



EMBARGO: MIDNIGHT
SUNDAY, 25 JANUARY, 1981

PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

MONDAY, 26 JANUARY, 1981

AUSTRALIA DAY AND CITIZENSHIP

Many of us spend the Australia Day long weekend with our friends and families in sport and recreation. But we also all recognise that Australia Day is much more than just another summer holiday.

Some time ago the Government established a national Australia Day Committee designed to foster amongst all Australians an awareness of what Australia Day stands for, and of its significance to us as a growing and prospering nation.

Australia Day is an appropriate occasion to reflect on what being a citizen of Australia means - the privileges it confers, the sense of Australian identity and of our aspirations.

Australia is the best place in the world to bring up a family; Australia is one of the freest and most open societies in the world.

Until the Second World War, which is already beyond the personal memory of the majority of living Australians, Australia was largely an Anglo-Saxon society. Most Australian settlers had come from the United Kingdom or from Ireland.

On reflection, I think we were sometimes narrow and inward looking. Since the last war, all that has changed.

Australia is now a multicultural society. Tens upon tens of thousands of new settlers have come as refugees from war, or displaced from Eastern Europe as their homelands were overrun by Communism. There has been a great economic migration; many families from Europe came because they believe Australia offers a better life, a fuller life, for themselves and for their children.

All this has changed the face of Australia. Our factories could not have grown, our mining industries could not have been established, our standard of living could not have risen without the help, the energy, the initiative of people from overseas. But that is only part of the story.

New settlers have brought with them their own sense of history and their own culture from different backgrounds. They have made this a part of modern Australia.

As a result, we have become a more tolerant, and I hope a wiser people. In the last few years we have taken in many refugees from South East Asia, from Vietnam and Kampuchea. In this respect Australia has been one of the more generous nations in the post-war world and I strongly believe that we should continue to be so.

That is the kind of Australia we are all building. These are the hopes we have for the future.

But what are the privileges, what are the responsibilities, of Australian citizenship?

There are simple but important rights - the right to vote for the political party and for the candidate of one's choice in State and Federal elections, the right to stand for, and enter, Parliament.

Accordingly, I would urge all those who have come to this country from other lands to participate as fully as possible in Australia's national life.

Taking out Australian citizenship does not mean casting aside affection and love for the land of one's birth. It does not mean casting aside the history, the culture or the language of one's country of origin. I believe people are good Australians and able to love this country best, if they also maintain their links and their affection for their land of origin.

All people who choose to lead their life in Australia have a responsibility which I believe is the highest responsibility of citizenship. That is to contribute to making Australia a better, more tolerant society, and a more prosperous one, in which, out of the varied pasts of citizens, something distinctive and uniquely Australian can continue to grow and develop.

Australia is not something remote and untouchable. It is the sum of all the actions of all the citizens and all the residents of Australia.

We might think that individually what we do cannot have much impact, but I believe that is not so. Australia is the sum of the actions of 14 million Australians.

It is the cumulative effect of those actions that determines the nature of the society and the kind of life we can give our children. So what you do is important, not just for yourself and your own family, but for Australia.

Citizenship in its broadest sense involves a knowledge and an understanding of that.

There are a million people living here in Australia who are eligible to become Australian citizens but have chosen not to do so. If they intend to lead out their lives in Australia, I would urge them to consider sharing our Australian citizenship.

Those who do not, can still participate in much of our national life. But there are important responsibilities and duties which are denied to them unless they become Australian citizens.

They are not being asked to forget their past, or to forget their heritage, but build upon that, and to be a part of Australia.

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