicians need to be held responsible.

The Australian government is following a trending path of wealthy nations at the moment - tightening its borders and circulating an anti-migration sentiment. Australia has a wealth of multicultural history and is geographically and uniquely positioned to be a leader in a truly multi-cultural sense. In some way we already are, but these propositions forget this, these propositions insult Australia's once good nature and are taking advantage of the insecurity out there regarding employment. Do not allow this government to use migrants as their scapegoat. Migrants bring colour and life to this country - it's how we started and how we should remain - reject these propositions to honour our past and welcome a future with even more opportunities that only come with an embrace of our neighbours - following the spirit that is inspired in our National Anthem - supporting these propositions could not be more un-Australian.

Regards

#### References

- 1: Bregman. Rutger, 2016 – *Utopia for realists – The case for a universal basic income, open borders, and a 15-hour workweek. 'beyond the gates of the land of plenty'*.
- 2: George Borjas, "Immigration and the American Worker. A Review of the Academic Literature," Center for Immigration Studies (April 2013). <http://cis.org/sites/cis.org/files/borjas-economics.pdf>
- 3: Heidi Shierholz, "Immigration and Wages: Methodological advancements confirm modest gains for native workers," Economic Policy Institute (February 4, 2010). [http://epi.3cdn.net/7de74e-e0cd834d87d4\\_a3m6ba9j0.pdf](http://epi.3cdn.net/7de74e-e0cd834d87d4_a3m6ba9j0.pdf)  
Also see: Gianmarco I.P. Ottaviano and Giovanni Peri, "Rethinking the Effect of Immigration on Wages." <http://www.nber.org/papers/w12497>