



## FOREWORD

Recently my ambassadorial duties took me to a series of APEC-related ministerial meetings in San Francisco. The meetings were supported by a substantial group of young diplomats from the Washington Embassy. I was surprised when one of them said how delighted she was to be there because she felt more at home in San Francisco. It is arguably the most beautiful city in the US but that was not the source of her comfort. She, of solid Anglo-Celtic origin, said quite naturally, there are not many Asian faces in DC; here there are many. It is just like an Australian city.

There was nothing confected about her comment. Nor was there a context in the discussion which drew her out. It was just musing by a bright young 20-something Australian about what she identified as her community. I suppose she has read enough history to comprehend how powerfully the White Australia policy occupied an intense corner in our national psychology at federation and for a long time afterward. For her generation it has exited the gene pool. It has no resonance with her nor my similarly aged daughters.

It has taken a long time for a generation to reach this point, and some in older generations have not yet done so, or if they have they have done so very self-consciously. A core motivation for our federation was the determination to control access to Australia for the purpose of establishing in Australia, indigenous aside, an exclusively white population. The first act passed by the new parliament was the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, constantly then tampered with in practice and in law until its ending by the Whitlam Government in 1973.

White Australia was enmeshed with other mythologised aspects of physique and culture to reinforce a notion that we were taming this tough continent with an equally tough but superior race of a



racially pure stock. Such racialism was commonplace both at the heart of the British Empire and more broadly in European society. For some it reflected fear and xenophobia. For those who advocated it from the Labor Party ranks, it represented a determination to secure a high-wage economy. For most it was reinforced by an assumption that Empire success was evidence of the superiority of the white race.

Throughout the seventy years of the operation of the race-based immigration policy there were dents and quirks in the system. It upset Empire policy. The British ruled a multiracial empire; racist enough themselves, they nevertheless recognised their rule in their African and Asian colonies was not helped by such a strident affiliate. Particularly difficult was its complication for Anglo-Japanese relations after Britain early in the century outsourced the protection of the far-eastern reaches of its empire to the Japanese Navy.

One of White Australia's founders, Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, managed to combine its advocacy with a profound respect for oriental civilization. He was Australia's only, albeit closet, Buddhist Prime Minister. One of its last advocates, one-time Labor Leader and post-World War II Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, combined his devotion with an ability to speak Mandarin, support Chinese Australian candidates for Melbourne City Council and empathise with indigenous Australian rights. Ironically, Calwell's support for reorienting Australian migration away from an Anglo-Celtic focus undermined a central tenet of its practice. He had a preference for what he called a polyglot society - one nevertheless whose people were sourced from a European background. As Europe receded, the weight of Australia's geography made the policy both ludicrous and dangerous. Such realities however required changes in the Australian heart for them to be recognised.

This is where Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya comes in. He represented one of the dents in the system. His appointment to an academic post in the 1950s, followed by its regularization in a 1957 policy change which permitted non-whites of a distinguished background to settle here, was an early fissure in the dam of White Australia. Laki is a generous Australian patriot. He wants the best

for his nation and for it to be the best it can be. He has combined great scholarship with courageous advocacy. The essays which follow demonstrate all of that combined with a comprehensive analysis of the nuances, twists and turns in one aspect of the race issue in Australia. He updates and extends much of his early work in this book. It is essential reading for those who want to understand Australian society.

Australia is now a multiracial, multicultural society. The fact does not sit easily with all. It will probably require the emergence to dominance and authority of the generation represented by the young woman whose views I quoted earlier before we render the views Laki addresses purely historical. Laki will hold an honoured place in the evolution of attitudes traced in that history.

**Hon'ble Kim Beazley**

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and Former Leader of the Australian Labor Party