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review essays

The Murky Matter of Immigration — John Atchison

Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared*. Montreal/Kensington: McGill-Queens/UNSW Press.

Freda Hawkins, in discussing the 1974-75 Green Paper on Immigration Policy (Canada), highlights the minister's insistence on the need to see immigration policy in a very wide framework (p.53). This factor, along with the far-reaching effects of immigration on all institutional arrangements in contemporary societies, makes the formation of developed and informed public opinion such a complex, delicate and difficult task.

Governments, such as federal cabinets in Ottawa and Canberra, walk tightropes in balancing very strong international pressures against the public opinion base within which their policy formulation and implementation operate. Only a minority of electors is likely to appreciate the geo-political realism and population objectives embedded in policy. Rarely examined in public debate are the constraints of non-renewable resources, technology base and trade options in a world moving rapidly from superpowers to six powers and possibly, by mid twentyfirst century, to ten powers (Bell 1989, p.29). People move in company with other international factors: investment, technology and trade. It is little wonder that in popular culture darkness rather than light prevails when immigration, and the associated settlement policy of multiculturalism, are discussed.

J.K. Galbraith's judgment that on few matters are human beings⁴ so deliberately obscurantist as on immigration (Galbraith 1981, p.280) is matched by Hawkins' well-documented argument that politicians find the area difficult, unpopular and problematical. These factors are compounded by the problem that 'in all countries of immigration family reunion has become a sacred object which can only be handled with extreme care [p.85]'. This timely volume should be read against this social environment. *Critical Years in Immigration* is welcome both for immigration debate and for comparative studies.

Critical Years in Immigration builds on and expands within a comparative framework the author's *Canada and Immigration Public Policy and Public Concern* (1972), a second edition of which accompanies this volume. Both volumes exemplify an exhaustive, sometimes cautious, sometimes daring, analysis of the flood of reports, inquiries, parliamentary debates and controversies on

immigration. The emphasis is descriptive and pedagogical in a field lacking systematic treatment in any overview manner. If the interpretation, at times, could be more trenchant this may be to expect too much at this stage of the historiography. For Australians, the book exemplifies the contribution to public literature which can result from negotiated, contractual co-operation between academics and government departments. Graeme Hugo's excellent study *Australia's Changing Population* is such an event in a climate marked more by the political bastardry which evoked some of Jean Martin's finest writing (Encel 1981, pp.158-169)¹. In these debates, therefore, *Critical Years in Immigration* assumes importance at many levels.

The study is the most thorough and comprehensive comparative survey available on immigration, refugee policy and multiculturalism. As such, it has particular interest to the readership of this journal. Each ACSANZ Conference 1982 to 1990 has elicited comments on how little real comparative work by individuals with a secure foothold in both Canada and Australia is being produced. At the same time, real progress is evidenced over the past eight years.

Critical Years in Immigration invites comparison with *Federalism in Canada & Australia* not only because they emerged within months of one another but also because of their common focus on the late twentieth century. Both volumes are significant and seminal. By moving historical analysis solidly beyond the nineteenth century they suggest outlines of constitutional interpretation and political economy which will enable social history to inject a stronger humanities approach into insights provided by social science methodologies. As with toponymy, immigration studies take place at a meeting point for the humanities and the social sciences. *Critical Years in Immigration* has grown out of that indigenous political economy tradition of Toronto, the formal demise of which both author and reviewer witnessed at a departmental meeting, in Sidney Smith (late 1981). *Critical Years* is the achievement of one author well versed in her subject. *Federalism* brought together twenty seven authors. Both open ample room for seminal argument about methodologies and advantages of comparative studies.

Such studies are expressing in an important way the wider insights formerly gained from the jettisoned approach of Commonwealth Studies. The innovative, refreshing but still seminal framework of countries of recent European settlement used by Deryck Schreuder at Sydney may anticipate the ultimate wider context for extending the achievements of *Critical Years* and *Federalism*. Such speculation is occasioned not only by these recent books but by Reg Berry's plenary at the 1990 ACSANZ Conference and also by the import of George Tomkins' (1986) valedictory message to Canadian Studies.

If one extrapolates beyond the purview of *Critical Years in Immigration* to the CAAIP Report of 1988, the dilemmas of public policy formulation and implementation become apparent and the value of this study is reinforced. It can be argued that the bottom line of Australian policy is whether government retains or loses control of the entry process. This is most relevant apropos South West

Pacific and Irian Jaya (Indonesia). Canada's refugee experience in 1987 suggested one future. Access for Irian Jaya refugees across Torres Strait is easier than arrival by boat in Charlesville, Nova Scotia. Thus, while constitutional-legal frameworks vary within Canada and Australia, the pressures, international and domestic, are similar.

The landmark decision (1985) by the Supreme Court of Canada testing, in response to well-lubricated pressure group activity, the 1967 UNO *Protocol* on refugee status against the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* raises the spectre of control over policy formulation transferring from cabinet to judiciary. Given the mutual indebtedness of immigration management strategies shown by Hawkins, Australian policies could ultimately be affected by these Canadian moves.

Australia's dilemmas, at present, are different. A new migration act and regulations in 1989 attempted to remove the post-1945 discretionary power vested in minister and department (DILGEA). The well-motivated attempt to locate this power in parliament would have ensured greater scrutiny by the legislature and entailed better, more open public debate. Strong lobbying against a bank of regulations designed to make review and appeal processes more community advocate based and less the domain of lawyers either lost sight of this fundamental principle or aroused fears that some key players would lose their power and influence. The outcome raised disturbing questions within a parliamentary democracy, particularly the prime ministerial intervention in the sudden removal of the secretary of DILGEA and the unbalanced access to decision making of four ethnic pressure groups.

All these events show the complexity of immigration issues. They show the profoundly political nature of an operation which is, by definition, full of all the tragedies and traumas, joys and achievements of the human condition. They show the radical choice between national policy for 'selfish' national interests or compassion as the fundamental basis of immigration and, especially, refugee policy. Freda Hawkins' useful highlighting of PEI Red Tory David Macdonald's critical response to the 1975 Report of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Immigration (p.62) has its Australian counterpart in 1990 church responses to some Cambodian refugee movement to Australia, views which must command attention in a democratic society.

Hawkins' study grew out of the earlier book on Canada. *Critical Years* reflects her strong conviction that as immigration is an international phenomenon it cannot be studied adequately from within a nationalist framework. At the same time, the meticulous, cautious analysis of official reports, ministerial statements, parliamentary inquiries and public opinion as reflected in media coverage evidence her awareness that comparative study of the murky matter of immigration is also a tricky business.

Societies, such as Australia and Canada, while sharing similar parliamentary and legal traditions derived from a former imperial centre, have been driven by strongly divergent geo-political, ethno-cultural and regional forces. Defence played such a strong role in Australian assumptions about immigration until 1973

that its implications are little appreciated. A distinctive feature of Australian settlement, 'migrant' hostels built from former army bases, never operated in Canada. Control as the essence of immigration management contrasted with international ideals, especially since Lester Pearson, and fairness. Rhetoric on assimilation and official suppression of heritage (community) languages prevailed. Nostalgia for a pre-Singapore imperial link was maintained and only waned once the reality of Midlands England as the northern limit of the European Community's golden quadrangle took shape. Now, however, multiculturalism, a term devised at Banff in 1965 and plagiarised by Australia in 1973, reflects the gathering strength of post-war immigrants in the political and legal structures of Australian society. Unlike European societies, immigrants in Canada and Australia can assert from a human rights position a claim to define and shape these nations, emerging as they are from cultural cringe and an obsession with identity occasioned by the withdrawal of the imperial link.

Some future social historian will enrich our understanding of the key role of the defence assumption, present in Australian immigration policy 1945-1973 but paralleled by foreign policy objectives in Canada, in affecting settlement management, community attitudes, bilingualism, expressive arts as symbols of personality and high rates of mental disturbance and illness. The study, will, of necessity, build on Hawkins' foundation survey. Hawkins' study shows a constant and subtle admiration of Australian achievement, a perception which should be appreciated widely within public opinion and a judgment which lacked recognition in CAAIP.

Hawkins presents well evidenced arguments (p.182) to underscore Australian and Canadian achievements in managing and absorbing 'very large influxes of refugees which have not yet come to an end'. This is explained by the efficient use of existing resources and experience, mobilisation of the community and creative responses to pressures from, and co-operation with, voluntary agencies. Greater realisation of such achievements within public opinion would disperse some of the ludicrous pessimism in both societies. It would combat the CAAIP finding that too many Australians (and Canadians) perceive immigration as marginal whereas it is central to them and their society, present and future.

Realistic appraisals of multiculturalism characterise the book. The enmeshment of multiculturalism in politics (p.215), the tension between immigrants' own motivations and multiculturalism (p.217), its power to buy votes (p.222), the weakness of advisory councils (p.224), multiculturalism's boom time employment for sociologists (p.227), its cosmetic role as distinct from empowerment and resource redistribution (pp.241-242) and the anomalous position of charter groups, ruling classes, immigrant groups, ethnic communities and indigenous peoples are all well covered.

Immigration analysis and writing in Canada and Australia has been dominated by economists and sociologists. It is impoverished through the low participation of historians, geographers, political scientists, lawyers and linguists in debate and scholarly analysis. This point is emphasised well by Hawkins' study and,

especially, by Tomas Hammar and the Center for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations, University of Stockholm. Hammar's *European Immigration Policy and Democracy and the Nation State* could be well emulated from within Australia. Philosophers, not least, could sharpen discussion on the common good and the public interest (Dummett, 1978,a;b). This is needed especially in Australia, a country whose materialist political culture and instrumentalist view of the state (Emy, 1974, pp.347-355) and education equate the common good with an ideology coterminous with balance sheet management and Harvard MBA's.

Hawkins' study provides a strong foundation for future work in this important field of social concern and public policy. This historian missed the important Butlin-Schedvin (1977) revision of Giblin and Calwell's roles in the framing of Australia's post-war immigration. At times, he felt greater emphasis could be put on the extent to which European source countries of the 1945-1973/74 era are, since the 'turning point year of 1974 and the convergence year of 1978', now countries of immigration rather than of emigration. Red Tories and rednecks in both Canada and Australia are not alone in lacking understanding of demographic trends in a rapidly emerging European Community. The valuable construction of knowledge on immigration facilitated by SOPEMI-OECD provides the base for further comparative work.

The purpose of such comparative work is, as we know from the 1990 ACSANZ Conference, a matter of contention. Freda Hawkins has shown the way with a book on immigration from which Canadians and Australians all gain a better understanding of their own societies. From her current residence overlooking the Abbey Green and Kenilworth Castle and her access to the excellent resources on immigration and race relations at the University of Warwick, Freda Hawkins is well placed to push the skills evidenced thus far into a final book to complete the trilogy. An interpretative essay on British society in the 1990s should develop the insights gained from analysis of immigration policy and multiculturalism in Canada and Australia for a society which has never been a country of immigration. If the concept of neocolonialism applies to Moroccans and Tunisians in Brussels with continuity from Leopold's Congo (Martens, 1988)², perhaps the country which has diversified its labour force through decolonisation will understand how substantial the indigenous achievements in immigration of its former dominions have been. It is time to turn the tables and give Australian-Canadian studies their rightful place.

It is also time for electors, in both Canada and Australia, to inform themselves on matters of such public debate and public concern. This will stop politicians, for electoral advantage, making immigration and multiculturalism the bogey of foreign policy played, until the 1969 federal election, in Australia. This, in turn, will ensure creative acceptance and integration of the immigrant presence. *Critical Years in Immigration* is a valuable and substantial contribution to such active citizenship.

Notes

1. The allusion, based on conversation with Professor Alan Martin is to Jean Martin's 'The Vietnamese Study' second only to J. Martin *The Migrant Presence: Australian Responses 1947-1977*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1978. The textual comments refer to the period before the emergence of The Bureau of Immigration Research.
2. This assessment is based on conversations with Professor Albert Martens, Department of sociology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

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