In mid-1988, some senior Coalition figures made equivocal statements about racial matters as they affected immigration—an issue that still raises its head today. Sadly, other senior Coalition figures then widened these comments with more specific and more racist statements. In the midst of all this, the press came to me and I told them, 'John Howard could fix this with a single sentence'—meaning that if the leader made a robust anti-racist rebuttal, the matter would die. The Labor Party took political advantage of the situation, introducing a motion that stated that immigration policy should never be based on racial grounds. The Opposition decided to move some amendments and to oppose the main motion if the amendments were unsuccessful. In the Senate address below, I indicated that I would support the amendments but also Labor's motion as its intention was consistent with liberal principles. My speaking slot was at 1 am.

Senator PETER BAUME—It gives me no pleasure to take part in this debate. It gives me even less pleasure to know that I will be out of line with my colleagues when the vote is taken. We are debating a Government notice of motion on immigration and an amendment thereto by my Leader, Senator [Fred] Chaney. My colleagues have chosen generally to speak to the amendment. That is quite proper. It is provided for within the Standing Orders. They have set out reasons why I will want to support that amendment. I will address the motion itself. I will not discuss the Liberal Party policy that has been well set out and well-defended today. I will not talk about our past or our record; only the motion and the position that I intend to take. It is of course a mischievous and malicious motion. Its purpose is blatantly political. It is designed to advantage the Australian Labor Party (ALP). It is designed for fishing in troubled
waters. Earlier someone said that this is a political chamber—that is fair play in this chamber. I wish to participate in the debate not in any sense of anger or petulance and hopefully with no bitterness but I do need to participate. I point out to colleagues that I have now been here for more than fourteen years. Only two senators…

Senator Chaney—It sometimes seems longer.

Senator PETER BAUME—Senator Chaney and I came in together. Only two senators have served longer. They are Senator [Arthur] Gietzelt and Senator [Peter] Durack. Recently we had to count the number of divisions I had voted in. It was for my lawyers for a defamation action that I am involved in. We have voted in divisions about 1,300 times. I have voted with my colleagues and the Australian Labor Party together against the Australian Democrats many times, as my colleagues have voted with Labor in those lopsided votes. I guess we will do so again. I have voted with the Australian Labor Party against my colleagues once only in 1,300 divisions. Today it looks as if I will be voting with the Australian Labor Party against my colleagues for the second time. I guess it is my duty to explain to my colleagues and to the party that preselected me why I am doing so.

Senator [Brian] Archer—You don’t have such a duty.

Senator PETER BAUME—I thank my colleague for the interjection but I would like to do so. I start by setting out for colleagues the position of a Liberal Party parliamentarian. This is laid down in the Valder Report of the Liberal Party Committee of Review ‘Facing the Facts’.\(^1\) I notice it was produced in 1983 by a very distinguished group of people. They are all friends. In fact, my former research officer, now Senator [Chris] Puplick, was a member, as was another former research officer, Mr Chris Crawford, as was my present helper, Mrs Elizabeth Grant. So we have quite a proprietorial interest.

Senator [Chris] Schacht—You certainly had the numbers.

Senator PETER BAUME—We almost had the numbers. This Committee actually laid down in black and white the fact that the Liberal Party does not have a caucus rule, that it does not bind its members but gives them freedom within certain defined boundaries to cast their votes. I will read the paragraph and a half that is important:

In Parliament, a high degree of discipline is necessary if the Party is to be really effective. The Liberal Party does not require of its Parliamentary candidates a pledge to always vote with the Party in Parliament. The Party’s belief in the

\(^1\) Valder (1983).
importance of the individual conscience means that it accepts that there are occasions when a Liberal Member of Parliament may vote against his colleagues without incurring sanctions from the Party (or expulsion, as in the Labor Party). The Committee believes that it is important for the conditions under which this right is exercised to be clearly understood if the Party is not to be damaged by its Members crossing the floor.²

The next few words are emphasised in the report:

In particular, it is important that it be recognised by all Liberal Parliamentarians that the general expectation is one of loyalty and support for the Party in the Parliament, and that crossing the floor is to be regarded as an exceptional act. It is a right which should be exercised only under the following two conditions—

Where the issue is one of personal conscience, and not merely a difference of policy or political judgment; and

Where the Member informs his Parliamentary Leader and his Party colleagues beforehand of his intention.³

This will be the second time in 1,300 divisions—so I have not made a frequent practice of that. I will make the case that it is a matter of conscience and principle and I can advise the Senate that I satisfied the second condition, under quite difficult circumstances, by advising my Leader and colleagues.

For many years the Liberal Party that I joined would have proposed a motion such as the one before us. It would never have allowed a statement like one by Senator Stone, which I will mention later, to have gone unrepudiated or unchallenged. I was proud of the Liberal initiatives of the Liberal Prime Minister I served.

But why take this course? Why decide that it is important to take part in this debate and vote on the motion? I will set out very briefly some of the events of the last few weeks. They have been set out in this debate.

The immigration policy debate was initiated from our side, as has been said, by my Leader on his return from overseas. It was set out not in racist terms, but in terms that were ambiguous and capable of misinterpretation, particularly malicious interpretation. I have to say that my Leader has not made racist statements, but he has made ambiguous statements. The trouble is that the statements were then made explicit—not by John Howard but by Senator John Stone, in colourful phrases which were referred to earlier:

Asian immigration has to be slowed. It is no good dancing around the bushes.

I do not question the right of any of my political colleagues or members of the National Party to make such statements. They represent a view they hold. That is fine: I have no objection to that. If I have any objections I will express them in the party room. However, it is a pity that the statement was not repudiated immediately. When it was not repudiated immediately, I felt that I had a duty. All the people I respected and might have expected to respond were out of the country. Not one of them, including [Ian] Macphee, [Michael] MacKellar and [Philip] Ruddock, was in Australia. I think that Robert Hill was out of Australia at the same time.

Senator Hill—Rare.

Senator PETER BAUME—He was on one of his rare absences from Australia. It was at that stage that I made a public statement. I want to read that statement because it relates to the motion before us tonight. My public statement was only five sentences and read:

There is no place in Australia for any revival of a white Australia policy, overtly or secretly. No tests of racial origin should be applied to any applicant for migration to Australia. I expect that the assurances of my Leader that he is not moving to a racial immigration policy should resolve that matter. Since we have become a multicultural society, we have been enriched beyond measure. I hope we will continue to use the strength of that multicultural heritage in pursuit of a unified Australian community.

I add that the reason I issued such a short statement was that I had the pleasure, I thought, of being at the third national conference on AIDS. However, that is another story. My position has been quite simple. That is the message. Having issued the press statement, I then repeated that message on television, radio and in the press and made it quite clear that if there were any suggestion of a racist element in an immigration policy, I would want to be part of repudiating such a suggestion.

I find in the motion before us—in the important last part of it—exactly the sentiment that I was advocating publicly in that press statement and in other statements that I made to the press. I understand that many Australians are concerned with social cohesion. I understand, too, that many Australians are racist and that many Australians actually want less Asian migration. In fact, to say so might be a very popular thing. However, as [NSW] Liberal Premier Nick Greiner said when asked for a comment, there had probably never been a time when popular opinion had supported more migration. He said that it had always been unpopular. I wonder why it is that people do not want Asian migration. Perhaps it is based on the many faces of Asians in the streets. The Asians we see in Australia at present do represent migrants. However, they
also represent second and third generation Australians. They also represent the tourists that we need—the tourists who are bringing in foreign currency as part of our booming tourist trade.

Senator [Bob] Collins—They are our guests.

Senator PETER BAUME—Yes, they are our guests. They represent students, both secondary and tertiary students, and people in Australia for short-term language study. Most of the time they represent welcome guests to Australia. According to the 1986 census, only 2.6 per cent of the Australian population is Asian born. It has already been pointed out that even if the present trend of migration is continued for another 25 or 30 years the percentage will not exceed 7 per cent of the population. I believe that the position I have advocated, and the position contained in the motion, is essentially a Liberal position. That is not only my view. If it is essentially a Liberal position, then I would want to support it. I would like to quote in support of that from a book called *Liberal Thinking* written by two eminent liberals, C.J. Puplick and R.J. Southey.4 In several parts of that book they make reference to the fact that race is not an adequate basis for policy. On page 28 of the book, in talking about differences among groups, they say:

Some categories (race, religion, political affiliation) are generally accepted to be improper grounds for legal and social discrimination.

They go on to talk about other categories. Further on they say:

Discrimination against a person on grounds of race, in order to secure higher status to those who are of a different race, is not an acceptable objective.

So we have good Liberal reasons for saying that any suggestion of racial discrimination is unacceptable. I am attracted to some of the aphorisms at the back of the book that help enrich the book, may I say to one of the authors. One of them attributed to Daniel O’Connell says:

Nothing is politically right which is morally wrong.

I believe that any kind of policy that even admits of the possibility of taking into account the race of a potential migrant is unacceptable. I reject it, as some of my colleagues have, as a logical impossibility to claim that a policy aimed at slowing down immigration from Asia can also be termed a non-discriminatory policy. I am indebted to a colleague for pointing out that to me.

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4  Puplick and Southey (1980).
I have been told this week in words of one syllable that politics is about compromise. Well, yes, it is. We have all compromised. If I have voted in 1,300 divisions and managed to stay with my colleagues 1,299 times there must have been a fair amount of compromise in that time. But in the end, as Senator [Baden] Teague has said, there is a moral element to politics, or there should be.

It is different for every person. I do not ask anyone else to accept my judgment of where the point is. Principle sometimes has to come before compromise. The question, of course, is when.

It is different for every person; I accept this. But for each of us there are some bottom line issues on which we say we will not accept this and we will not go further. I found one last year and I found my way onto the backbench at the same time. Racism, overt or covert, open or implied, is another such bottom line issue for me, so much so that I welcome any declaratory statement that rejects even the possibility of racism in any of our policies. The words in the policy do that. The words that have been objected to—I quote from the motion—are ‘race or ethnic origin shall never, explicitly or implicitly, be among them.’ That is the criterion that might be applied.

I note, as has my colleague, that former Liberal Immigration Minister, Michael MacKellar, refused to oppose this motion in another place tonight. I also know that my Leader here, Senator Chaney, and my colleagues, have argued for an amendment that sets out and defends the alternative policy which our parties have put forward. I will have no difficulty supporting that amendment. But if it fails, and if we are then faced with a government motions impliciter, as of course we shall be, I am also aware that another former Liberal Immigration Minister, my friend, Ian Macphee, a former Liberal Shadow Minister for Immigration, Phillip Ruddock, and a former Liberal State Premier, Steele Hall, all found it necessary to vote for the proposition in the other place tonight and, like them, I will support it because it makes explicit and clear what needs to be made explicit and clear to Australians at this time.

Response to Immigration Speech

Your speeches on the War Crimes and in the immigration debate in the last session are still the two best speeches I have heard in the Parliament in my short time here.

—Senator Chris Schacht

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