

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
AT A NATURALIZATION CEREMONY, LIVERPOOL COUNCIL CHAMBERS,
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Australia has just come through a national election in which, whatever you may hear to the contrary, there were clear winners and clear losers. In the decision you are taking here this evening, however, there are no losers, only winners. The nation wins, because each new citizen represents an increase in the strength of our national family and our national spirit. And each of you, as a new citizen, wins personally from your choice to become an Australian.

By accepting our invitation to citizenship, you have reaffirmed your earlier, perhaps hesitant, decision to seek your future among us. Tonight you are identifying yourself officially for the first time as Australians but you are not relinquishing anything you hold dear from your past life. Since the arrival of the first fleet in 1788, new settlers have been linking their own future with that of this land - people of two worlds blending in a new loyalty to Australia. This has been our history and our strength and is no less true tonight. You are adopting the most realistic stance that you could adopt, one that accords with both the past and the future, with your own interests and with the nation's interests.

Tonight you are acknowledging that your future is here in Australia, but you are not attempting to sever the old roots that will bind you forever to your first homeland. No one can dictate to you what your deepest feelings should be - what should be in your heart tonight - and I would not dare to try. Let me just say that your official status from tonight confers on you two grounds for pride, based on the strength of two cultures, two life-styles, your 'share of the heritage'. In that respect you are to be envied above those of us who share only one common heritage.

The cumulative impact of the 817,000 people who since 1949 have joined the national family through citizenship has been to change the very concept and content of that citizenship. Today, people from more than 70 nations make up Australia, a nation subservient to none, firmly and responsibly seeking its own destiny. In the electorate of Werriwa alone, at the last census there were 57,000 people born overseas - nearly one third of the total population of the electorate. Thus we are creating a cohesive society of many parts, where cultural diversity can lend interest, charm and enjoyment to the national life without forfeiting that harmony, that inner sense of belonging 'together with' is the expression of true nationhood.

One solid foundation for that harmony must be in equal and indivisible citizenship rights. For that reason the Government has already moved to end all discrimination in the conditions of citizenship. Today we have one criterion, one oath, one ceremony, with all discrimination banished. We make no distinctions on the grounds of national origin or former citizenship, and certainly none on the grounds of race.

The widespread approval given to this new approach is shown by the great increase in the rate of citizenship applications under the new provision which became operative on 1 December 1973. In 1972 a total of 38,402 people were granted citizenship. In 1973 this figure jumped to 57,102 - an increase of nearly 50%. Further, for the four months up to the end of April this year citizenship applications continued to increase at an even higher rate. The verdict of those who in the past eighteen months have decided to join the national family cannot be denied - Australian citizenship today is more desirable than at any time in our history. The symbols of a strong independent nationhood are not a cheap gimmick, an empty gesture meant to impress ourselves rather than the world. There is a wide and deep current of agreement in our society about what our true national identity should be.

There is another quite objective statistical measure of the confidence migrants now feel in Australia's future. The success of a national immigration program is shown not only in the personal efforts and sacrifices of those establishing themselves in a new land. It is revealed in the statistics of those who, having tried the great adventure, leave Australia with no intention of returning. Since the Labor Government came to power, these figures have declined from 33,172 in 1972 to 30,325 last year. This is the first significant decline since 1964 in what we call the 'migrant drift', and represents a resurgence of optimism in what Australia offers to newcomers.

Many of the things which have persuaded you, and thousands of your fellow-migrants, to become Australian citizens are the result of one man's efforts on behalf of our migrant people. That man is Al Grassby, the Minister for Immigration - a great friend, a stalwart colleague, a true patriot, a fine Australian. No one has worked harder for the welfare of migrants and achieved more solid and lasting benefits for them and their families. It is a sad and bitter blow to me and the government that we have temporarily lost the services of Al Grassby. It is a tragic irony that the forces he opposed so staunchly and successfully as a Minister, as a member of Parliament - the forces of hate, of prejudice, of ignorance, of racial discrimination - have now helped to defeat him. I know you will regret this event as profoundly as I do. I know you will repudiate the campaign tactics used against him, just as I and all decent Australians repudiate them. They have no place in Australia, they have no place in the kind of open and tolerant society that Al Grassby worked so hard to achieve. I pay tribute to him here tonight. Ceremonies such as this, here and all over Australia, are eloquent testimony to the achievements of his public career, the strength of his character, the breadth of his vision and the power of his ideals.

On behalf of the Australian Government and people I welcome you all as new citizens of our nation and wish you every happiness and success in the future.
