SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO CHILD MIGRATION

Submission by
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Summary

1. This submission relates to Section (a) (i) of the Terms of Reference, and focuses specifically on the words I italicise in that clause: 'whether any *unsafe, improper,* or unlawful care or treatment of children occurred in such institutions'. (Others may judge in the light of State and Commonwealth legislation whether care or treatment was 'unlawful'.) My assessment is derived mainly from a reading of official British Government records, now in the Public Record Office.

2. An assessment focusing on 'unsafe' and 'improper' is necessarily concerned with standards. This does not mean that judgements on the quality of care for child migrants are bound only to reflect subsequent changes of standards and expectations and that criticism constitutes merely the exercise of hindsight. The evidence in the Public Record Office files shows that the ways in which child migrants were to be cared for in *Australia* after 1945 were judged by many observers in *Britain* as seriously inadequate by the standards and practices which child care professionals in Britain were by then expected to follow. Criticisms were made known to those involved in child migration from Britain and those responsible for the care of child migrants in Australia. Such contemporary critics would argue that the treatment of these children was 'unsafe' and 'improper'.

3. My assessment of the contemporary debate should not be read as a criticism only of Australian culture and practice at that time. However mistaken, Australians on the

whole insisted that their child care practices were appropriate in the light of Australian needs, conditions and conventions. British authorities and charities, on the other hand, continued to allow British children to be despatched overseas in spite of strong professional and even official reservations in Britain about the type of care they were going to receive.

Historical Context: Child Migration and Child Care

4. The emigration to empire destinations of children 'deprived of a normal home life' had been, of course, a major child care strategy since the mid-19th century. Before the Second World War, many children in the care of well-known charities had been transferred overseas, especially to Canada. The emigration of some but far fewer children in local authority care had also been effected by Poor Law authorities and Reformatory and Industrial Schools (later Approved Schools). Since the passage of the Empire Settlement Act in 1922 (extended for a further 15 years in 1937), British taxpayers' money was for the first time made available to subsidise the fares, outfits and maintenance of children sent out by the voluntary societies. However, the ban imposed by the Canadian authorities in 1928 on the immigration of children in care under the age of fourteen, the onset of economic depression in 1931 and the outbreak of war in 1939 virtually ended the practice.

5. During and immediately after the war, two potentially conflicting developments occurred. Firstly, from 1942, Australian concerns about national security and under-population ensured that child migration again featured strongly among ideas to boost the immigration to Australia of (preferably) British 'stock'. This guaranteed that charities operating in the UK and in Australia would seek to redirect most child migration operations to Australia. Soon after the war they began to seek the approval of the Dominions Office (later Commonwealth Relations Office) for their schemes, so that they could qualify for financial subsidies under the Empire Settlement Act (later Commonwealth Settlement Act). However, secondly, in Britain, the studied effects of wartime evacuation and family separation confirmed and more widely publicised in official and professional circles the importance of stable child-parent relationships for the psychological well-being of children. These conclusions carried implications for the care of children 'deprived of a normal home life', and for the appropriateness of child migration as a child care practice.

6. In Britain the wartime Coalition government was persuaded by vigorous lobbying by child care specialists to appoint in March 1945 the Care of Children Committee. The Curtis Committee took the conventional natural family as the unit most conducive to the well-being of children. The emphasis they placed upon the psychological and not just the physical needs of children was indicative of a very important shift in professional child care thinking in Britain. All subsequent proposals stemmed from that perception. In its conclusions the Curtis Committee was therefore emphatic that local authorities and voluntary societies caring for children 'deprived of a normal home life' should attempt to replicate the 'natural family' as far as possible in child care practice. The recommendations of the Curtis Committee (Cmd 6922, September 1946) were accepted by the British government in March 1947.[1]

7. Much followed. The Home Office, with an expanded Children's Branch, was made the department of state responsible for children in care. By the Children Act of 1948, local authorities were required to set up a Children's Committee, to appoint a Children's Officer, and to develop their child care services. The Home Office was given the task of monitoring the child care provisions of local authority and voluntary societies and was to be assisted by an Advisory Council on Child Care, made up of child care specialists. The professional training of child care workers was expanded.

8. The recommendations of the Curtis Committee, the requirements of the Children Act, the guidance of the Home Office, new professional training courses and different altered concepts of children's needs altered 'best practice' in Britain. The priorities became if possible to support children with their natural parent(s), and failing that to secure adoption. Otherwise the emphasis was upon boarding-out children with foster parents. Where children were to be retained in institutional care, the preferred 'institution' was to be a small group of children, looked after by a married couple, living in so-called 'scattered homes', that is ordinary houses indistinguishable from others in the neighbourhood. If, as a less desirable option, distinctive child care institutions were to be operated, these should allow children in small groups, ideally

no more than eight and of different ages and both sexes (like a large natural family), to be looked after by a trained house 'mother' in purpose-built 'cottage homes'. Far less acceptable were large 'barrack' institutions, characteristic of the 19th century, especially those in which children slept in dormitories and dined in large groups. It was judged especially important that children should not be gathered into single-sex institutions. Siblings should not be separated. Contact with other relatives and friends should normally be maintained. Conventional socialisation should occur by arranging for children if possible to attend normal state schools and to be involved in local sports and club activities.

9. It must be stressed that practice in Britain fell short of aspiration and that limited financial and human resources led to delays and errors. Nevertheless, expectations were altered and new criteria were established by which contemporaries in Britain judged the appropriateness of child care methods. The practice of local authorities and charitable organisations did alter. These shifts enabled contemporaries (and now allow us) to assess in comparison the merits of child migration as a child care practice.

10. Organisations making representations to the Curtis Committee included several which had been involved in child migration. However, child migration as a child care practice was mentioned in only four of the 128 memoranda submitted as evidence to the Curtis Committee and was not raised in any of the 75 interviews conducted. By 1945-46, child migration was certainly not regarded by the principal child care practitioners in Britain as a primary strategy. The Committee nevertheless concluded that the emigration of children in care should remain open for those with 'an unfortunate background' who 'express a desire for it'. However, the caveat they entered is of critical importance in assessing what subsequently happened to child migrants (italics added):

> We should … strongly deprecate their setting out in life under less thorough care and supervision than they would have at home, and we recommend that it should be a condition of consenting to emigration of deprived children that *the*

[1] Very similar recommendations were also made by the Committee on Homeless Children (Scotland) -

arrangements made by the Government of the receiving country for their welfare and after care should be comparable to those we have proposed in this report for deprived children remaining in this country.

11. The Children Act which followed in 1948 allowed for child migration, but the Curtis caveat was expected to guide practice. Children in *local authority* care could only be sent abroad with the consent in each individual case of the Home Secretary. This was to be obtained only after he had been satisfied that parents or guardians had been consulted (if practicable), that the child had consented (or if too young the child must be emigrating to a relative or friend), that the child would benefit from emigration, and that suitable arrangements for reception and welfare had been made. In the case of children in *voluntary society* care, the manner in which children could be sent overseas was not defined in the legislation, although the intention was for the Home Secretary to control voluntary society practice by regulations. Unfortunately, because of the inadequate way in which the Children Act had been drafted, the Home Office found it very difficult to devise legally enforceable regulations. However, other means to exercise influence and assert Curtis standards were available. Voluntary societies needed the approval and periodic re-approval of their child migration schemes by the Secretary of State for the Dominions/Commonwealth Relations in order to qualify for financial support under the Empire/Commonwealth Settlement Acts. In making assessments the Commonwealth Relations Office (henceforth CRO) solicited the views of the Home Office (henceforth HO). There would have been even less opportunity for official control over child migration if societies had remained financially independent of the state.

12. Official records show that child migration continued, albeit from the mid-1950s on a diminishing scale, even though on many occasions doubts were raised in Britain *and forwarded to Australia* about the appropriateness of child migration and the quality of care received by child migrants in Australia.

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the Clyde Committee - Cmd.6911.

British Child Migration and Child Care in Australia after 1945

13. It was widely recognised in Britain after the war that demographic and economic change meant that there was a labour shortage in the UK. Nevertheless, the British government then and on several occasions thereafter bowed for political reasons to Australian pressure and the arguments in favour of sustaining a white and *British* Australia. In March 1946, the Empire Settlement Act of 1937 was reactivated and agreements were signed between the British and Australian governments which allowed, among other matters, for subsidised passages for migrants to Australia. The Empire Settlement Act was renewed for these reasons in 1952 (as the Commonwealth Settlement Act) and again in 1957, 1962 and 1967, and with them the assisted passage schemes.[2]

14. This post-war legislation also allowed for the payment of subsidies to the voluntary societies involved in child migration, to help them meet the costs of providing fares, outfits and maintenance for the children they sent overseas. Almost all went to Australia. Agreements were first signed with the voluntary societies in 1947, and these were repeatedly renewed. As we will see, these renewals were among the occasions when the merits of child migration as a welfare strategy in general and of Australian child care institutions in particular were officially debated. As we will also see, whatever the doubts, political reasons ensured that agreements were renewed time after time. It should also be noted that local authorities were able to resume child migration, but very few chose to do so - itself a critical comment on the practice and made more apparent when unavailing attempts were made to make them change their minds.

15. Initially, immediately after the war, the debate on child care in Britain and the preparations leading up to the passage of the Children Act had scant effect upon the making of these arrangements. However, the concepts expressed in the Curtis Report were adopted by the HO, where government responsibility for child welfare had been focused, and this soon led officials to comment critically on child migration and on what they understood to be child care practices in post-war Australia.

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[2] Stephen Constantine, 'Waving Goodbye? Australia, Assisted Passages and the Empire and Commonwealth Settlement Acts, 1945-72', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol.26, No.2, May 1998, pp.176-95.

16. In August 1947 one HO official wrote after a meeting with colleagues from the CRO: 'We tend to discourage [emigration] in favour of boarding out and more family care in this country'. Moreover, she doubted the quality of child care which migrated children would receive: 'There is here a vigilance and interest, and a reforming spirit, which probably does not exist in Australia'.[3] Following up a CRO suggestion, the HO then drafted a statement which was sent to the UK High Commissioner in Canberra for the guidance of the Australian authorities as to the new angle on children's needs that the HO was trying to propagate in Britain. Explicit reference was made to the recommendations of the Curtis Committee. The caveat in its acceptance of child migration as a child care option was in effect repeated: 'The first requirement from an emigration Home or Society must be…the assurance that a child emigrant will have equally good care and opportunities overseas as he would have had in this country'. Social workers informed about conditions overseas should be involved in the selection of children for emigration. Staff in Australian institutions should be of high calibre. Efforts should be made to settle children in small groups, of both sexes and of mixed ages, 'so as to be as like a family as possible'. To encourage assimilation, homes should not be remote from towns; education, at all levels, should be outside the institution; and children should be involved in local activities. This was the first of many HO missionary statements.[4]

17. A typical indication of the gap between the HO's Curtis-derived principles and Australian conventions followed in March 1948. The CRO had been asked to subsidise the migration of 30 girls to St John's Roman Catholic Orphanage at Thurgoona, New South Wales, and sought HO advice. The project had the support of the Australian Immigration authorities and in the UK of the Catholic Council for British Overseas Settlement. However, the HO criticised the large numbers of children involved, the single sex nature of the institution, its remoteness, the large dormitories and poor recreational facilities, the limited numbers of staff, the inadequate aftercare provision and the poor chance that the children would have of becoming properly assimilated: 'there is no indication that they would be brought up as good Australians but would remain emigrated British children'. The UK High

[3] MH102/1553, memorandum by Maxwell, 20 August 1947.

Commissioner, representing Australian opinion, stated in defence that all Roman Catholic institutions were single sex and that the location of the home, four miles from Albury, 'can hardly be described as remote - certainly not in Australia'. This rejection of the inapplicability of British standards even for the settlement of British children was always going to be a gulf difficult to close. Indicative of pusillanimous British reactions was that St John's Orphanage became an approved institution.[5]

18. The HO felt they needed better to instruct the CRO and through them Australian child care professionals about Curtis-based child welfare principles. Two opportunities cropped up in 1950. The first occurred in June at a meeting between officials from the CRO and the HO. The CRO were reminded of the caveat in the Curtis Committee's acceptance of child migration and of the Home Secretary's pledge during the passage of the Children Act that HO regulations would ensure that the welfare of children migrated by voluntary societies would be protected just as much as those who might be despatched by local authorities. Although the HO was struggling (and failing) to draft those regulations, nevertheless the HO felt able to assert that approved schemes had to address issues concerning assimilation, supervision, education, employment and aftercare, as well as the material condition of the institution. To turn this to practical use, the HO then compiled a list of the data they desired to enable them to form a proper judgement on Australian establishments. They wanted, for example, information on the numbers, sex and ages of the children in care, on the nature of the premises, on the numbers of staff trained in child care, on educational provision, on opportunities for making outside contacts, on aftercare, and, very significantly, on the home environment, staff attitudes and 'the non-material factors on which the happiness and well-being of the children largely depend'. The inspiration for the list was the Curtis Report. It was sent on to the UK High Commissioner. He then discussed the requirements with officials from the Child Welfare Departments of New South Wales and Victoria. Their complaint was that the questionnaire 'was drawn up entirely in the light of conditions in the United Kingdom and did not allow for the very different circumstances, especially in respect of climate, of Australia'. This response, disconcertingly, suggests precisely that focus on

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[4] DO35/3434: letters of 20 August, 23 September, 2 October 1947.
[5] MH102/1878.

the material needs of children and a disregard of their psychological needs which the Curtis Committee and the HO were trying to challenge.[6]

19. The second opportunity for missionary work related to the renewal of the Empire Settlement Act, scheduled to expire in 1952. Without some form of extension, the British Government would no longer be able to subsidise further child migration or even to continue to pay maintenance allowances for children already sent to Australia. An Inter-Departmental Committee (Syers Committee) was therefore set up in September 1950 to consider the merits of renewal. The HO representative, now with the Children Act on the statute book, was even less willing to accept that arrangements in Australia for the care of migrated children were satisfactory. A CRO official correctly minuted that the HO's 'dogmatic principles' were likely to cause conflict with Australian governments and voluntary organisations. In its report of December 1950 the Committee recognised that the Australian Government was keen on child migration and that there were political advantages in continuing to support it financially. They agreed too that there was something to be said for giving some deprived children a 'fresh start'. They also reckoned that subsidising the voluntary societies gave the British government some control over their practices. But the Committee concluded that a final decision on supporting the voluntary societies should be postponed until a commissioned report had been received on the institutions responsible for caring for child migrants in Australia.[7]

20. The reference was to a report which John Moss, in June 1950, had volunteered to make for the HO. With his credentials - a member of the Curtis Committee, Kent County Welfare Officer and a member of the Central Training Council on Child Care - the HO seemed to assume he would be their man and produce the critical report they expected. The tour of inspection did not take place until May1951-February 1952. His report was not submitted until July 1952. It was generally regarded in the HO with dismay and was effectively disowned. The report had much to say in favour of several Australian institutions, and its thrust was to recommend child migration as a suitable child welfare strategy. Nevertheless, Curtis principles still guided the necessary reforms Moss endeavoured also to encourage. Assessing some institutions,

[6] DO35/3437.

he was critical of their accommodation and facilities and of their isolation, showed concern about single-sex establishments, and drew attention to a lack of trained staff. He was keen to see more effort to encourage integration of children with the wider community and wanted to see more use of employment and vocational guidance services. Moreover, clearly reflecting the Curtis Committee hierarchy, he urged the societies to abandon barrack-like institutions in favour of cottage homes, to try and board out more children, or to seek their adoption.[8] While the tenor of his report was therefore complimentary and encouraging (and made a renewal of the voluntary societies' subsidies unavoidable), a responsible reading of the report would have prompted change. Rather it seems to have induced complacency.

21. It certainly had no effect in deflecting HO criticisms of child migration and Australian child care practice. The assisted passage schemes and other arrangements agreed under the Commonwealth Settlement Act once more had to be reassessed before they expired in March 1955 by another Inter-Departmental Committee (Garner Committee), set up in June 1954. The HO representative had a further chance to educate his colleagues. An HO paper laid out the changes in child care in Britain effected by the 1948 Children Act, not least the priority now given by local authorities to settling deprived children in a family home. Voluntary societies, more slowly (the Catholics the slowest), were also accepting the 'desirability of finding foster homes'. Adoption too was on the increase. Institutional care was therefore in decline. Even the notion that emigration represented a desirable 'fresh start' was rebutted. 'The recognition of the fact that a child's proper development depends partly on his affectional relationships with adults implies that it is seldom beneficial to the child to be sent out of this country and away from any relatives whom he may have and who display some affection for him'. However, 'these radical changes in the public attitude seem not to have been fully realised in other countries of the Commonwealth'. It followed that 'If emigration is to be encouraged…means must be found of transmitting the skill and knowledge built up in this country to Commonwealth workers before a start can be made'. One member of the committee reported that 'The Home Office views with their underlying implication that child migration may be a rather bad thing came, I think, as a bombshell to the Committee'. (This was eight

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[7] DO35/3424.

years after the Curtis Report and six years after the Children Act.) According to the HO representative himself, the effect of his presentation was profound. 'The Committee accepted the principle that the care of children emigrated to Australia from this country ought to be governed by the principles of child care accepted here (and indeed by informed opinion all over the world) and that the emphasis should be on family placement at the earliest practicable stage'. It was also understood that 'a good deal of indoctrination both of Australian official opinion and of voluntary society opinion in this country' was needed. So guided, the Committee's report in October 1954 recommended that the agreements with the voluntary societies might be extended, *provided* that the societies accepted the need to shift from institutional care to a family placement system. Unsurprisingly, the UK High Commissioner, to whom the report was sent, reckoned that it would come as a shock to some 'very public spirited and benevolent people' in Australia and the UK to be told that the child care system they supported was 'out of date'.[9]

22. The Chief Migration Officer at Australia House was also soon to be shocked. Like other enthusiasts for child migration he was convinced that only ignorance and prejudice could account for the small numbers of children in the care of local authorities who were sent out as child migrants after the war - and for the consequent embarrassment of unfilled places in Australian institutions. (Between 1952 and 1956 only 113 children in local authority care were sent overseas, of whom 34 came from Cornwall whose Children's Officer had formerly worked for the Fairbridge Society.[10]) During 1954 he lobbied the HO and the CRO, to ask them to encourage local authorities to be more co-operative. Neither ministry was willing to put pressure on the local authorities, but meetings were arranged for him with representative groups in the early summer of 1955. In May at two meetings in Manchester and then in Birmingham, local authority officials explained their reservations and reiterated Curtis doctrine: that their child welfare aim was primarily to return children in care to their natural parents or to make fostering arrangements. Were children to be emigrated then parent substitution should still be the guide. The institutional model should be a

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[8] John Moss, *Child Migration to Australia*, HMSO, London, 1953.
[9] DO35/10212, DO35/4879, MH102/2055, MH102/2056.
[10] Jean S. Haywood, *Children in Care: the Development of the Service for the Deprived Child*, London, 3rd ed.1978, p.173.

husband and wife team caring for only six children. Even the cottage home run by a 'house mother' was unacceptable in Manchester.[11]

23. At a further meeting in June 1955 the Chief Migration Officer met representatives from the County Councils Association and from the collectivity known as the Council of Voluntary Organisations for Child Emigration. He was once more subjected to a lecture on Curtis principles, with their strong emphasis on the family or failing that the substitute family as the prerequisite for children's psychological as well as physical welfare. There was an emphatic rejection of institutional provision. He was told, 'Children's Officers generally in the UK were not altogether satisfied that Australian methods of child care were comparable with those practised in Britain in the past few years'.[12] An HO official commented that 'It must now be abundantly clear to Australia House that the child care authorities of this country have no esteem for Australian methods of child care, and moreover consider that the prospects of deprived children here are as good as, if not better than, what Australia has to offer, and the objections to uprooting them are great'.[13] Indeed, after his recent meetings, the Chief Migration Officer (and surely colleagues in Australia) could have been left in no doubt of how most local authority child care professionals in Britain regarded not just child migration but the institutions provided by voluntary societies for the care of British child migrants in Australia.

24. But there were also players in the UK who were reluctant to be swayed by Curtis-derived objections to current child migration practice. These included the Oversea Migration Board. The OMB, created in 1953, was chaired by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Commonwealth Relations and made up of non-officials with knowledge of migration matters. It was intended to serve as an advisory body to the ministry, although it also on occasions acted as a pressure group for the causes to which it was committed, including child migration.[14] In its first Annual Report, published in July 1954, the Board had strongly supported the practice, regretted that local authorities were reluctant to contribute to the exodus, and recommended an

[11] DO35/10253, Chief Migration Officer to CRO, 11 July 1955.
[12] Ibid.
[13] MH102/2051, minute of 10 August 1955.
[14] DO35/3426, DO35/6373.

increase in the maintenance allowance per child which the societies should receive.[15] In March 1955 the OMB were asked to respond to the Garner Committee's proposals on child migration, which were amplified in an accompanying HO-CRO memorandum. This latter firmly reiterated the report's conclusion. Decisions about a child's future should be governed only by what was best for the child. The natural place for a child was in a family, or in a substitute family environment. Child migration should not place a child in circumstances less favourable than if in child care in the UK. The Australian emphasis merely on securing adequate material conditions in institutions ignored the needs of children for family life. There was no reason why foster home placement should not be developed for child migrants in Australia. Admittedly, changing policy and training staff would take time. To leave no doubt of the source of the principles underlying these arguments, extracts from the Curtis Report were attached to the memorandum.[16]

25. In its deliberations OMB members were still inclined to criticise local authorities for failing to see the opportunities available overseas. However, the OMB subsequently met the Children's Officer of Essex County Council and the Chair of London County Council's Children's Committee and the Children's Officer. These meetings at least helped persuade the Board that changes in Australian child care practices were needed if child migration were at all to be sustained. The chairman suggested 'we ought at least to consider whether, in view of the fact that the methods of the Societies do not entirely correspond with the accepted practice in this country under existing legislation, continued assistance from public funds should not logically be made contingent on the Societies' willingness to discuss certain modifications in their system, such as an increase in boarding-out arrangements'. There was, he pointed out at a Board meeting in July 1955, 'some discrepancy between the form of care recommended by the Children Act and carried out by local authorities in the UK, and that offered by the societies in Australia'. But the Board as a whole, after some sideswipes at the Curtis Report itself, merely concluded, rather surprisingly, that they did not have enough information on child care practice in the Australian institutions upon which to reach a judgement. The Board therefore concluded that a fact-finding mission should be sent to Australia to prepare a report on the conditions in the homes.

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[15] Cmd 9261, pp.17-20.

Evidently what they hoped to secure was the kind of encouraging noises, such as the Moss Report had made, with which to charm the local authorities.[17]

26. They were to be disappointed. So too was the Australian press, which also seems to have expected a fulsome report. In fact, the investigation became less of an attempt to gather information which might persuade *local authorities* to ship their charges overseas and more to see whether the schemes managed by the *voluntary societies* were 'so far removed from modern ideas as to prejudice the welfare of children'.[18] The *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission on Child Migration to Australia* (Cmd 9832) shows that common Australian child care practices, even as late as 1956, struck British observers as, in effect, 'unsafe' and 'improper'. These might seem foregone conclusions since the three Committee members included, as chair, John Ross, Assistant Under-Secretary at the Home Office (with responsibilities for the Children's Branch) and Miss C.M.Wansborough-Jones, the Essex County Council Children's Officer who had already resisted the OMB's efforts to convince her of the merits of current child migration practices. However, the third member, was William Garnett, a former Deputy UK High Commissioner in Australia, who had been selected as a supporter of child migration but who readily signed the final report.[19]

27. In addition to merely information-gathering, the Ross Committee were given a confidential directive to assess whether arrangements in Australia conformed with current practice in the UK, and if not whether it would be practicable to bring them into conformity. This brief largely determined their approach. They arrived at their conclusions after a tour of nearly six weeks during February and March 1956 during which time they visited two-thirds of the establishments approved by the CRO for the reception of child migrants. Their report included an attack on the very principle of child migration. They dismissed the argument that deprived children were naturally those who would benefit most from 'a fresh start'. In their view it was 'precisely such children, already rejected and insecure, who might often be ill-equipped to cope with the added strain of migration'.

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[16] DO35/10190, MH102/2053, minutes of meetings and papers.
[17] Ibid. and DO35/6377, DO35/6380.
[18] DO35/6380, minute by Johnson, 28 September 1955.
[19] DO35/6380, see his letter to Noble, 18 February 1956; BN29/1325, Garnett to Ross, 25 June 1956; DO35/6382, Ross to Shannon, 5 July 1956.

28. But it was the emphasis on and the nature of institutional care available in Australia upon which, with Curtis standards in mind, the Committee heaped their criticism. True, officials in State Child Welfare Departments to whom they spoke agreed that 'when children could not be brought up in their own homes, the aim should be to arrange for them to be brought up in circumstances approaching as nearly as possible those enjoyed by a child living in his own home with good parents'. They even found that some (not all) representatives of the voluntary societies involved accepted that principle. However, the societies admitted that not much thought had yet been given to boarding-out child migrants. The 2230 post-war British child migrants received by June 1955 had therefore all found themselves in institutional care. Of the 26 establishments visited, 11 were of the old-fashioned barrack-type, 8 of the others in the not much more desirable grouped cottage-style homes, and the remaining 7 institutions were houses or groups of houses. Unsurprisingly therefore the Committee concluded that 'The establishments that we saw provided for the most part care that…was institutional in character'. Moreover, they noted that not all staff in these institutions had 'sufficient knowledge of child care methods', and they regretted that in Australia there was no specialised scheme of training in child care work. Perhaps as a result, especially in the larger establishments, there was a lack of a 'homely atmosphere' and too little privacy. Even some cottage homes lacked the mix of children by age and gender characteristic of families. Evidence of the separation of siblings further indicated an imperfect grasp of family-focused child care. The distress was the greater in the case of the many children to whom they spoke who had parents in the UK and who were disturbed by their separation from them. They were critical of the education and employment opportunities made available to the children. Finally, the isolation of several establishments and the lack of intimacy between children and the local communities inhibited the process of assimilation into Australian society. The conclusion to the Report was pretty severe, and left no doubt that existing practices should be much overhauled if child migration were to continue to deserve official British endorsement and further funding.[20]

[20] DO35/6381.

29. There would have been still more of a fuss if the Committee's confidential reports on individual establishments had also been released. Now available in the Public Record Office, they make for unhappy reading. A few extracts will give the flavour. St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage, Sydney, 'is an institutional home, deficient in comfort and amenities, in which the girls lead a restricted life in isolation from the community'. At Dhurringle Rural Training Farm, Tatura, 'both material conditions and the general attitude to the boys [were] deplorable'. At Nazareth House, Melbourne, 'anything approaching a home atmosphere [was] impossible'. The assessment of St Joseph's Children's Home, Rockhampton, was that 'there seems nothing in this regime which can help migrant boys and girls to make roots in a new country'. At St Vincent's Orphanage, Castledare, 'it is doubtful whether provision for even their physical welfare can be recorded as adequate'. At St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage, Perth, there was 'little attempt to fit the girls for independence'. Children at the Methodist Girls' Home, Perth, 'appear to lead an unreasonably restricted life'. Of St Joseph's Farm School, Bindoon, the Committee reported that 'it is hard to find anything good to say of this place, which has the disadvantage of isolation, unsuitable and comfortless accommodation, and a Principal with no understanding of children and no appreciation of their needs as developing individuals'. At the Fairbridge Farm School, Pinjarra, the 'Principal …shows a lack of appreciation of correct thought on child care'. At St John Bosco Boys' Town, Hobart, the Committee formed 'a most unfavourable impression of the attitude of the Principal, and of the regime described by him'.[21]

30. In his summary, Ross especially picked out five places for special condemnation: the Salvation Army Riverview Training Farm in Queensland, Dhurringle Rural Training Farm in Victoria, St John Bosco Boys' Town in Tasmania, the Methodist Children's Home at Magill in South Australia, and St Joseph's Farm School in Western Australia. However, Ross privately informed his HO colleagues that 'it was considerations of practical politics that caused the Mission to limit extreme criticism to the five establishments named. Others could easily have been condemned'.[22] The HO itself wanted to add another five institutions to this black list, because the principles on which they were run were 'so wrong'. These were St Joseph's Girls'

[21] DO35/6382.

Orphanage in Sydney, St Joseph's Children's Home in Rockhampton, St Vincent's Orphanage at Castledare, and the two Fairbridge Farm Schools at Pinjarra and at Molong. It was, however, conceded that the reputation of the Fairbridge organisation made it politically impossible to black list the last two, 'although well-informed opinion would condemn them from the point of view of the accepted principles of child care'.[23]

31. The annoyance and embarrassment which the report was likely to generate (it would 'put the cat among the pigeons'[24]) led to a pretty conspiracy by the CRO to ensure its publication at a time when the House of Commons was in recess. Moreover, publication was timed to coincide with an OMB response which largely distanced themselves from the investigation they had spawned. Attempts were also made in a private meeting to soothe the ruffled feathers of the UK's voluntary societies. Senior CRO officials were concerned that the report might strain relations with Australia just before a visit by the Prime Minister.[25]

32. Very revealing was the initial Australian response of 25 June 1956 to the published report. Most British child care workers had long since accepted that family-focused child care was the way to ensure children's well-being. The Department of Immigration too actually agreed that the boarding-out of children was desirable. However, they explained in defence of the institutional provision which alone was available for British child migrants that 'it is doubtful if there are sufficient "good homes" offering in Australia'.[26] It is not obvious how this less desirable treatment of British children 'deprived of a normal home life' was compatible with the caveat which the Curtis Report had added *ten years ago* to its cautious acceptance of child migration as a child care practice - that the treatment of children sent overseas should not be less satisfactory than the care which they should receive in the UK.

33. Even more indicative of Australian child care culture was the official response on receiving the confidential reports on individual institutions. In the light of those

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[22] BN29/1325, minute by Whittick, 23 June 1956.
[23] Ibid, Whittick to Shannon, 22 June 1956.
[24] DO35/6380, minute by Johnson, 28 June 1956.
[25] DO35/6381, DO35/9489.
[26] DO35/6382, enclosure to UK High Commission to CRO, 27 June 1956.

reports, the CRO had urged the Australians to conduct rapidly their own investigations. This was urgent because, following the recommendations of the Garner Committee in 1954, the funding agreements with the voluntary societies had only been extended for one year, pending signs of a change in policy towards family placement. These agreements had actually expired on 31 May 1956 and some societies were understandably pressing for renewals. Should applications from societies responsible for black-listed institutions alone be blocked? Since the Ross Committee had visited only 26 of the 39 previously approved institutions, would it be proper to approve requests from those not inspected, which might be better or might be worse? Should all agreements be suspended pending a thorough investigation of all institutions by the Australian authorities, adopting British child care principles as their criteria? This last was the HO recommendation. The HO even offered to provide the expertise and advice. In the event, during July, August and September, an inquiry was conducted by the Australian Prime Minister's Department, and a report was despatched to London. Remarkably, or perhaps not so, the only detected shortcomings were at Dhurringle and Bindoon. There was, it seems, a feeling of austerity at the former, the showers and lavatories were inadequate, and more staff were needed, but the institution by Australian standards was not isolated (seven miles from Tatura) and other problems were the fault of the children. At Bindoon, too, 'isolation is a matter of relativity', and minor improvements only were needed. Even St John Bosco Boy's Town, another on the black list, was deemed to be satisfactory. (The Salvation Army Riverview Training Farm and the Methodist Children's Home at Magill were apparently no longer operating as reception homes.) 'In view of [this], it is felt that there is no justification for your government to take any action to cause even the temporary deferment of child migration to Australia.'[27] In the CRO it was recorded that, 'As we feared, the Australian authorities focus only on material things like bathrooms and carpets, and ignore what has been said about atmosphere and management'.[28] An HO official minuted that the Australian report 'confirms my view that Australian and UK thinking on child care matters is poles apart'.[29]

[27] DO35/6382, enclosure to UK High Commission to CRO, 20 September 1956.
[28] Ibid., minute by Shannon, 1 November 1956.
[29] BN29/1325, minute of 21 November 1956.

34. Interestingly, at the insistence of the Australian Government, an official at the UK High Commission, not a child welfare specialist, accompanied the tour of inspection. The CRO insisted that he had observer status only and would not be bound to sign any report. In fact, Rouse privately recorded his agreement with the Fact-Finding Mission's assessment of Dhurringle ('old-fashioned ideas') and of Bindoon ('difficult to find anything good about the place'). Nor did he dissent from their negative appraisal of St John Bosco Boy's Town.[30]

35. Shortly afterwards, on 4 December, the UK High Commission forwarded the official Australian report on the re-inspection they had conducted of Dhurringle and Bindoon: satisfactory. According to the HO, 'The improvements are not such as to alter the character of the homes'.[31]

36. During the summer of 1956, British views of the work of the voluntary societies and of standards of Australian care of child migrants were also being again recorded by yet another Inter-Departmental Committee (Shannon Committee). The Committee had been set up to consider whether the Commonwealth Settlement Act, due to expire in May 1957, and its attendant agreements, including those with the child migration societies, should once more be renewed. The HO again took the occasion to set out Curtis principles. The HO, they claimed, were neither for nor against child migration, but, echoing that familiar caveat, they insisted that 'A child should not be sent abroad unless he has at least as good a prospect there as he would have in this country of health, happiness, education and, in the end, a satisfactory job'. They went on to insist that 'To provide that, the organisation overseas that looks after him must be reasonably enlightened and reasonably well-staffed and equipped'. However, no doubt conscious of the conclusions of the Fact-Finding Mission, 'There are indications that this is not always so in Australia'. While the HO were willing to offer advice, it was up to the Commonwealth and State governments in Australia to ensure that standards of care were satisfactory. So steered, the Committee accepted in its final report of 7 September 1956 the Mission's judgement that in some Australian institutions 'there is no real appreciation of a child's need for affection, for roots in a home with a family atmosphere, and for adequate contact outside the institution'.

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[30] DO35/6382, enclosure to UK High Commission to CRO, 20 September 1956.

Staffing needed to be improved. Children should be settled in or near urban areas (not in isolated rural locations), and better opportunities should be created for assimilation. Unfortunately, 'child welfare authorities in Australia and some voluntary organisations have not yet embraced the principles of child care that are accepted in the UK'. Very importantly, echoing the recommendation of the earlier Garner Committee, the Shannon Committee too insisted that fostering, not institutional care, should become the policy directive.[32]

37. After all this high-mindedness it is disillusioning to record that the CRO nevertheless continued to sign agreements with the voluntary societies without insisting on changes in child care practices in Australia. Politics and pragmatism overcame principles. The societies, unaware of the damning confidential reports prepared by the Fact-Finding Mission on some of the institutions to which they were sending British children, had been pressing for their financial agreements to be renewed. The CRO felt unable to adhere to the firm line proposed by the HO of granting no extensions until all places had been properly investigated. The problem was made worse, as the HO had predicted, when the Australian inquiry produced its own complacent assessment. An HO minute records the consequence. Gwynn, a senior official at the HO, recommended suspending all approvals, but Shannon at the CRO said that such a course would not be politically practicable. 'Mr Gwynn said that he appreciated that the political consequences, which were the province of CRO, might well override merits and, if that were so, we should not wish to press our objections.' Subsequently, a CRO minute recorded that the HO 'prefer not to be embarrassed by being consulted and are prepared not to object to our disposing of the applications on our own responsibility'. Late in 1956, agreements were extended, albeit initially only until May 1957, but including, for example, those covering Dhurringle and Bindoon.[33]

38. Attempts to insist, when further extensions were being negotiated, on the reforms first recommended by the Garner Committee and then by the Shannon Committee were equally perfunctory. The voluntary societies had predictably rejected with

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[31] Ibid, enclosure to Rouse to Johnson, 4 December 1956; BN29/1325, minute of 9 January 1957.
[32] DO35/10215, DO35/10216, DO35/4881.

indignation the judgements on their work in the published report of the Fact-Finding Mission. However, since they were dependent on financial subsidies, they were persuaded to provide the CRO with more information about their practices and those of the institutions to which they were sending children - matters such as their type of care, facilities, staffing, educational provision, integration with the local community, aftercare services. They were also, notably, required to state their policy on boarding-out. This was typical of the CRO policy of allowing child migration to continue while trying by persuasion only to bring child care practice in Australia into conformity with British expectations. The office was aware that the CRO could not *impose* such an obligation on Australian institutions in a self-governing state. And the idea of simply prohibiting child migration, as currently managed, remained politically too contentious. The CRO even abandoned a Shannon Committee recommendation that a condition of renewal should be formal adherence to certain child care principles and standards. In practice new agreements were signed without much fuss with all the eight currently operating societies.[34] An agreement was even signed with the Church of Scotland Committee on Social Service, which was sending British children to the formerly black-listed Dhurringle Rural Training Farm. This was in spite of an official *Australian* report in May 1957 which indicated that its facilities were poor, its character was institutional, and it lacked a 'cosy atmosphere'. There was no boarding out. 'Admittedly', the CRO wrote to the Scottish Office (in Scotland playing the role of the HO), 'the place is not ideal; but certain improvements have been made and we would hope that with pressure from the Scottish Committee and the Australian authorities conditions would become more satisfactory'. The Scottish Office did not demur.[35]

39. It seems unlikely that much pressure for wholesale change would be exerted in Australia. In January 1957 the Secretary of the Immigration Department formally wrote that Australia did not regard the report of the Fact-Finding Mission as seriously reflecting on child care in Australia.[36] In June 1957 the UK High Commissioner reported that, according to Australian officials, material conditions in all the critically

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[33] BN29/1325, minute by Whittick, 5 December 1956, DO35/6382, minutes of 6 and 30 December 1956.
[34] DO35/6383, DO35/10254.
[35] DO35/10275, correspondence of 29 May and 6 June 1957.
[36] DO35/6382, enclosure to Rouse to Sudbury and enclosure, 17 January 1957.

assessed institutions had been improved and that 'more fundamental criticisms are not in all cases accepted'.[37] In July 1957, in a press statement, the Minister for Immigration, Athol Townley, declared, among other matters, that child care in Australia was satisfactory and conformed to standards set by the child welfare authorities. There was a 'homely atmosphere' in the institutions. He disagreed that rural placings were isolating. Fostering had long been an Australian policy.[38]

40. Thereafter nothing, or at least very little. Early in 1960 the CRO had to decide what to do when the agreements signed with the eight UK voluntary societies for three years in 1957 were again coming up for renewal. It was initially noted that up-to-date reports would be necessary 'in order to ascertain that the principles laid down for the first time in the 1957 agreements are being adhered to by the organisations'. This was both an overstatement of what had been insisted upon in 1957, and an indication that since then close monitoring had not been taking place. Moreover, it seems that though the Australian authorities had agreed to periodic inspections of the institutions in Australia, the CRO did not have copies of any reports. There had been some movement towards boarding-out (41 child migrants in 1958, 39 in 1959), but an insistence on accelerating such a shift was not made a prerequisite for a further renewal. Indeed, the decision was taken in the CRO not to consult the Australian authorities before renewal, not to ask the voluntary societies to report on their fostering-out policy unless the HO insisted, and not to remind the HO of this supposed commitment. The HO did not raise the matter and approved the renewals. And thus public funding for child migration was extended for a further three years, to 31 May 1962.[39]

41. Before that date the decision had to be made as to whether the Commonwealth Settlement Act itself should be renewed. An Inter-Departmental Committee (the Chadwick Committee) was again established to consider the issues, including the subsidises paid to the child migration societies. The flavour of long-standing HO objections can be tasted in the final report of November 1961. It was widely accepted that institutional care should only be a last resort and that the priorities in child care

[37] DO35/10254, UK High Commission to CRO, 28 June 1957.
[38] Ibid., Press Statement by the Minister for Immigration, 25 July 1957.
[39] DO35/10255.

should be adoption or fostering. Although there had been improvements to the care of child migrants in Australia, standards still troubled the HO. The voluntary societies had indeed outlived their usefulness. However - and here the political arguments were again trundled out - it would be courting controversy not to renew the agreements. The societies 'are genuinely convinced that they still have a useful role'. To complete the case for inertia, it was concluded that 'it would be particularly unfortunate to rouse controversy when the amount of money involved is so small and the societies themselves are likely to die a natural death before long for lack of child migrants'. And so it came about. Neither the CRO nor the HO had amendments to propose to the existing agreements with the voluntary societies - except to double the maintenance allowance. The societies were so informed and new contracts signed.[40]

Conclusion

42. British official documents relating to the final chapter in the post-war history of child migration have yet to be released. However, we know that demographic change, economic growth, extended welfare services, and the development of public sector child care in Britain continued to reduce the number of potential child migrants. Fewer were being led into voluntary society care; more were being cared for by local authorities. Increasingly, children looked after by voluntary societies like those in the care of local authorities were being adopted or fostered, if they could not return to their natural families. The priorities and recommendations of the Curtis and Clyde Committees both represented and guided these changes in child care practices.

43. It is not the contention of this submission that this transition was complete or fully successful. Institutional care was retained in the UK for some categories of children; adoption and fostering were not trouble-free solutions. The emphases in British child care policy were to be altered again from the late 1960s.

44. However, what is abundantly clear is that the particular practice of child migration after 1945 was considered by most child care professionals in Britain as at best unnecessary and at worst - unless the Curtis caveat was strictly followed - damaging. It was also only too apparent that the politics of child care ensured that the caveat was

[40] DO175/38.

dishonoured. The voluntary societies in Britain had inherited traditions, reputations and allies, and neither the Home Office nor the Commonwealth Relations Office faced up to confrontation. Even the dependence of the voluntary societies upon British taxpayers' subsidies was not employed as a sanction to insist upon changes in the treatment of British child migrants. Instead British officials attempted to 'educate' Australia.

45. The evidence collected in Britain about the care and treatment of British child migrants in Australia prompted that policy. The assumption of the child migration voluntary societies was that (until late in the day) only institutional care would be offered to British children sent to Australia - and not adoption or fostering. Institutional provision as the only option would be regarded by contemporary British standards as *ipso facto* 'unsafe' and 'improper' care or treatment of children in need. Moreover, by the same contemporary British standards, the institutional care actually provided in many (not all) Australian institutions would be judged 'unsafe' and 'improper'. That many of the institutions to which child migrants were sent were at best 'grouped cottages' and at worst large 'barracks' alone made them unacceptable. The argument that the locations of some establishments were not 'isolated' by Australian standards failed to recognise that these children were British-born and of an age already to be conscious of contrast. The limited number of trained staff and the single-sex character of several institutions also cast doubt by British standards upon such places. That even official Australian reports were preoccupied with the material conditions within institutions indicated insensitivity to the psychological need of children for individualised affection.

46. The proper care of 'children deprived of a normal home life' - and even of some not so deprived - cannot even now be guaranteed in either Britain or Australia. But it does not follow that past practices can be left uncriticised. In the case of the care and treatment of child migrants sent post-war from Britain to Australia such an abdication of critical judgement is even less justified. Criteria for judgement were even then available. The British knew them and ignored them. The Australians chose to remain ignorant.