

RACISM AND THE RECESSION

■ Andrew Markus

There has been much discussion, perhaps more in the mid to late 1980s than at the present, of the consequences for race relations of a rise of unemployment. Would the recently arrived immigrants be blamed for unemployment, and for contributing unfairly to job competition? The significant numbers from Asian countries would, it has been argued, make these immigrants a 'visible' target. Some feared that the legacy of racist attitudes within the Australian community would fuel tensions.

These hypotheses were explored in a survey of inter-community attitudes in the outer Melbourne municipality of Springvale in December 1992.¹ The Springvale community provides an ideal test case because of the high level of overseas born residents, including a prominent Indochinese presence in the main shopping precinct of Springvale Road and a near monopoly of shops in side streets. While unemployment in Springvale was generally at or below the metropolitan average in the 1970s, in 1986 it was a little worse at 7.3 per cent and at the time of the survey it was at the high level of 15 per cent.

From 1971 to 1986 the percentage of Springvale's population born overseas increased from 32 to 38 per cent. Over the last inter-censal period the increase accelerated, and the overseas born reached 44 per cent in 1991. (They were 30 per cent of the population of Melbourne as whole.) The general pattern of changing ethnicity in Australia saw the British and Irish preponderant amongst immigrants in the

early post-war period, continental Europeans from the second half of the 1950s, and more recently a significant increase of people born in Asian countries. In 1981 the population in Springvale born in Vietnam was 1,212. By 1991 it was 6,569, having doubled over the last five years, and is now the largest of the overseas birthplace groups.

The survey examined attitudes towards immigration and other aspects of government policy, and towards life in a community characterised by its ethnic diversity. The area is indeed diverse: at least 60 per cent of the Australian born respondents had European and Asian neighbours in their street. The questionnaire, which included almost 50 questions, was administered to groups of school children (most aged 14 to 16 years), householders, and to people within organisations and community centres. It was not a random sample and there were more female than male respondents. But the objective of reaching a large, diverse population was met: 981 questionnaires were returned covering 50 birthplace groups, including 435 people born in Australia, 113 in Vietnam, 53 in Kampuchea, and 49 in the United Kingdom. Of the 920 respondents who gave their age: 295 were aged 13 to 19 years; 269, 20 to 39 years; 279, 40 to 59 years. Amongst respondents unemployment was apparently in the 15 to 20 per cent range, although it was lower amongst the Australian born and significantly higher amongst recent arrivals.

ATTITUDES ON BROAD POLICY ISSUES

Several questions were included to test respondents' attitudes to broad issues of national economic and cultural policy and their feelings about Australia and being 'Australian'. The answers indicated that most respondents favoured integration over cultural maintenance and supported policies which placed Australian interests first. Very few shared the globalising agenda of current political elites. Only a small minority of adults (13 per cent) favoured 'opening of the country to competition from foreign goods in order to promote efficiency', as opposed to 47 per cent who favoured competition 'only when we are sure that Australian workers will not lose jobs', and 34 per cent who believed that 'Australia should try to satisfy its own needs from its own industries'.

Most also believed that immigration levels were too high. Of the 83 per cent expressing an opinion (a majority of whom had little idea of the current level of immigration), 48 per cent of adults believed the intake was too high, 28 per cent thought it was about right, and nine per cent that it was too low. The responses from students produced very similar results, as did a breakdown by gender. There was, however, significant diversity of opinion across different birthplace groups: nearly 70 per cent of those born in Britain thought the number too high, compared with 61 per cent born in Australia and 57 per cent born in southern and eastern Europe. Of those born in Indochina only 19 per cent considered that the intake was too high, 43 per cent thought it was about right, and 10 per cent that it was too low.

Consistent with these defensive, 'little Australia,' attitudes, most respondents did not favour multicultural policies which involved state support for the maintenance of ethnic cultures.

Respondents were asked whether migrants should be 'encouraged to fit into the community as soon as possible', 'left to fit in at their own pace', or 'assisted by government funds to maintain their own culture during their first years in Australia'. Fifty-five per cent supported encouragement to fit in as soon as possible, 21 per cent believed people should determine their own pace, 12 per cent supported government funding for cultural maintenance, and a further 12 per cent had no firm view or did not agree with any of the three propositions. Seventy-one per cent of those born in the United Kingdom supported the 'as soon as possible' option, compared with 62 per cent of those born in southern and eastern Europe, 57 per cent of the Australian-born, and 51 per cent of those born in Indochina. Thus, in only one birthplace group did a majority favour the government assistance option.

Given these attitudes, it might be expected that respondents (especially those of Australian birth) would be hostile to the large overseas born presence within their community. This proved not to be the case. Most respondents appeared capable of holding views opposed to immigration and active multiculturalism while, at the same time, showing as a tolerant disposition towards recently arrived Australians — including Asians.

INTER-COMMUNITY ATTITUDES

It could not be asserted on the basis of one survey that inter-community tensions are at a low-level in Springvale. In this survey, however, few respondents expressed strongly prejudiced attitudes.

In sharp contrast with the expectations of commentators who believe that Australians are prejudiced towards Asians, a clear majority of the

Springvale respondents expressed an open stance towards Asian migration.

Respondents were asked whether they thought Asian immigrants, 'have a great deal to offer the Australian way of life'. Of the total sample born outside Asian countries only six per cent strongly disagreed and 10 per cent disagreed. There was little variation when the sample was further narrowed to the Australian-born. As evident from Table 1, amongst the Australian-born the level of disagreement was highest in the 12 to 19 years age group, and the level of agreement strongest in the 20 to 39 years age group. Sixty-five per cent of non-Asian-born respondents agreed that Asian migrants have a lot to offer Australia. Although Springvale has been an area of high unemployment there is little evidence of scapegoating, of blaming immigrants for Australia's economic plight.

Consistent with these attitudes respondents showed no inclination to apply racist criteria to the immigration selection system. They were asked to rank the top three factors in deciding which people should be allowed to migrate to Australia. The factors presented to respondents were: age, ability to speak English, culture similar to

Australia's, health, qualifications or skills, race, relatives living in Australia, refugee status, religion, and wealth. First ranking was given to ability to speak English, followed by qualifications, health, refugee status, and relatives living in Australia (see Table 2). Race was placed at the bottom of the rankings: 0.2 per cent first preference; 0.5 per cent second preference; and 2.1 per cent third preference. These three rankings give a total of 24 people out of the 871 who completed the question.

There is a striking absence of racism in these responses; other questions provide further evidence of a willingness to accept people irrespective of background, so long as they adopt the Australian way of life. Respondents were presented with the statement that 'so long as a person is committed to Australia it does not matter what ethnic background they are from'. Only three per cent of the total sample strongly disagreed and five per cent disagreed; 10 per cent were unsure, and 82 per cent agreed or strongly agreed. In all birthplace groups agreement was 75 per cent or above: 76 per cent for the Australian born; 78 per cent British; and between 92 and 94 per cent amongst southern and eastern Europeans,

Table 1: Q: 'Asian migrants have a great deal to offer the Australian way of life.'
Birthplace groups excluding Asia, and Australian-born by age-groups.

	Total (excl. Asia)	Birthplace			Australian-born by age-group*				
		Aust.	U.K.	S. & E. Europe	12-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Strongly agree	24.8	22.4	20.9	35.3	11.0	29.1	28.3	26.6	31.7
Agree	40.6	41.6	51.2	35.3	35.6	49.1	51.7	48.1	33.3
Unsure	19.0	20.0	11.6	17.6	29.5	14.5	11.7	10.1	22.2
Disagree	9.9	10.2	9.3	5.9	13.7	7.3	3.3	10.1	9.5
Strongly disagree	5.7	5.8	7.0	5.9	10.3		5.0	5.1	3.3
Total									
Percent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	636	411	43	51	146	55	60	79	63

* Eleven respondents did not provide data on age

Table 2: Ranking of criteria for selection of immigrants

Q: 'What factors should be given the greatest weight in deciding which people are allowed to migrate to Australia? Number three (1,2,3) of the most significant factors from the following list in order of importance.'

	1st pref.	2nd pref.	3rd pref.
Ability to speak English	25.1	14.9	14.4
Qualifications/skills	19.5	23.4	19.9
Health	14.7	21.7	15.2
Refugee status	14.2	8.7	10.1
Relatives living in Australia	13.5	15.5	15.2
Age	6.2	6.7	9.5
Come from a culture similar to Australia's	3.3	4.0	3.8
Wealth - amount of money able to bring to Australia	2.5	3.9	7.8
Religion	0.7	0.5	1.1
Race	0.2	0.5	2.1
Total			
Percent	100	100	100
Number	871	871	871

Indochinese and Turkish. Four per cent of the Australian born strongly disagreed, seven per cent disagreed. As Table 3 shows, amongst Australian-born people the level of disagreement was again highest in the 12-19 age group.

Several factors need to be considered in interpreting these findings. First, the Springvale community is of recent growth and has a history of accommodating a large migrant presence. The

Springvale Council and community organisations have played, and continue to play, a significant role in promoting harmony. Second, evidence gathered from other sources suggests that many of those discontented with the extent of ethnic diversity have moved away from the area. The survey reveals that most of the Australian-born who remain have an open sense of their community and are willing to accept people irrespective

Table 3: Q: 'So long as a person is committed to Australia it does not matter what ethnic background they are from.'

Total sample, by birthplace group, and the Australian-born by age-groups

	Total	Birthplace				Australian-born by age group				
		Aust.	U.K.	Indo-china	S.& E. Europe	12-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Strongly agree	41.3	34.0	26.5	49.1	56.5	23.1	23.2	52.5	37.5	47.8
Agree	40.9	42.1	51.0	42.4	37.1	32.7	51.8	36.1	52.5	46.4
Unsure	9.6	12.9	14.3	5.5	4.8	22.4	17.9	6.6	5.0	2.9
Disagree	5.3	7.4	6.1	1.8	1.6	12.9	5.4	4.9	5.0	1.4
Strongly disagree	2.9	3.6	2.0	1.2	0.0	8.8	1.8	0.0	0.0	1.4
Total										
Percent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	928	420	49	165	62	147	56	61	80	69

of race or ethnicity so long as they 'fit into the community as soon as possible'. In turn, most migrants want to 'belong' and are willing to accept inclusion on Australian terms.

Third, while there is high unemployment, people have not despaired of life in the region. Adults were asked how they felt about living and/or working in Springvale. Thirty-eight per cent of the total sample responded that they were very content, 46 per cent were moderately content, 11 per cent not very content and 5 per cent not at all content. Almost 90 per cent of the British and Australian born were very or moderately content, 72 per cent of the

Indochinese, and 70 per cent of the southern and eastern Europeans. The highest registration in the 'not at all content' category was amongst southern and eastern Europeans at 17 per cent; this compares with three per cent for Australian, five per cent for British and eight per cent for Indochinese birthplace groups.

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TRENDS IN ENROLMENTS OF OVERSEAS STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

■ **Ian Dobson**

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there have been concerns about the impact overseas students might be having on the availability of higher education to local students.

When the Government instituted its policy of permitting Commonwealth-funded institutions to enrol overseas students willing to meet the full cost of their education, it insisted that existing students would not be displaced.¹ This article will address this issue through a numerical analysis of overseas student enrolments.

The data analysed to assemble the information below were drawn from aggregated data sets supplied to Monash University's Centre for Population and Urban Research by the Department of

Employment, Education and Training (DEET). These aggregated data were originally supplied to DEET by individual tertiary institutions, in the form of records on each student enrolled.

HISTORY

Prior to the abolition of tuition fees in 1974, most overseas students were sponsored under the Colombo Plan or other Commonwealth schemes. Other overseas students were sponsored by their own governments, or were private overseas students, paying the same fees as local students. From 1974 until the early 1980s, overseas students enrolled on the same basis as Australian students; that is, there were no fees for tuition. However, many institutions had internal policies relating to the numbers of