

1.0 Introduction

The last two and a half centuries have seen terrible wars. Previously regional accents, diets, costumes, and sports prevented the curse of nationalism from doing such damage, in part because they create an ethos of diversity and difference.

A problem today is that Australia is midway through a journey from a constitutional monarchy to a republican system of government. As such there is not a common political ethos suitable for civics education ... What to do about this is problematic ...

Supporting multiculturalism is obviously more constructive than merely being against racism. Supporting political and religious freedom is part and parcel of the Australian ethos, as embodied in the Australian Constitution:-

“116. The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting any free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.”ⁱ

As J.D. Mabbott argues, compulsory religion is a contradiction in terms:-

“There is the old story of a Bishop who congratulated an Oxford Head on the attendance at College Chapel. The Head said, ‘Yes Chapel is compulsory.’ The Bishop raised his eyebrows. The Head continued: ‘Things have come to a such a pass that it has become a choice between compulsory religion and no religion at all.’ The Bishop replied: ‘My mind is not subtle enough to see that distinction.’”ⁱⁱ

If people develop a sense of identity, a sense of community, a self esteem and ethnic pride based on a recognition of diversity and difference, the world becomes a better place than if nationalist superiority complexes prevail. As argued by Paul Tillich, we need “the courage to be.”ⁱⁱⁱ

2.0 International Law

The terms refugee, displaced person, stateless person, political exile, and migrant may have legal distinctions in international law, but often shades of grey in reality.

Many migrants, political exiles, stateless persons, displaced persons, and refugees if given the opportunity and given the encouragement become fine upstanding citizens whose careers, businesses, and political and charitable good works are noted as a benefit to the Commonwealth of Australia.

3.0 Religious Tolerance and Religious Freedom

What is a religion vis-a-vis a sect or cult? A genuine religion distinguishes itself because it admits of the possibility of universal conversion of the entire human race to its doctrine.

The ideas of religious (and political) conversion distinguish a free polity from a polity where there is an established religion. In this analysis, the communist regimes of the Stalinist era had atheism as an established religion.

A distinction therefore needs to be drawn between incitement to violence and incitement to property damage, and conspiracy so to do, and sincere attempts to convert others to one's political or religious beliefs and causes.

On the other hand people (and laws) need to show respect for “No Junk Mail” and “No Hawkers Or Doorknockers” signage.

4.0 Civics And Public Duty

What should we expect migrants to do?

- (i) learn English, Australia's language of commerce;
- (ii) undertake civics education;
- (iii) become an Australian citizen.

Of course, civics education needs to have real content.

5.0 Allocation Of Migration Places

How to allocate migration places? The priorities should be:-

- (i) Take a fair share of the world's refugees, displaced persons, exiles, stateless persons:-

Whatever the legal niceties, whatever the cause, we should have charity for these people. Whether it is through political or religious persecution, war, climate change, or maybe a stateless person born in an aeroplane in international airspace whose undocumented mother does not survive childbirth, we should take, say, 100,000 of these misfortunates every year. And to ease regime change for some regimes, we should consider requests by fleeing leaders for exile.

It would be better to send out migration officers to sit at tables in camps and hand out forms and conduct interviews than to encourage risky boat trips by not taking our fair share.^{iv}

- (ii) Family reunions of close family members.
- (iii) Skilled migration for real skill shortages, not the reluctance of government to provide proper educational opportunities.
- (iv) Quota provision for migrants who do not fall into any other category but whose enthusiasm to become Australian is manifest in their application. Such places could be raffled, perhaps.

It has to be said that migration is an individual solution, not a solution to underdevelopment, bad and corrupt governments, war, or climate change.

Australia's government therefore should set aside 1% of its budget to help such underdeveloped countries with infrastructure, emergency food aid, public health, etc etc with a view to tackling the world's migration crisis at the source.

Maybe we need to consider an amnesty for illegal migrants, save for those of other serious proven criminality, who have been here five years, and are willing to learn English, undertake civics education, and become Australian citizens?

6.0 The Republic and Civics

I think the idea of civics education should be expanded into a republican ethos where the political, psychological, and sociological tools that enable citizens to "see through" racial superiority complexes are taught. In the ideal republic, the citizen would realise that the world is a place of diversity and difference. An absence of malice, a dialectic of desire untainted by looking down, unalienated by looking up, would ground the citizen as a citizen of the world, not just of Australia.

7.0 Conclusion

I ask that the committee consider the above in its deliberations.

8.0 Endnotes

ⁱ The Australian Constitution Annotated, Attorney General's Department, Canberra 1980.

ⁱⁱ The State and The Citizen, J.D. Mabbott, Arrow Books, published Hutchinson, 2nd Ed. 1952, pp76-7.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Courage To Be, Paul Tillich, Yale University Press, New York 1952.

^{iv} The Political Memoirs, Malcolm Fraser, The Miegunyah Press, 2010, pp438-9 mentions the "orderly departure program."