



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

BILLS

**Migration Legislation Amendment
(Regional Processing Cohort) Bill 2016**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 9 November 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP	Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (17:21): I am delighted to be speaking on the Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing Cohort) Bill 2016 after the member for Shortland, who gave us all a very good, highly moral argument. I find it extraordinary. I am going to give him the benefit of the doubt. Instead of him playing politics, I am going to give him the benefit of the doubt and pay him a compliment by saying he might just be suffering from an eternal lack of ideas. He has a vague notion of compassion, which is completely devoid of any practicality, and, therefore, undermines not only the best interests of our country but also the best interests of those people who are most vulnerable. As he leaves the chamber today, I hope he is going straight back to his suite to take some notes on what really is an argument in support of a very worthy amendment to the legislation.

The starting point, to my mind, is the global context. Indeed, here we are on the very day of the US presidential election, and I suspect there might be more people glued to the TV looking at the Trump versus Clinton battle than viewing this chamber. Nevertheless everybody around the world is watching, because the world today is as globalised and integrated as it ever has been. We are indeed living in a world of heightened volatility and uncertainty right across the global political landscape. We know that politically, we know that economically and, sadly, we know that militarily. We have at least 10 major wars taking place in the world today. If you look at Syria alone, there are over 1,000 deaths on average every single week in Syria. These conflicts create such hurt—not just death but displacement. That is why we have 65 million displaced people around the world, 21 million of whom are refugees according to the UNHCR, and 10 million are stateless. This is the largest number probably since World War II. Australia has to be proud of its record in this regard. Australia is one of the few countries that have a very planned, successful resettlement program. The starting point for this debate, therefore, should be one of enormous pride in our achievements.

The principle has to be compassion, but there is a link here. This is where I think the Labor Party are again either playing politics or missing the point. There is a link between compassion and how we control our borders. The link is simply this: the stronger our borders, the more compassionate we can be as a country. We know in our liberal democracy that the Australian people have strong views on this matter and that the stronger our borders, the more compassionate we can be and the more humanitarian refugees we can allow into our country. That is a proven correlation. One is a prerequisite for the other. Strong borders equal more compassion and more immigration.

Historically, we know the problem with the Labor Party. Their Achilles heel has again been snapped with this amendment bill being put up. The Labor Party have no high moral ground on this issue. The Labor Party are the party that governed over 1,200 people dying at sea. There is no moral argument in favour of people dying at sea; 1,200 people who do not have a voice, because they tragically died at sea on leaky boats trying to get to Australia. On 800 boats, 50,000 people attempted to get here and 17 detention centres had to be opened up, and the Labor Party are prepared to again welcome such tragedy.

This is no longer an academic argument. This is a proven piece of policy. The Labor Party inherited from the Howard government a successful migration program, and the tragedy I just outlined is what happened when Kevin Rudd undid those policies. What have we seen since? It was only after the coalition's election victory in 2013 that we have seen that mess fixed up, that we have seen the detention centres closed and that we have seen the number of children in detention centres—8,000 children at the peak under Labor—down to zero. We saw that under a coalition government. Over 830 days have gone by now without a boat—

Mr Hart: Why is this necessary then?

Mr TED O'BRIEN: A silly question, but some might ask why would this be a necessary thing to do? Well, there cannot be any loopholes in this. We cannot afford weakness. If we truly believe in compassion then we need to control our borders, because the stronger they are controlled, the more we can give. That has been the

mandate of the Australian people, and that is the mandate the coalition has accepted and that is why the coalition is rightly putting forward this amendment bill to ensure that there will be no loopholes.

Let me take you through a couple of the elements of the bill before I finish with some of the dangers of going down Labor's path. As we know, because the minister laid this out very well in his second reading, this bill is all about seeking to bar the designated regional processing cohort, being the illegal maritime arrivals, from ever applying for an Australian visa. This applies to those who are subject to regional processing. It applies to illegal arrivals who were transferred for regional processing—so we are talking here Manus and Nauru—after 19 July 2013. This bar applies to all Australian visas. Of course, the immigration minister of the day will have the discretion, under the legislation, to lift the bar if it is considered to be in the public interest to do so.

This gets to the integrity of the system. There is a part of me that still wants to give Labor the benefit of the doubt—at least some if it. I know as a relatively new MP in this place that very few in the Labor Party have any business background. It may, therefore, be difficult for them to think from a business perspective. However, the people smugglers are running a business. As grotesque as they are, as cruel and inhumane as their business is, they are running a business. Unless we ensure that there is no loophole to this proven policy, it opens up the opportunity for them to unfairly target the most vulnerable people, who are wanting a new life. The fact that the Labor Party under Shorten promised a unity ticket on this policy, and now is against it, sends all the wrong messages to those despicable people, who are more than happy to take the money and put the most vulnerable on leaky boats.

We cannot afford that. Our conscience as a nation cannot afford that. It is not in the best interests of those people who are most vulnerable, and it is certainly not in the best interest of our country. That is why we must stand resolute. Yes, we will have the noise. We will have all the left wing of the Labor Party screaming, but they scream from the low road. You do not scream and lecture from the high moral ground when your policies governed over a period of time when over 1,200 people died at sea. There is no moral platform for the Labor Party in this. There is only mismanagement.

The Turnbull government, like the Abbott government, got this under control. We cannot accept for a moment the possibility that more people will die. That is why we must support this amendment. Labor's form in changing its mind and breaking bipartisanship is already causing an enormous amount of problems in this 45th parliament. The Australian people are the losers as a result. Traditionally our two parties, the Labor Party and the coalition, have been united on certain issues, particularly relating to international affairs. We thought we had a unity ticket on immigration, but clearly we now do not, because Labor wants to compromise. We have already seen in the last few months the Labor Party come out with different views on the key strategic issue in our region, the South China Sea, including a shadow defence minister calling for operational boats within 12 nautical miles of the disputed islands. We have seen confusion with even the opposition leader saying that in fact he is going to get the defence forces to make such decisions. This is actually a critical breach, with the Labor Party going against traditional bipartisanship on such critical issues.

They did it again with same-sex marriage. Again they are going their own way for the sake of being an opposition. There are better ways of trying to convince the Australian public than just opposition for the sake of opposition. You certainly do not do it by travelling the low moral road on what is the single biggest bungle of public policy in my lifetime. I know of no other Australian government in history who can say that their policies led to a period of time where over 1,200 people died and 50,000 people risked their lives at sea. Unfortunately, the Labor Party are now looking as though, after coming together with the unity ticket, they want to go their own way. It is not worth the risk. This is why the coalition, under the immigration minister, will continue to fight.

Let me start to wrap up. This is where there is a relationship. There is a social compact that has been created over the years between Australian governments and the Australian people. It is a very simple one. The Australian people have said to successive governments, 'The more you control our borders, the stronger the control, the more willing we are as a people to accept immigrants.' Right now we have 13,750 humanitarian immigrants as our intake and, in addition to that, 12,000 people coming out of the Syrian conflict. We know that that would not be possible unless our borders were secure. This is where the basis of our argument is in fact an argument of compassion. If we, hand on heart, truly want to help the world's most needy people, then the first thing we need to do is control our borders, because the stronger our borders are the more we can do and the more we can give. Sixty-five million displaced people, 21 million refugees, 10 million stateless people—there is no shortage of demand, but the only way we can increase supply here domestically in Australia is to keep our borders secure. Therefore I commend this amendment to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): I thank the honourable member for Fairfax, and I also welcome him to the 45th parliament and wish him all the very best.