



2004: February 3, Tuesday

Committee on Expatriates
The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee,

Enclosed Submission

I enclose a submission relevant to your enquiry which may be of interest.

It consists of three pages plus a four-page Appendix which comprises a submission made last year to the Census Bureau.

I hope this may be helpful in your work.

Yours truly,

R.B.D. Cook

Encl: Submission
+ Appendix

Issues of the Diaspora

Submission from Roger B. Cook,

The facts are now well-known--the exodus is growing fast, with foreign countries gaining our emigrants faster than any domestic region apart from the Sunshine Coast; the diaspora threatens to be permanent, because the problems of repatriation are too difficult for most emigrants to overcome. And, for some people, because the pull of home cannot countervail the satisfactions of life overseas.

What we are seeing is the end of the centrifugal force of empire, when the bravest and best moved to all the ends of the world to bring them the benefits of civilization and the metropolis. The dominant force in the 21st century is centripetalism...the brightest and the bravest realize that Godzone is actually Hicksville so they move "to where the action is". And in this fast globalizing world they are right because, despite the name, globalization involves a centralization of power and money, the attractants of the bright and brave.

All of which leaves Australia with the same issues as a country town which the bold and the beautiful have left but whose remaining citizens do not wish to see shrivel and deteriorate. In general, such a country town will react by never turning its back upon the sons and daughters who have left for the Big Smoke. It will always regard them as locals, irrespective of their actual location: this same attitude ought to underlie national policy towards expatriates.

For, apart from keeping, or adopting, the attitude there would seem to be no single big idea which can stop the hemorrhage. If they still call Australia home they may come back one day: if not, they probably won't. It's not, in a free society, a government thing. But government can help.

Some suggestions for policy follow:-

1] The objective is not to prevent Aussies from leaving; that would not be possible anyway. The year-off, or sandwich year, is standard practice and it whets the appetite for foreign climes. And it adds much to the perspective and life-experience of the young people who do it. It is probably not desirable either to prevent the emigration, the eventual decision to work elsewhere.

(I used to think otherwise, and was among those calling for an increase in R&D expenditure some years ago with just that purpose. But essentially the departure of our bright people to work overseas is not intrinsically undesirable.)

All that policy can do is to increase the chance of emigres deciding to come home, and making a success of the repatriation if they do. The Republic of Ireland could be a useful model here; presumably DFAT could report on the program used by the Irish Government to entice its citizens home.

2] What decisions could governments make to help our emigrants to "still call Australia home"?

Basically, like any children leaving home, they need to continue to realize that they matter, to feel loved: otherwise they will look for love elsewhere. The fundamental health of local society is critical to this--obviation of any "push" factors.

Governments can do some things but few if any of them will rank with domestic social harmony as a factor. So all the state-based issues such as education, crime control and honest government have an important indirect effect. The "some things" include:-

- a) Briefing emigrants on the importance of their role as unofficial ambassadors for their fatherland. Passports should come with information not just about the dangers of drug smuggling but about the opportunities to answer questions about Australia. Ambassadors and High Commissioners should resume the practice of annual receptions for locals--if not on Australia Day, which also happens to be India's Republic Day, then perhaps on Anzac Day, or some chosen day in the northern summer.
- b) As a corollary, DFAT's consular services may need to be expanded. The registration of expatriates alone must have become almost impossible in the UK and USA but, to keep contact with our potential re-patriates, it is essential.
- c) The use of global English newspapers should be considered for government advertising, especially of high-level Australian appointments. While "headhunter" firms have good worldwide connexions and data-bases these cannot be relied upon to find the best candidates, which usually means those who are not presently looking to re-locate.
- d) Families, generally parents, left behind should understand, should be made aware, that so long as their children and siblings have an address in Australia they can vote in state and federal elections. Just as dual citizenship is no longer a big deal, so dual addresses can get over the fact that our electoral laws do not facilitate the registration of expatriate voters.

- e) We should know where our expatriates are. The Census Bureau has submissions, including from the Southern Cross Group, asking it to count expatriates in the 2006 Census. Perhaps the Senate could add its voice to the call.
- f) All government advertising to the community should recognize that absence overseas is potentially temporary. The millions of travellers and the hundreds of thousands of emigres must not be forgotten when governments are trying to communicate to citizens.
- g) Centrelink should be given special resources to help or at least advise re-patriates. Once an individual, or family, has made the decision to repatriate it is desirable that the community take advantage of that decision, and help to cement it.
- h) The Australian Tax Office should realize that economic expats are a source of secondary export income; it should ensure that such people are given the benefit of any double taxation arrangements that may exist and generally not penalize income-earners whose money is earned overseas.
- i) The Council of the Order of Australia should use international data sources, including the diplomatic service, to monitor the contribution of Australians overseas to their professions or areas of expertise. Foreign service ought not to be ignored in honoring performance of distinction, even if the individuals are not public servants. (Of course, if they have renounced their Australian citizenship that is another matter.)
- j) The Citizenship Act should be amended, as proposed by the Southern Cross Group, to allow ex-citizens who wish it to un-do their renunciation, if made for Rupert-type reasons. This country should not be in the business of cutting off its children unless they are a disgrace to it.

Respectfully submitted,

Roger B. Cook