



Migration Amendment (Abolishing Detention Debt) Bill 2009

Second Reading Speech

By Senator Mathias Cormann on 7 September 2009

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia) (9:24 PM) —Our borders are less secure today as a direct result of the actions taken by the Rudd Labor government. So far the government has ended the Pacific solution; abolished temporary protection visas, with more than 1,000 people on temporary protection visas granted permanent residency; and ended the 45-day rule. This bill is another step in the wrong direction. Over the coming weeks we will be debating the [Migration Amendment \(Immigration Detention Reform\) Bill 2009](#), which will be yet another step in the wrong direction.

These Rudd government changes undermine our system of mandatory detention—a system introduced by a previous Labor government—and the integrity of our border protection system. We have had a whole raft of administrative changes on the inside of the department of immigration. All these changes have got one thing in common: they weaken what used to be our strong border protection system that the current government inherited from previous governments of both persuasions: the previous Howard government and the previous Keating government.

The Rudd Labor government is sending the message to people smugglers and illegal immigrants around the world that Australia is back open for business—that under the Rudd Labor government Australia is back to having a soft touch. By doing so, the Rudd Labor government is not only putting Australia at risk; it is putting potential illegal immigrants at risk. The message the government is sending to people smugglers and possible illegal immigrants is: if you can find a way to get to Australia, the Australian government will find a way to keep you here.

Of course, there is a very obvious and direct link between the actions of the Rudd Labor government and the increase in the number of boat arrivals on our shores. I will go through the numbers, including both excised and non-excised places of arrival. In 2002-03 zero boats arrived; in 2003-04 three boats arrived; in 2004-05 there were zero; in 2005-06 there were eight; in 2006-07 there were four; and in 2007-08 there were three. What happened since August 2008? What has happened since the Rudd Labor government started to weaken our border protection system in this country? Twenty-seven boats have arrived on our shores.

The eastern-states-centric government, led by the eastern-states-centric Prime Minister, does not care about this, but I would have expected better from Senator Evans, as a senator from the great state of Western Australia, because the people of Western Australia are extremely concerned about where this is going. They are extremely concerned about the actions of the Rudd Labor government in the immigration portfolio. Senator Evans and the Prime Minister have been trying to tell us that push factors are at play, that the crisis in Afghanistan and the strife

that Sri Lanka is in have somehow caused the influx of illegal boat arrivals. As Senator Cash pointed out, the conflict in Afghanistan has been going since 2001. Push factors are always there; it is the pull factors that have changed, and they changed in August 2008 as a direct result of the deliberate actions of the Rudd Labor government.

I will read through some of the conflicts that have happened across the world in the period 2002 to 2007, when we had a very small number of illegal immigrants presenting themselves at our shores. There was the second Chechen war; the two intifada, which went from 2000 through to 2009; the war in Afghanistan, which has been going since 2001; the Ivorian civil war, between 2002 and 2007; the insurgency in the Maghreb, which has been going since 2002 and is ongoing; a civil war in Sri Lanka for the whole decade, not just since August 2008; the war in Darfur in Sudan, since February 2003 all the way through to 2009; the Iraq war in March 2003; the conflict in north-west Pakistan since March 2003, which is ongoing; the Islamic insurgency in Saudi Arabia from May 2003 to June 2008; the Haitian rebellion in 2004; the Central African Republic Bush War from March 2004 to April 2007; the Balochistan conflict in Pakistan in 2004; the Sa'ada insurgency in Yemen in 2004; the conflict in the Niger delta in 2004; the Mount Elgon insurgency in Kenya from 2005 through to March 2008; the fourth civil war in Chad from December 2005, which is ongoing; the Lebanon war in 2006; the war in Somalia from December 2006 to January 2009; and the civil unrest in Kenya from December 2007 to February 2008.

None of these caused an increase in illegal boat arrivals on our shores. But guess what? Since August 2008, boat arrivals have started to increase. What happened in August 2008? That was when the Rudd Labor government sent a message to people smugglers across the world that we are again open for business.

I happen to be a migrant to this great country. Australia is a very generous country. Australia is very good to migrants and there are very good processes in place. For somebody who wants to come to Australia and put their shoulder to the wheel, this is the best country in the world. We are very generous to refugees. People who are genuine refugees should be looked after by Australia—of course they should—and Australia does look after them. But the reality is that people turning up on our borders are not always refugees. People who come here courtesy of people smugglers are not necessarily the most deserving of our support. We have to have a system to effectively assess people who want to come to Australia and, while that assessment takes place, we have to have the capacity to detain people who are undergoing that assessment. It is an important part of a system designed to keep our borders secure, and it is that part of the system that the Rudd Labor government is consistently dismantling, sending a disastrous message overseas.

Earlier this year, on 16 April 2009, we had a boat explode to the north-west of Australia; a boat exploded and people died. The Rudd government was going to present a report on this. Where is it? Where is the report by the Rudd Labor government on what happened to SIEV 36? It is nearly five months now since this tragic event, and still the Australian people have not been told what happened. What has the government got to hide? Instead of telling us what happened with SIEV 36, here they are introducing bill after bill that will make our borders less secure. This is not what the Australian people expected would happen when they voted for a Rudd Labor government, because that is not what Labor told us would happen before the last election.

This is yet another bad piece of legislation. This is yet another bill in the immigration portfolio that takes Australia in the wrong direction. On behalf of the people of Western Australia, I object to what is being proposed here by the Rudd Labor government, as I object to all of the measures that the Rudd Labor government has taken in the immigration portfolio that have had the effect of weakening our border protection system. We need a strong border protection system. The Australian people expect that our borders are going to be kept secure by the Australian government. The Rudd Labor government has taken step after step in the wrong direction. The Rudd Labor government has taken step after step weakening our border protection system. The government will stand condemned for it by the people of Western Australia, on whose behalf I have spoken on this legislation today.