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I have met, to my knowledge, only one 'asylum seeker'. It was at a small party, celebrating a minor event, which brought together people only tangentially, or casually, connected. There was this one person whose timid apprehension brought me to him in an endeavour to make him welcome and cheer him up.

Well, there was a language difficulty, but we struggled with that sufficiently well to keep my side of the conversation stumbling. He was simply too afraid to sustain the effort. He was cautious of everyone in the room, reacting to sudden noises, movements, and made every gesture of accommodation that he could.

When I learnt that he was an asylum seeker on a temporary visa I was surprised at my immediately accepting his behaviour as appropriate. I had seen too many films, read too many books not to be familiar with the predicament of the escapee in an occupied European country. Extreme caution; fear of apprehension; ignorance of ordinary everyday familiarities; terrified of error; lack of simple personality.

I have wondered many times since at what sort of 'citizen' we are constructing from the 'workshops' of our detention centres. There was nothing whatsoever about this man that would put him into an Australian outfit; he wouldn't be able to wear it.

If this was so blatant with an adult, what irreversible damage is being done to the children?

There has been enough press coverage of the gross misfortunes of some of the most desperate survivors of detention for me not to make the obvious protest. What surely is a most urgent step to take is to put the 'camps' into the care and running of Government where there can be some expectation, and some experience, of those in charge being accountable.

What an irony: the camps are producing 'citizens' who will be more 'at home' in the New Australia that the camps are producing, than we older Australians who contrived them to preserve our treasured way of life.

Thank you.