

Ethnic Editorials – a selection of opinion

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Infocus has compiled a selection of editorials from the ethnic press published in the wake of the public debate over race and Pauline Hanson's comments. Almost without exception, the editorials express serious concern with the resurgence of racism and call for more leadership from the Prime Minister on the issue. Community newspapers are a vital information service for ethnic communities and provide a forum for the expression of community opinion. Infocus received the editorials and translations directly from the different newspapers. We publish excerpts:

The Australian Jewish News

The Howard Failure

Editorial, 1 November 1996.

The issue which should concern Australians troubled by aspects of what appears to be the current "national mood", is not the Hanson factor, but the Howard factor.

It is not that an ignorantly obtuse, increasingly manipulated, and media over-exploited independent MP has confirmed the obvious - namely, that some, perhaps many, Australians have fears, anxieties and prejudices in varying degrees about racial and ethnic minorities or about the levels of immigration. It is rather that Prime Minister John Howard has failed to provide the leadership which the national interest currently demands.

The national interest is not primarily a foreign policy issue, but a matter of domestic human rights and human dignity. At stake, therefore, is

not only the perception of Australia in Asia and internationally - although that clearly suffers as every day passes without unambiguous direction from Canberra - but the perception which Australians have of themselves.

The question, therefore, is not whether John Howard is personally racist, anti-Asian or indifferent to the plight of Aborigines. He is none of those things; indeed, he is a man who, until he had to confront the dilemmas of how to respond to the Hanson wave, had shown by his earlier response to the fears within the Australian-Asian community in the lead up to the election, that he did understand.

But despite the warning signs everywhere that his failure to confront and unequivocally repudiate Hanson has simply not worked, and that it has led to even more divisiveness and caused needless hurt, especially amongst Australians of Asian and Aboriginal background, Mr Howard continues to skirt around the problem.

Instead of dealing with the here and now damage and pain, the Prime Minister has been diverted into talking about perceptions of Australia's past. Instead of being the pragmatic healer of the divisions and alienation he claimed the Paul Keating era had wrought amongst many "Aussie battlers" by imposing the ALP's view of history, he has turned out to be an ideological campaigner for his own version of history and for who the "Aussie battlers" seem to be.

It is as if the Indo-China boat people, the Greek taxi drivers, the Aborigines taken away from their parents as children and the non-listeners to the John Laws program are somehow excluded from the family of "Aussie battlers". True, the Prime Minister has never said that, and he has not given any sign that he would intentionally create such an impression. But, as with so much

that he has allowed to happen "unintentionally" and by default, too high a price is being paid.

The price is that the fragile but precious bonds which glue a cohesive and tolerant society together, and which have taken all of the post-war decades to develop in Australia, are under strain. Whether the bonds are torn further asunder is still, despite the damage already done, very much in John Howard's hands.

Yorum Turkish Newspaper

Leadership or Lack Of It!

Editorial, 6 November 1996.

It is expected that governments should provide direction by leadership to people or will be dragged behind the public opinion. Obviously a leader has a great deal to do with this. We have witnessed both the leadership and the lack of it in recent times.

Many commentators claimed during the election that John Howard lacked leadership qualities. However, the Prime Minister had proven his ability to act and lead decisively on the issue of guns following the Port Arthur massacre, as he considered his position to be the "correct" one.

Despite this fact, the independent MP Pauline Hanson has been deciding the political agenda since her maiden speech in Parliament, specifically targeting Aboriginals and Asian migrants by taking a stand many considered to be racist. She has been successfully manipulating the current political vacuum with, on the one hand, the almost unlimited media coverage, and on the other, by organising her supporters.

The Prime Minister, John Howard, while calculating where his political gain would come from has been silently sitting on the fence with his predictable approach to this issue. To this end, he has either avoided answering questions or gave ambiguous answers. He must accept full responsibility for this vacuum in which Mrs Hanson's and her supporters' views have the

floor. We cannot be blamed to think that he must have been influenced by the thought that some of her supporters may also be voting for his party.

As a direct result of the views Ms Hanson is advocating, Aboriginal communities have been shamefully forced to extinction in the last two hundred years or so by the systematic white colonialist attitudes. It must be remembered that the same Aboriginal communities have been living on this land for many thousands of years with pride and integrity. In recent years they have started to regain their self-identity as the rightful owners of this land through the "land rights" movements gaining a legal status.

Those views (of the type advocated by Hanson) also resulted in the formation of the "White Australia" policies.

There is overwhelming evidence that the immigrants with their cultural diversity have contributed significantly to the development of this country. Let us not forget that the immigrants come to this country with more than their "luggage". They have come from the many corners of this world and embraced this country as their home. In addition, Australia has benefited from developing closer trade links with its neighbours in the region, instead of seeing them as enemies.

In the absence of a decisive response by the government, this racist action started to damage the harmony we have enjoyed in this country for some time. While the government kept its silence, students at school, youngsters on the street and adults at the workplace were being subjected to racist attacks.

Unfortunately, the response came only recently, but too late. It is a shame that this response was a reaction to criticism by countries in Asia, threats to tourism and economic relationships. This has been a great disappointment to Australian citizens of Aboriginal and migrant backgrounds.

I do not deny that our governments must

always be thinking to establish and maintain political and economic links with other countries, but our political leaders should always consider the integrity and pride of the people who live in this country as a matter of priority, not the other way around.

Quan Diem - The Vietnamese Herald

Protection of the Freedom of Expression?

Editorial, 1 November 1996.

The face of Australia would have been different today had the freedom of expression, a basic right of the Australian society, not been resolutely protected since the foundation day of this country. However, the face of Australia in the future might well be different if those who abuse this freedom of expression to further their own personal ambition on the misery of others could continue to do so without the resolute opposition from the Australian Government as at present.

The tardiness of the Australian Government in putting forward an official view on statements made last month by the member for Oxley, Ms Pauline Hanson, on the need to abandon the current immigration policy will push Mr Howard into a difficult position.

The Prime Minister should be praised for his commitment to protect the right to freedom of expression for Australian citizens. No one can refute the fact that the multicultural society in Australia has been successfully built on the cornerstone of this positive aspect of democracy. However, Ms Hanson's statements on Asian immigration cannot be seen as an example of the values that Mr Howard has vowed to protect. On the contrary, it is clear now that this is the one thing that Mr Howard must fight against.

Immigration policy is one of the issues which should attract the attention of many citizens. On the positive side, those who support an

increased intake of migrants do so on the basis of demographic statistics which indicate that an increased population will bring more jobs, increased business, a more skilled work force and more economic initiatives. These will be an invaluable potential leading to a more prosperous and happier Australia in the 21st century.

On the other hand, from a negative point of view, many wish to see the immigration program slowed down or ceased altogether. Their argument is that it increases the social security burden, unemployment, crimes, and housing shortage, despite indications to the contrary from the results of Government sponsored studies and statistics. Nevertheless, both of these views can only be of relative value in the overall background of a multicultural Australia.

Therefore, whether immigration brings benefits or harms to the Australian economy is a topic which should be openly, seriously and constructively discussed. The Government should protect the right of expression of its citizens by establishing a committee with representatives of all walks of life to lead this important debate. Then, based on the results of this serious debate, the Government should formulate the most appropriate immigration plans for the nation.

However, like many things in life, this cannot be done as idealistically as described. The task of protection of the freedom of expression for its citizens which the Howard Government has vowed to carry out "without fear or favour" might well turn out to be the protection for those who wish to abuse that very right in order to implement their intention to sow discord among the Australian population, revise the "White Australia policy", and cause racial strife. The Government thus must clearly show its ability to lead and stop the whole thing in its track.

Ms Pauline Hanson calls for a stop in Asian immigration because Australia is running the risk of being swamped by Asians, and because of

the 5T gang and Triad in Cabramatta. She asks for the abolition of ATSIC as Aboriginals are not the most disadvantaged in our society... Ms Hanson has used Asian-born Australians and Aboriginals as an excuse for her call for the abandonment of the current immigration policy. The way Ms Hanson raise the issue shows that she does not really care about the need for all Australians to seriously debate the immigration policy. Ms Hanson has abused the freedom of expression in order to separate Asian-born Australians and Aboriginals from the whole of Australian population.

The issue she has raised is indeed correct, but using Asian-born Australians as a pretext to raise it is wrong. The tardiness shown by the Howard Government in putting forward its own view and showing its leadership is on the other hand dangerous. No one can doubt the Prime Minister's confirmation of a non-discriminatory immigration policy. No one can say that Mr Howard as a leader in his adjustment of the immigration policy has put the interest of the Coalition above the supreme interest of the nation. But it is difficult to see that the reluctance shown by the Howard Government in condemning opportunist and racist elements is indeed a way to defend the right of free expression for all Australians.

La Fiamma, Italian newspaper

Nothing New Under the Sun and the Wheel is Turning

Editorial, 4 November 1996

90 years ago the Italians were the target of racist comments. Today it is the Asians.

Only the English immigrants were not subject to racist remarks and even today some 150,000 participate in the Australian elections even though they are still English Citizens.

O Kosmos, Greek newspaper

We're at the Crossroads

Comment, 11 October. 1996.

It's not enough for her to be mildly condemned. In the beginning many took her as a tasteless joke. And it may have been wise to ignore her so she would not enjoy more publicity. That approach was proved to be wrong. Pauline Hanson voices the views of a proportion of Australians, a large one at that. These views are based on lies and ignorance. These are the two elements that are responsible for the outbreak of racism: lies and ignorance. In order to fight racism, lies and ignorance need to be faced. Malignity also fits in this equation, but you cannot fight it for it will always exist in its attempt to destroy decency. At this crucial moment the prime minister has to show his leadership qualities. When it came to banning firearms he managed to impose logic, although he was facing what at first seemed insurmountable problems. He managed to unite the nation and isolate extremist elements.

It is not difficult to turn everything that Hanson views to dust. Mr Howard said it himself. The sectors of the Australian population whom the M.P. from Oxley portrays as the privileged ones are actually the most disadvantaged. Nevertheless, a solitary statement is not adequate. A campaign is needed to free the people from this delusion, to tell and re-tell the truth. And the prime minister will not be alone. He will not be left to wage this campaign by himself. He will be joined by thousands of honest people who are waiting for him to give the signal to launch the campaign. Australia has suddenly found itself at the crossroads. It has to decide whether it will turn back 30 years or go forward.

El Espanol de Australia, Spanish newspaper

Hanson Demonstrated that Racism and Ignorance are Holding Hands

Article, 8 November 1996

Australia doesn't need irresponsible and ignorant politicians that throw overboard the social gains and Aboriginal rights achieved after struggling for some years.

The Social Damage done in the space of weeks, will take a long time to be amended. If the Prime Minister, John Howard, would condemn Hanson's comments the damage would be dissipated. Contrary to this, Howard raised that with his government there is more freedom of speech... wait a moment, wasn't she expelled from the Liberal Party, during the Federal Election campaign, for the same declarations.

All this situation has been generated for political declarations with political objectives of Pauline Hanson. It does more to confirm an old postulate, the fact that "Racism and Ignorance are Holding Hands."

Sing Tao, Chinese newspaper

Immigration Contributions Hit Back Racial Discrimination

Editorial, 16 November 1996

Federal Independent MP Ms Pauline Hanson rebuking Asian migrants and Aborigines has led to racial discrimination between Australians and other ethnic people, and caused damage to the \$1 billion dollar tourist industry. Tourists from Asian countries have already stopped visiting Australia. However, Prime Minister John Howard has not yet openly reprimanded Pauline Hanson.

While Princess Diana visited Australia, she was invited to Dr Vincent Chang's heart disease research foundation. In the event, \$1 million

was raised. At the same time, the Australian community business achievement awards were held in Brisbane, and Prime Minister attended this ceremony. Businessman Johnson Wang, an Asian migrant, had obtained a non-manufacturing industry category award. Dr Vincent Chang and Johnson Wang are both Asian migrants. Their achievements have proved that Asian migrants have made contributions to the Australian society, and are strong arguments against Pauline Hanson's statements.

The Greek Herald

The Tolerant Australia

Opinion, 11 October 1996.

Australia in 1996 is a tolerant country with great scope for cultural acceptance for the 250 or so ethnic communities that comprise the 18 million of its people.

Older migrants would remember the expression "dagos" ("wogs") that was a sort of a "welcome" to the new migrants, Greeks and Italians, by the Anglo-Saxons.

That time has passed and the (southern) European is no longer pointed out, since he has proved his industriousness, ability to assimilate and success in a totally foreign place, but with a proper democratic environment.

Now the new migrants of Asian origin have taken the place of the "dagos".

The critical appraisal of the newcomers by the locals, as in the time of the "invasion" of the "dagos", is a natural reaction to a new situation, especially that the Asians differ from the "locals" in physical appearance and culture, much more so than the (southern) Europeans.

It would be unfair though to say that the average Australian is racist if he/she expresses a negative opinion of the Asian migrants, an opinion that is not racist but a comparison and a concern of the local about a newcomer to this continent.

In Australia the subject of migrant groups and especially Asians, came about with the recent clumsily-made comments of independent MP Pauline Hanson, who spoke in a muddled way, perhaps influenced by a vote grabbing intention.

Such impressionable comments do not necessarily reflect general racist attitudes. Maybe a tendency of counterbalancing reactions, opinions and situations, but not racism.

Racism means not only thoughts but also deeds and racist actions do not happen in democratic Australia.