



Purdue University Cytometry Laboratories

Cytometry - Image Analysis - Confocal Microscopy - Education – Biomedical Engineering

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June 23, 2002

The Committee Secretary,
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
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Distinguished Colleagues:

Citizenship carries with it certain inalienable rights – indeed not just rights, but necessary and reasonable needs for any person.

Nationalism is born, not conferred. It should be lost only at the desire of the individual. When a government legislates, such legislation should be for the benefit of its citizens. When it specifically selects a segment of its citizens and intentionally legislates against them, it must be for the better good of the nation. How then does the Australian Government's intentional discrimination against its citizens who for a variety of reasons, leave the soil, but not the nation, withstand need or reason?

Thinking in the 21st century gives us an advantage over our forefathers whose view of the world was restricted by thousands of kilometers of oceans. Today we have instant communication, and are perhaps better informed about national and international activities than every before. It might be understandable if our forefathers considered that leaving the soil of one's nation meant that it was not possible to maintain a knowledge of the internal politics and therefore remove their right to vote. One might be able to argue that a lack of knowledge means that an individual cannot make an informed decision. We frequently argue that education creates informed citizens thus making education one of the noblest goals of any nation. The irony in Australia is that it was the government of the late 1980s that disenfranchised Australian citizens, such as my family, and myself who for reasons of education itself, left Australia.

But who can actually vote in Australia? As noted in an government publication ¹"*Australian citizens who are 18 years of age or older are required to enroll as voters unless they are not eligible because, for example, they are of "unsound mind" or serving a sentence for a crime. Voting is compulsory for all people enrolled. People who do not vote may be fined*".

As a formerly registered voter, and current property owner and taxpayer in Eastwood (The Prime Minister's Electorate) my voting rights were removed during the 1980s. I believe that this action was unreasonable and disrespectful to my rights as a citizen. The ramifications of this action are really quite serious:

My three children (2 born in Australia) are now keen to take US citizenship. One of their arguments is that they have no rights to vote in Australia anyway, what encouragement is there to even retain their citizenship, let alone become an active citizen? Their vote has been taken from them; it is clear to them that a citizen who is abroad is a citizen without the vote.

¹ <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/infosheets/is08.pdf>

Having lost the vote myself over 10 years ago, my personal feelings are complex. While I feel that I am an Australian at heart, it is clear that because I cannot vote I cannot have a say in the running of the country in which I hold citizenship. Under such conditions, the real issue for our family given this situation is, why would we not all take our US citizenship and just forget the fact that we are Australian by birth and nationality, having come for 5 or 6 generations of Australians? This is the question asked by many of my friends who left Australia to pursue education and jobs overseas.

It is my belief that the vote is the only practical implementation of democracy and this is an essential part of what citizenship is all about. It is my hope that the committee will review and redress the acts that stripped the vote from citizens who are presently overseas.

Australia will continue to lose its citizens by default. Which government of Australia will have as its epitaph "It was our government that refused to allow over 600,000 Australian citizens to vote!" I venture to suggest that these families represent on the whole, a significant component of the intellectual and business elite of the nation. We Australians are not here in the USA because we are the worst our country can produce! On the contrary, we are among the best there is, and we have succeeded across the globe in many outstanding ways. Many are highly respected individuals within our fields – having perhaps attained far greater successes than opportunities in Australia might have allowed. Many are key players in the worlds of education, business and of course sport.

It is time to redress this situation by re-enfranchising every Australian that desires to be given back this right. We are citizens of the world in the 21st century – but that does not mean that we should lose the rights of the citizenship to which we are born.

I for one want to have my vote back. It was taken from me under false pretences; a small-minded gesture -thinking in a closed, small environment. Australia is but a fraction of a second away in the 21st century communication magic. It is time to rethink closed philosophies and enter the age of knowledge and enlightenment.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Paul Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and 'R'.

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cc: The Southern Cross Group