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# Immigrationism, Racism And Moral Monopoly

By Mark O'Connor

## Immigrationism — First Sketch of an Ideology

The world average for net immigration is of course zero. Most countries take in about as many immigrants as they produce emigrants. Overpopulation may be the greatest current problem for most nations, yet a well balanced immigration program need contribute little to this.

Only a handful of countries, such as Australia and Canada, have seriously unbalanced immigration programs. In these countries many more thousands of people enter the country than leave it each year. The net influx then becomes a serious problem both for the economy and for achieving population stability and ESD, (Ecologically Sustainable Development).

The word "immigrationism" in my title is not a mere synonym for immigration. We are talking about an ideology — one that is currently omnipresent in the media. Immigrationism is the belief that a large surplus of immigrants over emigrants is a normal and healthy situation.

Like all ideologies, immigrationism is dangerous because it invokes our moral sense and then applies it to a simplified and perhaps misleading model of the universe. Yet, like all ideologies, it becomes less dangerous once one has a name for it. One can then keep long-term tabs on the creed, note and remember what sorts of people its leaders have been, and also which awkward facts its PR may have swept under the carpet.

Oddly enough, we have had till recently no common word for "immigrationism" and have had to speak clumsily and rather misleadingly of "the ethnic lobby" (as though most immigrants were immigrationists). It is even possible that I am the first person to coin or use the word "immigrationism" in the present debate. Yet if so, how have we done without it? Immigrationism is surely as vivid and identifiable a presence in Australian politics as environmentalism or monetarism.

There is now a second near-synonym which I will occasionally prefer: this is "the politically correct line on immigration," or PCLI for short. As this second term suggests, immigrationism is part of the wider

problem of political correctness — that is, of orthodoxies and assumptions that may constrict debate.

The current PCLI often presents itself as self-evidently humane and altruistic, and its opponents as selfish and chauvinistic: end of discussion! However, our immigrant intake is not in fact dominated by refugees but by those whose skills are allegedly of value to us, and by those whose own ethnic groups, motivated by ethnic chauvinism ("racism") or family loyalty, have lobbied hardest. Further, a glance at the politically correct discourse of mainstream Australian media will show that it is in fact obsessed with materialist values, e.g. with ways to increase GDP, (Gross Domestic Product).

So let's take a closer look at one of the crucial code-words of the PCLI.

## The Use of "Racism" to Inhibit Debate

Twenty-five years ago, in the Vietnam era, we Australians had a conservative establishment, a rather complacent, self-indulgent and self-perpetuating establishment. It saw itself as right-wing, and it far too readily dismissed its dissidents as pro-Communists or pink. Today we have a similarly complacent establishment, but one that sees itself as left-wing, and far too readily dismisses its dissidents as crypto right-wingers.

This I think is the explanation for the common cant use of the word "racism" in contexts which have little or nothing to do with race. Many of those who misuse this word are quite literate enough to know that "racism" is not a loose synonym for any and every kind of prejudice against minorities. (They may not realize, though, that by their mis-use of this word they merge cultural or ethnic differences into racial ones, and thus re-create a central plank of Nazi propaganda).

They use the word in this way because they need a "boo-word" — a word with such intensely negative connotations that, hopefully, no opponent in debate can shrug it off, yet so vague in its meaning that it can be applied to practically anyone who disagrees with them. As with the McCarthyites, who called anyone to their left "pro-communist," the trick is to loosen the original *denotation* of a word until it means less and

less, while retaining the original intensely negative connotations. At the same time the true believer refuses to notice any degrees or gradations. To him or her "a pinko is a pinko," or "a racist is a racist."

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In recent months the news programs of Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) have run several items of Australian news each week that are introduced by the logo or title "RACISM" — a remarkable feat of political correctness considering that most of the items were in fact not about racial but about cultural or ethnic issues. Somehow the more accurate terms "ethnicism" and "ethnic chauvinism" don't seem to appeal to them, or to some newspapers that follow their lead.

Such witch-hunts, once launched, can go a long way. Once their term "capitalist running dog" or "communist fellow traveller" is extended to anyone who questions the politically correct orthodoxy, almost the whole population is at risk. Similarly, once "racism" comes to be a loose synonym for any kind of prejudice the war against "racism" can continue without limits — or it could in a dictatorship. The recent raids on the Immigration Department might be just a beginning.

As the McCarthyist and Fascist eras show, a witch-hunt in progress attracts misguided idealists. It also attracts the competitive egos of some mediocre writers and artists who, lacking original ideas of their own, seek to carry the pre-established views to new extremes.

Even democracy itself, a philosophy based on respecting the will of the majority, could be under threat since the true PCLI apparatchik is liable to brush aside the will of the majority as "revisionist" or "racist" or whatever.

The good news for environmentalists is that such outbreaks of ideology are a bit like boils. At least in a democracy they tend to come to a head and burst, leaving a painful slow-healing sore. We need to keep the pressure on them until they do.

So, to the larger issue of political correctness.

### **Immigrationism and Political Correctness**

A central question for this conference is, I take it, *how could a democratic government introduce a policy as problematic and unpopular as Australia's*

*recent immigration policy?*

- We have known for at least the last 20 years that we were headed for an age of automation and computers in which the last thing we would require was more labor. Instead we brought in a million migrants over the past 10 years, and wound up, perhaps not entirely unrelatedly, with a million unemployed and an economy half-ruined. (And as the economy sinks, more and more environmental standards are being abandoned.)

- We have long known that the present population of Australia (which refuses to contemplate any major change in its wasteful and destructive life-style) was already doing permanent and morally inexcusable damage to this nation's fragile environments. Yet we have set immigration levels that have kept our population on course to double at least every 50 years.

- We know that the population of those currently in world refugee camps greatly exceeds the total number of immigrants we could conceivably take in over many decades. Yet for the past ten years we have kept refugees to a mere 11,000 odd per year, while we have taken in anything up to 160,000 other immigrants per year, mainly from countries whose populations have no real need to emigrate. Indeed one of our largest sources of immigrants is a European country whose chauvinist government actually bribes its people to have more babies.

So we have a policy that is environmentally, economically, and morally a shambles, and which the Australian electorate has overwhelmingly rejected in all the opinion polls.

Yet you could tune in to a whole year's editions of the ABC's TV NEWS and 7:30 Report and discover only that our high immigration policy is good and inevitable, and that anyone who questions it is probably a secret member of the Hitler Youth League.

Environmentalists like Paul Ehrlich and David Suzuki have condemned Australia's population growth as extreme by First World standards. They have also argued that the First World's population growth is actually far more of an environmental problem than that of the Third World. Granted that each Australian expects to use resources equivalent to at least 30 Third World citizens, Australia's 17 million is already the equivalent in environmental load of about 540 million Third World citizens — roughly the population of Africa, and almost all of it supported on our coastal rim.

Yet, for over a decade, parts of our national media, notably including some SBS and ABC TV programs, have been spreading an ideology according to which Australia's traditional culture and national identity are crippling narrow and inadequate; hence, only massive immigration from as many overseas countries as possible can restore Australia's credibility by turning us into a progressive multicultural nation.

Persons opposed to population growth have often been accused of cultural chauvinism (what the illiterate calls "racism") and the effects of population growth on environment, urban problems, the economy, and on Aborigines, are either dismissed or are presented as benign. The SBS/ABC ideology sees itself as a progressive, egalitarian and international one.

### **The Dilemmas Our Opponents Are Facing**

An advocate of high immigration rates obviously needs to believe that Australia can take millions more people. To defend this position, he or she may ask, "*How can you or anyone else presume to tell when Australia is overpopulated?*"

The environmentalist's answer is very simple, "*If the current population, with the lifestyle it presently requires the government to provide, is already doing permanent and unacceptable damage to the farmlands, the forests, the rivers, and the unique native species of which we are custodians, then we are already overpopulated.*"

Some immigrationists will wriggle further on that spike by demanding, "*But couldn't we all reduce our environmental impact on everything by 50 percent each, and so have twice as many people?*"

The environmentalist's reply is nothing less than devastating: "*We could, but we haven't. Australians today demand more resources per person than ever before. It will be time enough to re-open the case for more people if in a decade or so this pattern of consumption has been reversed.*"

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Some immigrationists are social optimists who claim that population isn't a problem any more because "we" are just about to introduce some much improved system for equitable distribution of wealth. But once again, the environmentalist may simply ask them (a) how they're so sure their system will work where Karl Marx's failed, and (b) just how soon are they promising to install it nationally or globally, and (c) whether better distribution will necessarily save the environment.

This leaves the committed immigrationist in a hopeless dilemma. Only ecological illiterates still believe in the "empty country" myth. Yet if Australia is already approaching its optimum population, or has

exceeded it, immigrationism is irresponsible.

The simplistic myth of Australia as a "land without people for people without land" has been tried and found wanting. Out of hundreds of thousands of immigrants who arrived after the Second World War from depressed agricultural areas in Europe, very few succeeded in finding land in Australia. Most of the land that was economically farmable (and much that wasn't) had long since been ruthlessly cleared. Post-war immigration to Australia did not mean finding a use for an "empty" land, it meant further overloading the balance of cityfolk to farmers — that is, of food and import consumers to food and export producers.

In short, for those emotionally committed to immigrationism the optimum-population debate is a morass. It involves issues many of them are either not expert in or simply don't care to think about. Many immigrationists prefer to see their creed simply in terms of human charity, of helping people. Yet, like the Unjust Steward in the Bible, they try to give away what is not quite theirs to give. In a more modern analogy, the would-be charitable immigrationist is a bit like someone who writes a check to the Salvos [Salvation Army] on someone else's account — and without even finding out if the account has the required funds.

The only way to avoid entering this debate is to deny your opponent speaking-rights — that is, to rule him or her out of court. How do you do that? Well, if you are unscrupulous you go for "moral monopoly."

### **The Art of Moral Monopoly**

The essence of the moral monopolist tactic is to claim that you preeminently possess some virtue — which in reality is shared by almost the entire community — and that your opponents disgracefully lack it. (Respect for "motherhood" used to be a favorite choice.)

Claims to moral monopoly usually involve a conspiracy theory. In the U.S. in the 1950s the followers of Senator McCarthy obsessively denounced a supposed conspiracy to overthrow the government. This conspiracy was largely a myth, but the myth was a godsend to the accusers. It allowed them to turn the widespread and minimal virtue of allegiance to the national government into a sort of moral monopoly of their own. This helped free them from the responsibility to argue logically or to be nice people. It was also a great cover for vested interests.

The belief that all human beings are sharers in the brotherhood of humanity is a basic cherished view of our culture, for at least the last 30 years. Yet in Australia in the 1980s some members of the multicultural lobby attempted to make this commonplace virtue a peculiar possession of their own group. They did this by setting up a conspiracy theory that people who preferred lower rates of immigration were part of an omnipresent "racist" conspiracy.

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We can now see why the "racism" ploy forms such an essential part of the immigrationist position. Without it, the debate would largely turn into one on the environmental and economic carrying-capacity of Australia.

Conspiracy theories constructed by moral monopolists often rest on very odd assumptions. Some immigrationists claim that Australia is obliged to maintain high immigration until we have a roughly representative mix of the peoples of the world (or alternatively, of "Asia" or of "the Pacific region") right here in our own country. Needless to say, no such moral obligation exists. The people of Thailand, China, Finland, etc. are not ashamed of having a predominance of people of a particular ethnicity or culture in their country.

Indeed, national boundaries since the age of nationalism began, have been increasingly drawn along ethnic lines. It is a little hard to see why Australia alone or almost alone has an obligation to radically change its ethnic mix, and to become a sort of microcosm of the world — unless they mean to argue that Australia is not a real nation but a sort of international treaty area, like Antarctica. But then the moral monopolist doesn't debate; he or she assumes.

Assumptions like these probably began as a salve to the wounded pride of many immigrants. The mere fact of landing in an alien country immediately devalues much of the cultural and linguistic skill an individual has built up over a lifetime. The resulting pain is basic to the Migrant Pride movement. (One needs to grasp that the real agenda here is ego and self-respect, but that since it would be humiliating to admit as much, the debate has to pretend to be about justice.) There is also a certain proud temperament that is galled to admit its own country of origin has failed it, and that it has had to be rescued by the charity of another.

Some immigrants came from intensely chauvinist backgrounds, where one's own culture was automatically considered enormously superior to all others. In contrast, most Australian writers are, like myself, too pluralist and too convinced that humanity itself is flawed to waste very much time on promoting the merits of one human culture over another. As well, many ordinary Australians

(especially those of Irish stock) do, I think, understand and empathize with the humiliations that more recent immigrants often suffer. They do not demand extensive protestations of gratitude; though, of course, they do notice obvious expressions of ingratitude and arrogance.

Yet this very lack of opposition has tempted some migrant-pride zealots into more and more extreme statements, which have often gone largely unchallenged by an Australian intelligentsia terrified of appearing uncool. What the advocates did not realize is that their claims *were* noted and held against them by ordinary people. The Gallop Polls tell an unambiguous story.

The Roy Morgan Gallup poll taken in May 1992 probably sealed Labor's abandonment of high immigration. Confirming the Saulwick poll of November 1991, the Morgan poll found that 71 percent of Australians, up 24 percent since 1990, believed that the previous year's intake of about 122,000 immigrants was too many. Only 4 percent thought it was too small. That is electoral-landslide territory! If either major party had campaigned strongly against high immigration in the last election, it would have won. ■