



Objection 4

Anonymous 1

3 pages

Australian Redistribution Secretariat
Australian Electoral Commission
Level 6, 150 Lonsdale Steet, Melbourne 3000

Suggestion to Rename the Division of Calwell: "Reflecting a modern Australia starts with celebrating those who built its multicultural communities."

Dear Australian Electoral Commission and the Australian Redistribution Secretariat,

I write to submit a suggestion to rename the Division of Calwell, hoping to better reflect the multicultural depth of its communities and celebrate someone who has significantly contributed to building a modern, inclusive Australia.

While honouring a historical figure, I believe that the current name does not fully capture the diverse nature of the communities within the division and their rich contributions to our nation. Arthur Calwell held prominent positions in Australian politics, including Minister for Immigration and then Leader of the Opposition during his tenure. However, his legacy is marred by a history of racist remarks and policies that actively discriminate against Asian Australians and other people of colour. He justified the deportation of Asian migrants during the war and defended the White Australia Policy.

Many commentators and Calwell himself have attempted to revise the historical context of his remarks, claiming it was a mere joke about an MP and a resident Calwell, 1977). However, the fact that such a statement remains within the vernacular illustrates the persistent problems of modern racism that continue to plague Australia today.

While some argue for a more nuanced assessment of Calwell's legacy, citing his role in post-war European migration and convincing Australians to accept immigration despite widespread opposition, these arguments need deconstruction. Indeed, Calwell's views were not uncommon and was supported across the political landscape at the time but the the fact that Calwell had never really apologised nor reconciled with his views during his time in public warrants scrutiny. The assessments often overlook that he actively perpetuated specified racist views surrounding Asian Australians. His preference for European migrants further marginalised Asian Australians, maintaining a hierarchy of acceptance that continues to affect our society today (Jupp, 2002).

Even after his career in politics, Calwell continued to harbour racist views. In 1972, he attacked then Minister for Customs and Excise, Don Chipp, with racist remarks about immigrants ("Parties reject Callwell view," Canberra Times, 1972). In his biography, *Be Just and Fear Not*, he expressed fear about the Holt government's decision to liberalise Asian migration, stating that "these changes yet can be disastrous for Australia" (Calwell, 1972, p.109). The entire chapter 14 of his biography contains multiple instances of Calwell opposing people of colour, including his desire to abolish the

Colombo Plan and his claim that "most coloured migrants...form hard core, anti-white, 'black power' pressure groups" (Calwell, 1972, p.124).

Despite this history, the Australian Electoral Commission named an electorate after Calwell in 1984. The reason for this decision is not widely known, especially considering that other prominent ministers, party leaders, and community figures do not have electorates named after them. Additionally, Calwell is honoured with a suburb name in the Australian Capital Territory.

Today, the electorate is vastly different from the one in 1984. Over two-thirds of the population indicated in the 2021 census that their parents were born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Common ancestries of residents in Calwell include Iraq, India, and Lebanon. Islam ranks as one of the highest identified religions, and the most common language spoken other than English is Arabic (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Given Calwell's discriminatory actions and the division's evolving demographics, I firmly believe that renaming the Division of Calwell would be a meaningful step towards acknowledging its diverse communities and honouring a figure who truly represents the values of representation, inclusivity and multiculturalism that modern Australia strives to embody. As a result, I urge the redistribution committee to consider possible names not just for Calwell but in Victoria for future divisions:

- **Twentyman:** Named after Les Twentyman (1948-2024), a community activist who advocated for underrepresented communities in Melbourne's western suburbs.
- **Kirner:** Named after Joan Kirner (1938-2015), the first woman to be Premier of Victoria, serving from 1990 to 1992.
- **Balmford:** Named after Rosemary Balmford (1933-2017), the first woman appointed as a justice in the Supreme Court of Victoria.
- **Guilfoyle:** Named after Margaret Guilfoyle (1926-2020), the first woman to hold a cabinet position in the federal government.
- **Tchen:** Named after Tsebin Tchen (1930-2019), the first Asian migrant elected to the Parliament of Australia and the first endorsed by either major party.
- **Ah Ket:** Named after William Ah Ket (1876-1936), Australia's first barrister of Asian heritage.
- **Ilhan:** Named after John Ilhan (1965-2007), a migrant from Turkey with connections to Broadmeadows, who founded Crazy John's mobile phone business.

References

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