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21 . 5 . 2003

Dr. J. Carroll  
NMA Review Secretariat  
DCITA  
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Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Dr Carroll

I have forwarded my submission by E-mail and now send a copy with three attachments, my correspondence with the Chairman, Australian Broadcasting Corporation about the immigration programme in the series on Federation and a booklet prepared by the Jewish National Fund that led to the establishment of the *Arthur A. Calwell Forest of Life* in Israel. I was unaware of the closing date for your Review until much later and have now had an opportunity to contribute to it. The matters are most important for Australian History and as it is preferable to solve difficulties internally I would be grateful should you include my statement.

Yours sincerely

  
Mary Elizabeth Calwell

cc Senator Hon R. Alston

Hon S Crean

# SUBMISSION TO REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

## NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

I have been most concerned about aspects of the presentation of material at the Museum and as I have a significant personal involvement in its authenticity, I request that this submission be included as it directly concerns accurate presentation of events relating to my father, the late Rt. Hon. Arthur A. Calwell. I was unaware of the closing date for submissions to your enquiry until much later, have now had the opportunity to consider the terms of reference and prefer to resolve the matter internally. There are wonderful exhibits including the recovery of aboriginal culture, early farming practices and explanations of our environment but major political history should be determined by facts and not ignored or distorted by irresponsible and cynical disparagement or by wilful omission.

I address my comments to the terms of reference and the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*, specifically Section 6. There seems to be reliance on newspaper articles and politically hostile statements. Truth based on facts should be the basic criterion, irrespective of historical fashions.

It would be expected the National Museum in Canberra should educate, enlighten and celebrate our development as a nation but the Museum's summaries, *Horizons: Marketing Migrants* and *Horizons: Keeping Guard* are highly misleading and irresponsible ignoring material in Hansard, the National Archives of Australia and Calwell's last book, *Be Just and Fear Not* to contour a most misleading version of

events. RG Menzies wrote in *Afternoon Light* that Calwell convinced his colleagues that a large immigration programme should be initiated that was a

bold and courageous action. It could have been taken successfully only by a Minister who was known as a life-long Labour man of the strictist orthodoxy, and was well-known and extremely popular at the centres of unionism, the Trades Halls.

Calwell established the Department of Immigration in 1945 despite huge difficulties, including lack of shipping and over 100,000 British, 50,000 Displaced Persons and many thousands of sponsored migrants from many countries arrived by 1949. He changed the category of Middle East from Asia to Europe, enabling many Lebanese to come here. He was unable to formalise agreements with Italy or Greece because of political instability. Australia has the largest number of Holocaust survivors and their descendents outside Israel. The Vatican, World Council of Churches and Australian churchmen of all denominations as well as the International Refugee Organisation praised his achievements and fairness. He introduced the term, *New Australian* to discourage insulting epithets and the major initiative of Australian citizenship.

Calwell was the first person to change the *Restrictive Immigration Act 1901* proposing Chinese residents be naturalised in March, 1947 but Cabinet modified the submission agreeing to remove some restrictions and ordered the decision be kept secret in the society where prisoners-of war were returning home. The O'Keefe Case was dominated by other events including support of the Labor Government for Indonesia, Liberal support for the Dutch that was identified with the O'Keefe family, Australia's presence at the 1947 New Delhi conference and media attempts to embarrass the Government. Calwell refuted an article advocating quotas by W. Macmahon Ball as being discriminatory. He criticised the media believing their strident comments were disloyal to Australia. The Museum should refer to Hansard, 2 December, 1947 and

remove the misrepresentation about the wrong Mr Wong receiving a deportation notice. In 1946-1947, the US deported 33,038 persons, 1 per 4,200 of population, Australia deported 143 persons, 1 per 48,000 of population and they were war-time refugees at a time when most Asians concerned with liberation from colonial powers. There is no accurate estimate as to how many people were deported by each Minister since Federation. Calwell was the first Australian politician to welcome a diplomat in his own language when he welcomed a Chinese ambassador in Mandarin in the early 1950s. The ALP opposition to unrestricted immigration was that employers would exploit these immigrants and Australia did not want racial conflicts existing in other countries. The relevant Act was defended by all Ministers for Immigration until 1972.

Calwell stated the Immigration Scheme was for economic development and security and he approved the *Good Neighbour Councils* to welcome New Australians while encouraging them to enhance Australia with their cultural heritages. Geoffrey Blainey declared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* the political decision that changed Australia the most was that of Calwell who initiated the 'ambitious scheme' that landed a host of migrants from Continental Europe. He sold it with

a skill and zeal that are now overlooked. It is slightly puzzling to observe how often this shaper of modern Australia is either belittled or misquoted by people who wear the shoes he made for them and who stand in the space he set aside for them.

The *National Museum* in the nation's capital is expected by many people to inform visitors about our political history and development as a nation that included initiating several socially progressive policies as well as celebrate the achievements of the general population. Our technical inventions and scientific achievements are also important.. It is of interest that Calwell protested about treatment of aborigines in

1941 and a referendum by the Labor Government in 1944 that included transfer responsibility for aborigines to the Commonwealth Government was defeated.

I was in Canberra for nearly every year for 32 years and with my family enjoyed often looking at the wonderful displays in the basement of Old Parliament House. they included maps, books and valuable and expensive presentations to leading members of the Commonwealth Parliament throughout its history. I would like to know where they are now, surely they should be on display at the Museum in Canberra where other items that could be added to the collection.

I enclose copies of correspondence with the Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that resulted in a statement that the ABC was looking at new program formats to encourage broader examination of "professional issues in journalism and the media generally." I also enclose a booklet by the Jewish National Fund about the establishment of a forest in honour of my father near Jerusalem. RE Armstrong, former Secretary to Calwell and later Secretary of the Department of Immigration stated in a speech to the ACT Good Neighbour Council in 1972:

If Mr Calwell had been daunted by the problems of those early post-war years; if he had not been prepared to take calculated risks; if he had not possessed that rare gift of seeing with the eyes of today the things of tomorrow, many thousands of men and women, their children and the children of those children would not be enjoying hope-filled lives in this country today.

cc Senator Hon R Alston MP

Hon S Crean MP

I draw attention to Part 2 of the ABC television programme, that purported to tell the history of immigration to Australia. It was calculated to provoke hostility rather than provide knowledge. Sue Spencer, a producer, requested that I meet her, I gave her details of legislation, policies and events from 1945-1949 but the programme, in the words of Paul Kelly 'tried to depict Hanson following from Calwell.'

There was no attempt to recognise a Minister has to apply the law, that there was provision for entry of Asians or that Calwell tried to change it. Calwell's rebuttals of the racist statements of Lang, Gullett, Francis and others were ignored while no effort was made to explain that the ALP policy was to protect our working conditions from the exploitation of imported cheap labour and avoid racist strife and discrimination against Eurasian children dividing other countries at that time. The *Restrictive Immigration Act* was defended by Chifley, Evatt, the official ALP, all ALP and most conservative Members of Parliament, church spokesmen such as Catholic spokesman, Dr. Rumble and accepted by the United Nations and Nehru of India.

The misrepresentations are particularly concerning as Calwell when Minister for Information strongly supported the ABC, introducing the Broadcasting Control Board and made a major contribution to creating an independent News Service. The Department distributed material, including films to Europe, Asia and the US and in 1948, Radio Australia broadcast for 23 hours a day receiving letters from 50 countries. In 1947-1948, earnings from productions resulted in the cost being 40,000 pounds less than the allocation.

Your TV programme insulted the credulity of the audience and seriously damaged your credibility especially as Calwell was honoured by Chinese communities around Australia and PNG including a dinner by the Sydney community when he became Federal ALP Leader, another by the Melbourne community for his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and shops closing in Little Bourke Street, Melbourne for his funeral. Spurious secondary sources were preferred to original documents that show my father refuted racist assertions while rejecting deliberate misrepresentation by the media. It is important to know why Sue Spencer was unable to use facts and the programme contoured to malign my father and project an ideosyncratic interpretation of our post-War Immigration Scheme that demonstrated a high degree of eclectic and misleading selection of evidence.

The material I provided to her included references to:

Proposals by my father in the House of Representatives that Chinese residents be naturalised, 20 November, 1941 and also his protests about treatment of aborigines;

Submission by my father to Cabinet, 14 April, 1947, after consultations with the Chinese Ambassador, that Chinese residents be naturalised that was modified by Cabinet;

Details about *Reunion*, a film by Lisa Wang about her Chinese-Australian family and the opening of several businesses of Melbourne Councillor David Wang, her father, by Arthur Calwell, shown on SBS several times;

The Nationality Act 1946 that gave Australian women the right to retain their British nationality after marriage;

The Nationality Act (No. 2) 1946 that enabled foreigners living in Australian Territories to be naturalised;

The Nationality Act 1949 that gave Australians for the first time, Australian citizenship;

All this material, apart from the film, is available in Hansard and the National

Archives as well as hostile comments by political opponents and was ignored. I told

her my father changed the Regulations to classify the Middle East as Europe enabling

many Lebanese people to come here and this decision is available. I gave her a document about the *Arthur A. Calwell Forest of Life* established in Israel to honour my father who allowed Holocaust survivors to enter Australia when other nations refused that was ignored while footage I identified showing him leaving for Europe was included in the film.

I also informed her my father spoke some Mandarin and that the misquotation of my father's teasing comment to Sir Thomas White about the wrong Mr. Wong receiving a deportation notice was distorted to make the "W" a "w" and sent by reporter to the *Straits Times* in Singapore. While this comment was not included, it was mentioned in the Online Forum where your producer, Kate Evans acknowledged its origin but defended its use apparently on the basis that when slander is repeated it becomes legitimate to use it.. Evans also referred to an interview of William Liu to justify her misinterpretations later used on Radio National. Billy Liu was a good friend of my father, attended many events with him in Melbourne and Sydney and came to the ship with his sister to farewell our family when we were going overseas in 1967. I suggested to the National Library they interview him because he had an interesting life with an English mother and a Chinese father, he was sent to China to be educated and played a significant role in the Australian Community. An officer at the Library said it was unfortunate that Hazel de Berg did not develop the discussion on my father further. It is morally unacceptable to try and identify hostile attitudes he experienced with my father who strongly opposed them.

There were several misleading comments within your programme. There was no shortage of British immigrants and immigration from Europe was mooted in the first



speech on immigration by my father on 2 August, 1945 and in 1946 in Federal Parliament. As Australia was part of the British Empire and many people had relatives there it was politically appropriate and realistic to deflect criticism by stating there would be a predominance of British migrants. Calwell persuaded British shipping companies and the IRO to provide very scarce shipping. He had no English ancestry. There is a huge leap in logic from my father's attempt to soothe hostility by saying many of the first group of DPs had 'fair hair and blue-eyes' [like you] to the absurdity it was his preferred appearance. Some migrants came from the US, Calwell signed agreements with Malta and the Netherlands Foundation and was negotiating others. Simultaneously, many Italians, Greeks and Lebanese were coming as sponsored migrants but agreements for assisted schemes could not be concluded until a Peace Treaty was signed with Italy then in political turmoil, while Greece was enduring a civil war and the Middle East was unsettled.

All absconding seamen and illegal migrants have to be deported unless there is danger in their own countries. In the simplistic coverage of the O'Keefe Case there is no reference to the fact it was being used by the Dutch Government to embarrass Australia because of its support for Indonesia or that the Indonesian representative in Australia, Dr. Usman, stated it was 'part of a clever Dutch stunt to embarrass the Australian Government because of its attendance at the New Delhi Conference.' [1947]. Sir John Latham commented that America was much more ruthless in deporting people but their newspapers did not try to denigrate their own country.

The Nancy Prasad Case under Opperman is ignored as are statements by Snedden and Forbes who defended the policy in 1972 and the programme ignores our values of

democracy and Australian nationalism. It was absurd to employ an actor when there are hundreds of recordings of my father available, there is no acknowledgement that my father introduced the term, 'New Australian' to welcome immigrants or that the right of all babies born in Australia to be Australians was removed in 1993. This programme is unprofessional, lacks balance and endeavours to malign the person, who despite tremendous difficulties, implemented policies that have immeasurably enriched Australia.

M. E. Calwell

28 March, 2001