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POPULATION AND MULTICULTURALISM
Immigration, integration and crime

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This chapter analyses aspects of the Greens’ policies on population, multiculturalism and justice. These include 63 sub-points: some admirable, others questionable. The focus is on the latter group, particularly those relevant to population growth and migrant settlement.

Since 2006 Australia’s population has been growing at record levels, records largely due to high net immigration. Most migrants head for the major cities but the infrastructure has not kept up. Today, transport is in crisis, housing unaffordable, and more investment in power stations, hospitals, schools and water services is badly needed.

These problems have long roots but they came to a head in October 2009. When Kevin Rudd announced his support for “a big Australia”, Australians’ frustration with their deteriorating quality of life erupted. This made population growth an issue in the August 2010 election.

Where did the Greens stand? In March 2010 they called for an independent inquiry into Australia’s carrying capacity (which would not report until mid-2011). At first the Coalition backed them, but then withdrew, and the initiative foundered. Commentators often assumed that the Greens supported limits to growth but in fact they said little. For example, in a debate on population on the ABC’s Q&A Bob Brown spoke of global population growth, compassion towards asylum seekers, and
international aid. He did call for a wider debate on Australia’s population, given our finite resource base and the problem of climate change, but he did not speak out against growth. Why not?

The Greens once had a population policy that emphasised limits but, from 1998, they revised and diluted this, erasing the question of numbers. Instead they focused on consumption, population distribution rather than size, and the neglect of international social justice. Today their population policy worries about global population, Australia’s consumption patterns, women’s rights, international human rights, refugees, and global social justice, but has nothing to say about numbers. It is also silent on infrastructure.

Though immigration is the largest component of the recent surge, most participants in the 2010 debate distinguished between their concern about numbers and respect for existing overseas-born Australians. This was sensible: the growth lobby frequently labels support for demographic stability as anti-migrant or racist. Debate can be muffled by vested interests keen to paint such support as green racism, and some progressives lead or echo these manoeuvres. Here environmental activists are often to the fore. And as we have seen, today’s Greens are not worried about Australia’s population growth. Brown made some mild statements about its possible risks in the run-up to the election but his heart was not in it, and his party’s policy did not push him to be more forthright.

As well as being relaxed about growth, Greens are keen supporters of multiculturalism. There is a historical link between the two concepts because, during the Hawke/Keating years, multicultural rhetoric was a rich resource.
for gatekeepers using the green-racism smear to shut down debate about growth. Though the Howard government talked about harmony rather than multiculturalism, the Gillard government has recently revived it, and this follows the Greens’ policies. For example, they say that population policy must be determined by a commitment to international human rights and to multiculturalism (and never by economic goals). Their policies on multiculturalism provide some clues as to what such a commitment might entail.

Multiculturalism has many meanings. Sometimes it just describes demographic reality: Australians come from many different ethnic backgrounds. But it can also refer to policies about ethnic diversity. Some of these promote tolerance and ease the path of integration. This is John Hirst’s “soft multiculturalism”. But the word is fluid. It can mean valuing immigrant cultures for their own sake, affirmative action, quotas, ethnic separatism and accusations of racism against the host population, together with a denigration of its culture. This is Hirst’s “hard multiculturalism”.

What variant do the Greens want to draw on when shaping our population policy? They say that cultural diversity enriches us and should be celebrated, and that we should support equal opportunity, including equal opportunity of representation in government “regardless of culture, ethnicity or dual citizenship”. This last stipulation refers to section 44(i) of the Constitution which prohibits dual citizens from standing for federal parliament. It can only be repealed by referendum, but there is no mention of such a referendum. Their multiculturalism policies also oppose Australian values testing as prerequisites for citizenship or immigration and say that all barriers to social justice “for every member of Australia’s culturally and linguistically diverse community
Social justice is a vague term referring to the redistribution of resources within a community. This “is only possible in a polity with high communal solidarity”. Will celebrating difference foster this? The Greens do not say, but they do say they will try to eliminate racism, make sure services are delivered in languages other than English where appropriate, and “ensure data on cultural and linguistic diversity is collected and used to improve services and programs”. However, their policies on justice “prohibit the use of racial profiling, and the arbitrary use of racial descriptors by police or other government agencies”, so some data are to be collected and used, others not.

But how useful is actively importing and celebrating diversity to the welfare of immigrants and to the host society? ABS survey data show that, from January 1998 to November 2007, 24 per cent of permanent migrants (aged 15 plus) came from the main English-speaking-background (ESB) countries and 76 per cent from other countries. Overall, 81 per cent lived in households where the main source of income was wages and 19 per cent in households dependent on welfare or other income. Households where the main applicant had a skilled visa did best, but proficiency in English was crucial. Among migrants where English was not spoken at home, 75 per cent of those who spoke English “very well” were employed, followed by 62 per cent of those who spoke English “well”, followed by 37 per cent of those who did not speak English well or at all, or whose proficiency was unknown.

Thus skilled migrants with good English were mostly employed and not on welfare. But did they have jobs commensurate with their qualifications? While those from ESB countries have little difficulty finding appropriate work, those
from non-English-speaking-background (NESB) countries, who form the majority, are not so fortunate.\textsuperscript{44} In 2006 only 29 per cent of younger NESB migrants with university degrees who had arrived in the previous five years had professional or managerial jobs, as did 36 per cent of older degree-qualified migrants.\textsuperscript{45}

Migrants from NESB countries need help with English and skilled migrants need bridging programs to help them find suitable work. Rather than onlookers celebrating their diversity and fretting about whether they can run for parliament, they need practical assistance. Pride in one’s origins seems admirable but it is no substitute for appropriate work and a good wage.

Indeed ethnic pride on its own can lead to difficulties. The police report on the December 2005 Cronulla riots and revenge attacks states:

“Pride in one’s background or a sense of loyalty to a particular race or culture can be the motivating factor for people with no previous criminal convictions or history of violence becoming involved in a riot.”\textsuperscript{46}

Lebanese Australians from the Muslim community were key victims of the riots and key actors in the revenge attacks;\textsuperscript{47} they are also particularly disadvantaged.\textsuperscript{48} Practical help and law enforcement are better responses to their difficulties than celebration of difference. The Cronulla rioters behaved disgracefully. But the long-running tensions between them and their antagonists might have been alleviated if the latter had known more about Australian values and been encouraged to show some respect for them.\textsuperscript{49}

The Greens’ policies on justice echo their policies on multiculturalism with, for example, their belief that equality
before the law depends on recognition of “the way in which cultural, social and economic issues structure choices and influence decisions”. They also believe that customary law and other cultural factors should be “taken into account by judges in determining sentences”. And as well as prohibiting collection of data on ethnicity and crime, they also oppose a national identification card.\textsuperscript{50}

Data on prisoners show that people from some birthplace groups are more likely to be serving prison sentences and others less likely. For example, in 2010 the rate of imprisonment for people born in Australia was 202 per 100,000. But the rate for those born in Samoa was 555 per 100,000, Tonga 531, Sudan 398, Vietnam 382, Romania 359, Lebanon 259. For others the rate was lower: UK and Ireland 26 per 100,000, India 28, Italy and Germany 37, China 51.\textsuperscript{51} Little purpose would be served by deliberately choosing not to record such information.

The Greens’ policies on population, multiculturalism and justice should be read together. Enthusiasm for diversity is coupled with the principle that population policy should be committed to bringing in yet more diversity. Integration is not mentioned. Justice, in the Greens’ policy, demands that we do not insist on Australian values, that cultural background should mitigate sentencing, and that data on crime and ethnicity should not be collected. This is closer to hard multiculturalism than to the soft variety. It also does not amount to a population policy focused on the health of the Australian environment and the society that this environment supports.

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References

26 From 1948 to 2005 annual growth averaged 217,600 with net migration accounting for 41 per cent (or 89,700 pa). From 2006 to 2009 it averaged 402,000 with net migration accounting for 63 per cent (or 254,900 pa). Thus the four years from January 2006 to December 2009 were exceptional. While growth eased in 2010, it was still very high. From 1948 to 1981 net migration is net total migration; from 1982 to 2009 it is net overseas migration. The nine months to September 2010 show some easing; Total growth from the December quarter 2008 to the September quarter 2009 was 444,500, but from the December quarter 2009 to the September quarter 2010 it was 345,600—lower but still in the record category. DecQ 2008-SeptQ 2009, natural increase was 156,500 and NOM 288,000 (65% of the total increase). From the DecQ 2009 to SeptQ 2010 natural increase was 159,800 and NOM 185,800 (54% of the total). Prior to 2006, the highest NOM recorded was 182,200 in calendar year 2005; thus Australia is still in a period of exceptional growth. Historical data calculated from Demography 1954, Bulletin No. 72, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics; J. Shu et al., Australia’s Population Trends and Prospects 1993, (BIR), AGPS, Canberra 1994; Demographic Statistics, ABS, Catalogue no 3101.0 (various issues). Recent data: Demographic Statistics, September Quarter 2010, ABS, Catalogue no 3101.0, March 2011, p. 10.


29 T. Jones, ‘Q&A Population Debate Special’, ABC TV (transcript), 12 August
2010 <www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/txt/s2981403.htm> accessed 13 August 2010


35 See Greens’ policies on population, op. cit., *Principles* 5 and 6.
36 J. Hirst, ‘National pride and multiculturalism’, *People and Place*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1994, pp. 1-6

37 Greens’ policies on multiculturalism, op. cit., *Principle 1*

38 ibid., *Goal 6*

39 ibid., *Measure 17*


41 Greens’ policies on multiculturalism, op. cit., *Measures 8, 11, and 14*

42 Greens’ policies on justice
accessed 11 April 2011, *Measure 26*

43 *Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Recent Migrants, November 2007*,
*Catalogue no. 6250.0*, ABS, 2008, calculated from pp. 24, 23, 31

44 See B. Birrell and E. Healy, ‘How are skilled migrants doing?’ *People and Place*, vol. 16, no. 1 (supplement), 2008, pp. 2, 3.

45 The younger group was aged 20 to 29 in 2006 and would have included many former international students who had obtained their qualifications in Australia. The older group was aged 30 to 64 and would mostly have obtained their qualifications overseas. Birrell and Healy, 2008, op. cit.


47 On the evening of Monday 12 December, the second day of the revenge attacks, ‘some 4000 people gathered at the Lakemba Mosque in a public rally in the belief that the Mosque needed to be protected. At that time from the surrounding area, gangs of Middle Eastern men gathered after leaving the Mosque and reprisal attacks similar to those of the night before commenced’. *Strike Force Neil*, 2006, op. cit., p. 9


51 *Prisoners in Australia 2010, Catalogue no. 4102.0*, ABS, 2010, p. 18