

# An Australian Overview

## *Lessons for other immigrant-receiving nations*

by Mark Uhlmann

Australians generally know little about their history and don't have much of a sense of the country's strategic position. For most, the British hand-over of Hong Kong to China was an exotic foreign news story. It was interesting, but not seen as something of direct relevance to them.

But the hand-over of Hong Kong formally ends a period of transition which began with the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in February 1942. The fall of Singapore, described as the British Empire's darkest day, was also Australia's most crushing military defeat.

In the Japanese sweep through Southeast Asia a total of 22,000 Australian soldiers were captured and used as slave-laborers. Their treatment was so brutal that one in three of them died in captivity. Singapore's fall underlined the fact that we could no longer rely upon Britain for military support.

The hand-over of Hong Kong sees the final withdrawal of Britain from our area of strategic interest. In one sense, it merely puts the seal on the reality which began with Singapore, but it has important symbolic importance. It represents a time to reflect on how Australia has responded to the need for change since the end of World War II.

Australia was quite justified in establishing the White Australia policy in 1901, but it was also right to abolish it in the late 1960s. Australia, which had engaged in Vietnam as an ally of the United States and for reasons of forward defense against communism, was quite right to accept some Vietnamese refugees, but it was wrong to allow

abuses of our immigration system by non-Europeans to happen as a sort of compensation for the White Australia policy.

Right up until the late 1970s the policies Australian governments had in common — in other words the accepted national parameters — were overwhelmingly supported by the general public. The battleground occurred within those parameters, but from the late 1970s, with the policy of

multiculturalism, and the early 1980s with dramatic immigration and economic changes the national consensus was broken.

Recent Australian governments have handled the need for change very badly. They have failed to bring the bulk of the population with them and have for the most part arrogantly and insultingly

dismissed their concerns. To understand the magnitude of the changes it is necessary to give an overview of some key Australian history.

Australia, which began as a collection of British colonies on a continent at the far flung ends of the earth, had responded to the challenge of being far from Europe and close to the teeming millions of Asia by largely excluding Asians from settlement and encouraging Europeans to take the long voyage south. This strategy worked very successfully while the Asian nations were weak, the British Navy an all powerful shield and our trade overwhelmingly with Britain and the Empire.

But with the fall of Singapore, Australia, with the exception of its Aboriginal population, almost entirely of European stock (and that overwhelmingly British), was for the first time threatened by an Asian invader.

Conquest by Asians was at the time Australia's worst nightmare, a nightmare with roots deeper than just the European settlement of the continent and the establishment of a formal whites-only immigration policy. It is a dread that seems to be

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part of a European folk memory.

Australians were a free people with a democratic system, something seen as totally at odds with Asian models. It was clear that invasion by Japan would mean not only enslavement, as our captured soldiers had been enslaved, but the obliteration of our way of life.

The Australian colonies in the 19th Century saw foreign European powers as the main military

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threats. The threat they saw from Asia was not military invasion, but unwanted immigration. This rose to the fore in the wake of large-scale Chinese immigration during the gold rush. The Chinese were indentured laborers prepared to work for very low wages. Labor organizations were at the forefront of those calling for their exclusion.

The Australian colonies adopted laws excluding the Chinese and one of the first pieces of legislation passed by united Australia after federation in 1901 was the so-called White Australia policy, limiting settlement to Europeans.

At first Australians did not take much notice of Japan as a potential threat. But in 1905 after it defeated Russia in a naval war the alarm bells rang. From that point on, even though Japan was allied to Britain and fought with the allies in World War I, it was seen, by strategic thinkers, such as Alfred Deakin, and Billy Hughes, Australia’s Prime Minister in World War I, as the major military threat.

Japan also urged Britain to put pressure on Australia to alter its White Australia policy to make exceptions for Japanese.

Australia resisted the pressure and to underline the displeasure with Britain, then-Prime Minister Alfred Deakin invited Britain’s rival, the United States, to send out a fleet on a goodwill mission, though foreign policy was still officially conducted by Britain. The U.S. Great White Fleet, so called for the color of its ships, arrived in 1908 to great acclaim. The British, with the example of losing the American colonies always at the forefront of their minds, got the message.

Over 59,000 Australians died in World War I, mainly on the Western Front, and Hughes, at the Paris peace conference following the war, used the moral authority of that loss to promote Australian security interests.

As Roger C. Thompson notes in *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific*, Hughes insisted on Australia’s claim to German New Guinea, in the face of opposition from U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, who opposed any annexation of former German colonies. Hughes clashed with Wilson who accused Hughes of a willingness to “defy the whole civilized world.” The hard-headed Hughes, mocking Wilson’s self-regarding idealism, said the president was right, that was precisely what he was prepared to do.

He also defiantly defended the White Australia policy in the face of Japanese diplomatic moves, which at first had the sympathy of Wilson. Hughes, a small man, was depicted in a humorous cartoon of the time as an angry little Horatio at the Bridge, hopping up and down in front of the inscription “White Australia”.

He also opposed Japanese and American pressure for an open-door policy to New Guinea. He wanted to exclude Japan from the area in immediate proximity to Australia. Hughes also wanted to claim the formerly German north Pacific islands, claimed by Japan. And if Australia could not have them, then neither should Japan, as Australia “profoundly distrusts” the nation. The islands contain “many harbors, several of which are capable of holding very large fleets.”

Hughes, as it happens, was precisely right about the Japanese threat. If he had not acted as he did, Japan may well have had a foothold right on Australia’s doorstep, making a direct strike against Australia that much more feasible and effective. Hughes was very clear-headed about strategy. The White Australia policy, which he so vigorously defended, also made sense for its time. While this policy is presented as nasty and racist these days, in fact in its time it was regarded as progressive.

Apart from pressure from labor organizations and sympathetic publications such as *The Bulletin*, it was Deakin who largely fashioned the policy. His strategy was to build up local working conditions by excluding cheap labor, meaning in practice at that time, colored labor. The fear was that business would use an open door to such labor to drive down

wages and diminish working conditions.

But if settlement was restricted to Europeans and capital given protection from imports, workers could be paid a decent wage, labor could obtain a dignity instead of being a slave-like toil, workers could feel a part of the life of the nation and the common racial characteristics would bind all classes together in a sense of national unity.

While crude racism was expressed by some, it had no part in the thinking of liberals like Deakin, who saw the American experience with slavery as a caution. As Bob Birrell notes in his book *A Nation of Our Own*, Deakin stated that excluding cheap colored labor from northern Australia (a region equivalent to the U.S. South) involved economic sacrifices, but "those sacrifices for the future of Australia are little ... when compared with the compensating freedom from the trials, sufferings and losses that nearly wrecked the Great Republic of the West [the American Civil War]."

There would be no slaves or semi-slaves in the north, sowing the seeds of national division. Where industries existed which had used such labor, such as the Queensland sugar cane fields, employers would be compensated for having to pay higher wages by tariff protection.

With the Japanese sweep through Southeast Asia, Australia's Prime Minister for most of World War II, John Curtin, in an article in the *Melbourne Herald* on 26 December 1941, which became famous, signaled his intention to turn to the United States. U.S. troops, under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, came in large numbers to Australia, which was used as the major land base in the fight back against Japan.

Welcoming the great ally with relief, Curtin pledged that Australians would also fight to the last. In a radio broadcast in March 1942 Curtin, himself of Irish Catholic descent, said: "Never shall an enemy set forth upon the soil of this country without having arrayed against it the whole of the manhood of this nation; with such strength and quality that this nation will forever remain the home of sons of Britishers, who come in peace in order to establish in the South Seas an outpost of the British race."

To Curtin and the earlier politicians who shaped Australia, the country of today would have been inconceivable. The attitudes of these men were a reflection of those of their people.

This background is given to underline the fact that early Australian governments had a very clear-headed strategy for the country and were prepared to stand up to pressure in order to achieve their aims. They were prepared to turn to "great and powerful friends" where necessary, and also knew how to appeal to their people. Their decisions were very valid decisions for their times, but the times were changing.

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At war's end, the close shave with Japan led to a belief that Australia had to quickly increase its population, then standing at 7 million, to economically develop the nation and meet any new threat. Not enough migrants were available from the preferred source, Britain, so, for the first time, large numbers were accepted

from continental countries, particularly southern Europe. Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell referred to them as new Australians. Australians were promised that this would not upset their existing way of life, but such a dramatic change was bound to have an impact. In the 1970s the changes wrought by this new immigration were used to justify the establishment of the government policy of multiculturalism.

Less than a human lifetime on from the Fall of Singapore, the official Australian attitude toward Asia has changed profoundly. Once the aim was to keep Asia at bay, but, from 1983 the official policy under the Australian Labor Party governments of Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating was to embrace Asia. It was not only to embrace, but, particularly as articulated by Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and a clique of Foreign Affairs bureaucrats, favored academics and journalists, to look forward to the day when Australia was entirely absorbed by Asia, racially and culturally. A self-named "Asiacrat", leading academic Stephen Fitzgerald, a former ambassador to China, was prepared to advocate a political confederation with Asian nations.

It is hardly surprising that many, if not most,

Australians, reared on the old model, found this change staggering. The governments of the day seemed to regard their bewilderment with contempt. At the same time that this was occurring the policy of multiculturalism, which effectively set up "ethnic" organizations under government patronage, had led to a fragmenting of Australia's sense of nationhood.

Ethnic leaders, initially without much support from their local communities, but backed by academics and bureaucrats, launched attacks on the "old" Australian population, which was given the designation "Anglo-Celtic", but which also included a minority of people with forebears from such nations as Germany and Italy. Effectively the term referred to anyone of European stock whose only or first language was English and whose forebears arrived in Australia before World War II. In other words, the unhyphenated Australians.

Ironically, people of this profile among the intelligentsia were at the forefront of those making the attacks. Politicians of the same profile increasingly joined them. So the Anglo-Celts found that their intellectual leaders, who once reflected their opinions, had in fact turned against them and their forebears.

Instinctively they knew the attacks were unfair, but not being organized and not knowing much about their history, they were unable to effectively counter them. So they were largely left without intellectual defenses against the assault.

While this assault involved supposed terrible treatment of postwar migrants of all non-Anglo-Celtic types, the most effective points of attack were on the past racially-exclusive immigration policy and attitudes to Asians, but particularly past treatment of Aborigines.

Again and again when the fashionable elites have wanted a stick with which to beat old Australia and old Australians, they have turned to Aborigines. Professionals from the multiculturalist and human rights industries have become very skilled at using Aborigines as a stalking horse for achieving their own agendas. The displacement of the Aborigines in their view and the white Australia policy denies the European settlers the moral legitimacy to object to high immigration levels or to object to the policy of multiculturalism.

A raft of programs were set up in which people

of "non-English speaking background" were given preferential treatment. Illegal immigrants, aided by local human rights lawyers, increasingly used scarce legal aid to fight through the courts for the right to stay in Australia.

To make matters worse, as this was occurring Australia was experiencing a painful economic transition. The doctrine of free trade and the level playing field had taken hold and tariff protection was being cut back. Australian industry was hard hit. Australian companies were being taken over by foreign interests at an alarming rate. Foreigners were snapping up prime Australian properties and our governments were expediting all of it. Unemployment rose dramatically.

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So, in less than a lifetime, Australian policy had shifted 180 degrees. The big difference was that while the earlier policy had the overwhelming support of the populace the latter was deeply resented.

The early strategy promoted a sense of national unity and was also simple to understand and, in the case of immigration at least, administer. The new approach, largely a reaction to the past policy, is complex and incoherent. It is not based in a belief in nation building and a firmly grounded appreciation of the national interest, but in response to guilt, imagined international opinion and a desire to please minority interest groups. It seems to wax and wane in official expression and allows all sorts of abuses to occur, particularly in the areas of immigration and multiculturalism.

The problem for the majority was that the political opposition was, at various times, unwilling or unable to provide a viable alternative. The most vocal sections of Australian educated elites, including a majority of journalists, supported the ALP and were quick to add their weight to campaigns against any Opposition politician who dared to question the new orthodoxy.

Present Prime Minister John Howard learned that to his cost in 1988 when he said social cohesion would be enhanced if the rate of Asian immigration

was "slowed down a little."

Prime Minister Howard, now that he is in government, basically supports the economic changes, but has shown that he is skeptical of much of the ALP social agenda. The 1996 election result, which handed the ALP a thrashing and saw the defeat of some of its most politically correct ministers, including the Attorney-General Michael Lavarch and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Robert Tickner, convinced him of the unpopularity of much of what the ALP espoused. However he is unable to dismantle the core policies the ALP instituted, or entrenched — which have the support of many politicians on his side — though he has attempted to modify them.

This is not to say that we should simply return to the old policies. Australia had to change, both economically and in social policy, and the hand-over of Hong Kong starkly underlines why it had to change.

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The need to change was apparent to astute observers soon after World War II. Britain was steadily declining as a major power and a major trading partner. Britain itself turned increasingly away from its former colonies and toward Europe. Decolonization by Britain and other European powers in Asia, including the Dutch in Indonesia, led to the rise of new Asian nations with which Australia had to deal.

Another reason for change was the rise in importance of Asian nations to Australia as trading partners, particularly our former enemy Japan, now our number one trading partner. Only 12 years after World War II, in 1957, Australia, under Prime Minister Robert Menzies, signed a trade treaty with Japan and renegotiated the treaty with Britain, which allowed the import of more non-British goods. So old Australia, even under a Prime Minister regarded as a strong Anglophile, saw the need to change.

Australia is and always has been a trading nation. It is dependent on exports and foreign

investment. No matter how much some may long for a sort of autarky, Australia will continue to rely on trade and so it makes obvious sense to develop good relations with major trading partners. Australia's major sea trade routes are controlled by Asian nations.

The development of good relations with Asian nations was vital, but rather than developing a hard-headed set of policies which would serve the best interests of Australia as well as gaining respect in the region, Australian governments, since the early 1980s, have rushed to surrender.

Of all the major strategic changes in Australian history, this has been the worst handled. Australian governments have given too much away, with too little return. We are left with deeply unpopular economic and social policies as well as a public relations disaster in the Asian region, where, in spite of all the painful changes, particularly to immigration, we are, as a result of a grass-roots backlash and the local media reporting and distortion of that backlash, presented as a racist nation.

This backlash is manifested in the figure of the Federal Member for Oxley, Pauline Hanson, who won the previously safe ALP-seat as an independent in a landslide after being disendorsed by the Liberal Party over comments she made about Aboriginal affairs. She is a politically insubstantial, but brave, person who has recognized the elements of discontent, particularly with regard to immigration and Aboriginal Affairs policies, but has catered to them crudely. Her supporters are mainly among the old Australian working class and the unemployed.

She has become a popular punching bag for the local media, and the ratbag university-based Left has organized a series of violent demonstrations against her. The international media in turn have largely been led and urged on by sections of the Australian media, so that Pauline Hanson has not only become a hate-figure in the Asian region, her exaggerated image is presented as the true nature of many, if not most, Australians.

This is dangerous, as the unctuous hand-wringers of the world, including in the powerful U.S. Department of State, have now turned their eyes to Australia. Their posturings, from what is regarded as the moral high ground, with the urging and aid of local "human rights" lobbies, have the capacity to

damage our national interests.

But it must be underlined: the inept handling of the need for change by Australian Governments, beginning in the 1980s, and their arrogant disregard for the feelings of the majority, have led directly to the Hanson phenomenon. The elites who so rail against her are the very ones who created her in the first place.

Neither the elites nor Hanson have the answers needed to unite Australians, which, given the pressures we will face in the coming century, including the immigration pressures of the growing population to our north, are vital for our advance.

What then is to be done? The first thing to do is to turn to Australian history to see where Australian governments and Australian popular movements have got it right and to take instruction from that in the light of present circumstances.

We need a renovation, not a revolution.

**B**efore this failure, Australian governments generally responded intelligently to the strategic imperatives of their times. Where they overstepped the mark, popular pressure led to change of governments and/or policies.

Though it is fashionable to present past governments not only as racist, but as lick-spittles of the British and Americans, in fact in general they proceeded with a healthy understanding of Australia's best interests and limitations, particularly in the late 19th Century and the period preceding World War I, the formative years of the united Australian nation. They understood that Australia, as a small nation, needed powerful friends.

The colonies maintained the shield of the British Empire, while managing, on significant occasions, to direct the energies of Britain to their own advantage. When Victoria and other colonies, and eventually infant Australia, adopted protective tariffs, it was to the disadvantage of British traders, yet the Empire connection remained strong.

The colonies and infant Australia skillfully mapped out a domestic and nascent foreign policy under the umbrella of British protection, using its own form of domestic pressure when necessary and also at times appealing directly over the heads of governments to British public opinion.

Australia, which lacks the strength to shape world affairs, must again skillfully negotiate a position in the gaps left by the changing international circumstances. We must realize our limitations as our forebears did.

The first limitation relates to Asia. We cannot adopt racially discriminatory immigration policies again after effectively dismantling them. In the late 1960s under Prime Minister Harold Holt it was wise to dispense with the White Australia policy. It is absolute

folly to try to reintroduce it in the present strategic circumstances.

Not only would this involve isolating ourselves in the region, it would invite pressure and even sanctions from allies such as the United States, which has powerful domestic lobbies which would rail against us. The only sensible immigration course is to insist on a low intake — 50,000 a year — which is targeted to jobs available and has a generous refugee component of 10,000 to 15,000 people. Such a program would not adversely affect Australia's social balance and could be defended anywhere.

On the other hand we must insist on our differences. We are a nation with a Western European heritage. It is stupidity to try, in a vain attempt to fit in, to pretend that we are not. We are not an Asian nation. We, with New Zealand, are unique in the region and we should be proud of that. Showing confidence in what we are and dealing with Asian nations with respect for our mutual differences will gain us respect in the region. We should also not presume to publicly lecture them on human rights, but take a diplomatic approach.

The policy of multiculturalism must be dismantled and a policy of integration into the mainstream reintroduced. Again, properly done, this policy could be defended anywhere. Given their own policies, our Asian neighbors are hardly in a position to object.

Just as our forebears at the turn of the century built up manufacturing, so we must rebuild from a devastated base. A sensible assessment of our strengths should be undertaken and a policy adopted to promote them.

Sensitive policies in Aboriginal Affairs are needed, but there must be an accounting of public

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moneys. Aborigines should be encouraged to stand on their own feet and not be dependent on government welfare. Most will readily embrace a system which promotes this and insists on fair accounting. This will also increase the confidence of white Australians that money is not being wasted.

The disinformation in the guilt campaigns of the local "human rights" lobbies must be countered. For example it is widely believed locally and internationally that far more Aborigines than whites die in custody in Australia. This is untrue. Far more whites than blacks die in custody and successive

that in the end, militarily we can only rely upon ourselves.

On the other hand there is considerable sympathy for Australia among large sections of the U.S. public. Should we have trouble with its government over such things as the excesses of "human rights" lobbies, there is always the option of going over the government's head and taking a case directly to the American people, as Deakin did with the British in negotiating the Bill for Australian Federation.

So we will need effective Australian communicators working for us in all our major areas of concern. The ineptness of our Foreign Affairs Department is underlined by the fact that it abolished a media affairs unit which had just this reach. Such a unit must be re-established and staffed by people who have a strong commitment to the best interests of Australia. Local government communicators should also be prepared to quickly counter the disinformation of our own local lobbies. We must look outward and engage with nations around the world, but have a strong sense of national identity. The recent fragmentation of Australian society makes that a more difficult task than that which faced our forebears, but it is by no means an impossible one.

We have to again find the balance between local independence and the need for foreign investment. We have to start with the principle of looking after our own backyard first and also engage with the world, not merely Asian nations.

Finding and implementing the right strategy is a psychological problem as much as it is a material one, but if we get the basic parameters right, Australia will be in a sound position to face the great challenges that surely lie ahead. TSC

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reports have found the proportionate death rates of whites and blacks to be roughly equal. (See *Australia Betrayed*, p.95).

A deliberately misleading media campaign, backed by lobbyists, bureaucrats and even our own governments, which gives massive publicity to every black death and very little if any to white deaths has led to this big lie's being entrenched. What is out of proportion is the arrest rate. Proportionally, far more blacks than whites are arrested, mainly for alcohol-related offences.

We must aim for good relations with the United States, but we must bear in mind the example of Singapore. We must not allow the U.S. to become our Singapore and think it will be our fortress if we are threatened by a hostile power. There is no guarantee of that. We must proceed on the basis