

Alfred Deakin

1903

The election was held on 16 December, 1903. During this period voting was still voluntary and overall voter turnout across the country was only around fifty per cent. In Western Australia the vote fell as low as twenty-seven per cent. Deakin held on as Prime Minister with the support of the Labor party.

White Australia

In this theatre, two and-a half years ago, I laid special stress upon the white Australia policy of the Government. (*Applause*) After that there was a fierce conflict in Parliament as to whether the means we proposed to exclude the undesirable and colored aliens would suffice. There were those who wished that on the face of the statute the prohibition against them should appear in so many words.

We believed that we studied Australian interests, and also lessened the difficulties of the mother country, if, instead of saying in so many words they should be excluded, we placed in the hands of the Government an educational test which could be applied so as to shut out all undesirables. We have had two years' experience of the working of our test, and it has worked well. You have seen from time to time how few have managed to survive it. The returns for the last nine months show that 31,000 persons entered Australia from over sea, 28,000 being Europeans. Of the remainder, many of the colored persons came to Australia to engage on pearling vessels. The arrangement we have made is that they land only to sign their articles. A guarantee is taken from those who bring them that, when their time is up, they shall leave the country. By this means they never really enter Australia. They merely fish in our waters or just outside them.

I find that out of 408 Japanese who came to Australia 374 went at once to the pearling vessels; 11 others had been in Australia before, and were entitled to return; while one deserted and managed to escape our clutches. (*Laughter*) 406 Malays came to Australia to engage in the pearling trade. Only one was entitled to enter the country, and again we had one deserter. 73 Papuans came over to assist in pearling; none deserted, and all will return. To come to the persons who, either under the state law or since, have secured domicile in Australia, the return shows that 2,571 colored persons entered the Commonwealth during the nine months, of whom 2,561 entered under the authority of the law. There were only 10 to whom we could not or did not apply the test. Besides these there were 785 Pacific islanders, who came in under permits which cease on March 31 next, after which no kanaka is authorised to be brought into Australia. (*Applause*) While 785 came in, 978 went out. There were 755 Chinese entered the Commonwealth, while 1,156 went out. Altogether 3172 colored people left Australia. (*Applause*)

The alien colored population is being steadily reduced. Now, as to the test. Of course this is not much applied, because ship-owners know that if they bring colored aliens to this country who are not legally entitled to land, they will have the pleasure of taking them back to their native land. During the nine months 121 such immigrants presented themselves; nine only got through. Out of these two were entitled to do so because they simply came from Ceylon to purchase horses, and of the others I find that five were probably colored

sailors who deserted from one ship and enlisted on another. I don't think that during the next nine months even nine are likely to enter.

You probably believe that a white Australia is secure. I hope it is, but it won't be secure unless a vigilant watch is kept upon proposals to tamper with it. None of a serious character have been put forward by anybody in a responsible position, but there are indications that we may have to defend the principle yet. So far as this Government is concerned it will be ready for the emergency. *(Cheers)* A white Australia does not by any means mean only the preservation of the complexion of the people of this country. It means the multiplying of their homes, so that we may be able to occupy, use and defend every part of our continent; it means the maintenance of conditions of life fit for white men and white women; it means equal laws and opportunities for all; it means protection against the underpaid labor of other lands; it means social justice so far as we can establish it, including just trading and the payment of fair wages. *(Cheers)*

A white Australia means a civilisation whose foundations are built upon healthy lives, lived in honest toil, under circumstances which imply no degradation. Fiscally a white Australia means protection. We protect ourselves against armed aggression, why not against aggression by commercial means. We protect ourselves against undesirable colored aliens, why not against the products of the undesirable alien labor? *(Cheers)* A white Australia is not a surface, but it is a reasoned policy which goes down to the roots of national life, and by which the whole of our social, industrial, and political organisations is governed.