

Chapter 4

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLANNING AREA

People choose to live in cities because they offer opportunities for commercial expansion, increased production, social intercourse, education and cultural pursuits, and for many amenities not so readily available in rural communities. It is the people who make the city a living entity, who determine the pattern of living, and who must pay for those things which give to the city the attractions which it has for so many. It is also the people who suffer from those undesirable conditions which have come about in all cities because man's needs and his attainments in other fields have outstripped the ability of civic administration to adapt the structure of cities to changing conditions. In planning for the future growth and development of the city the people, their number and probable future number, their pursuits and occupations, their habits and desires must all be carefully studied to ensure that the pattern of future development may be guided to meet the needs. Therefore, as a preliminary to the preparation of this planning scheme for Melbourne a careful and detailed study was made of the people and their characteristics. The information thus brought together is recorded in the following pages.

POPULATION GROWTH

A detailed study of the factors influencing the growth and decline of population, particularly as they affect Melbourne, has already been the subject of a report to the Board.⁽¹⁾ Since that report was written, a change, then unforeseen, has come over the movement of people from other countries to Australia. Thus it has been necessary to study this question further and to revise previous estimates.

The future growth of Melbourne depends largely on its development as a manufacturing and distribution centre for the whole Commonwealth, and not merely on its status as the principal commercial, industrial and administrative centre of the State of Victoria. For this reason its growth is more closely related to that of the population of Australia as a whole than to the population growth within Victoria itself. In 1950 the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics made a series of estimates of Australian population growth under varying conditions, and these have been used as the basis for studies of Melbourne's growth of population.

The two factors that contribute to the growth of a country's population are the "natural increase," which is the excess of births over deaths, and the "net migration," which is the excess of arrivals into the country over departures from the country. At the present time uncertainty exists as to the likely future trends of natural increase and migration in Australia. These trends are influenced largely by variables such as economic conditions, Government policy, the occurrence or fear of war, and the personal reactions of millions of individuals to changing circumstances. The vicissitudes of the last twenty years — the economic depression in the early 1930's, the World War from 1939 to 1945 and the period of inflation after the war — have had a marked influence on both natural increase and migration.

Natural Increase: For fifty years prior to 1930 there was a steady decline in birth rates in Australia. This downward trend was not confined to this country but was common to the Western World. By 1930, in many countries including Australia, the position was being reached where the women in the reproductive ages were not giving birth to sufficient female children to replace their own numbers. The gravity of this position was accentuated during the depression years. A prolonged continuation of this low rate of fertility would have meant a decline of the population in the countries concerned, but during the war years there was a general rise in fertility and this has been sustained in the post-war period. It is too soon yet to determine whether this rise is a permanent change from the old downward trend or is merely a temporary fluctuation.

Concurrently with the fall in the birth rate there has been an increase in the average life expectancy of Australians. At the beginning of the century the average number of years a person could expect to live was 50. Today this figure has risen to the vicinity of 70 years.

This increase in the average length of life and the consequent fall in death rates compensated to a degree for the falling fertility, but was not sufficient to counter-balance it. In 1912 when the population of Australia was 4,600,000 the annual rise in population from natural increase was 80,000. In 1934, when the population was 6,600,000 the annual natural increase was only 47,000.

Because of the uncertain future fertility of the Australian population, the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics included in its forecast four series of estimates based on

(1) "The Future Population of Melbourne" — report dated September 15th, 1944.

different fertility assumptions. These assumptions varied from one based on continuance of the present high fertility rate to one assuming a constantly declining rate after 1955. As most demographers seem to agree that a return towards the pre-war levels of fertility is likely, the assumption selected in the present study is an intermediate one which assumes a continuance of the high post-war rate of fertility until 1955 followed by a gradual decline to about the pre-war replacement level in the period 1970 to 1975.

Migration: The other factor governing the population increase, migration, is even more difficult to assess. In recent years more migrants have been entering Australia each year than at any time in its history. The influx began when in 1947 the Commonwealth Government implemented a series of schemes to bring migrants to this country. In 1949 and 1950 the net migration figure was more than 150,000 in each year. In 1951 this number fell to 111,000 and in 1952 it was 97,000.

The main factors behind the present migration policy are the belief that Australia requires a large population to ensure its adequate development and defence, and the recognition that the low pre-war fertility has left the nation with a reduced number of young adults in its work force. This latter factor has become increasingly pertinent because of the stage now reached in Australia's economic progress. World War II gave an impetus to Australian secondary industry, and in this post-war period attempts are being made to consolidate the development of new industries that did not exist in 1939. At the same time the Commonwealth and State Governments have been endeavouring to overcome a lag in public works, and to proceed with new works on which the further development of the primary and secondary industries is to some extent dependent. During the early post-war years there was insufficient labour to do all these things, but increasing competition, rising costs of production and a decline in capital investment have now curtailed production in many fields.

The history of migration to this country shows that it has taken place in bursts which have been associated with stages of economic development and prosperity. The first substantial flow of "free settlers" occurred in the 1830's with the establishment of the wool industry. The gold era of 1851 to 1861 saw the migration level rise to 55,000 per annum and in this decade the population of Australia was more than doubled. In 1861 the population had passed 1,000,000, of which migration was responsible for at least 75 per cent. From 1862 to 1880 there was a steady flow of migrants at about the rate of 20,000 per annum. At this stage Australia was developing its agricultural industry. During the 1880's the flow of capital from overseas brought much speculative development which increased the tempo of migration, and in the year 1883, Australia's net intake from migration was 70,000 persons, which was equal to a population increase of almost three per cent.

The collapse of the land boom in 1891, and the drought of 1894-1902 resulted in a long depression, and for almost

two decades there was no gain of population from migration. Migration began to revive in 1907 and Australia participated in the rising tide of world migration. In 1912 the net gain from migration reached a figure of 92,000, which was equal to an increase of two per cent. of the total population at that time. With the outbreak of World War I migration virtually ceased, and it was not until 1921 that it was resumed. From then until the beginning of the depression in 1929 the average annual increase was 35,700, or about 0.55 per cent. of the population. This period in the 1920's was also marked by heavy overseas borrowing by Australia to stimulate development.

It will be seen that the periods of high migration have usually been associated with certain defined phases of economic development and prosperity. The population influxes of 1880-90 and 1921-29, and in the recent post-war years have been accompanied by an influx of capital as well as migrants. The future rate of migration depends largely on the continued prosperity of Australia in relation to other countries.

A factor distinguishing the migration earlier this century from that of recent years is that there existed then a surplus of labour in most European countries. Today countries from which we have usually drawn our migrants (especially Britain) have an even more serious deficiency of young workers than has Australia. The only countries in Europe which have a surplus of young adults are those in Southern Europe. However, although the migration of young people from northern Europe may effect the rehabilitation of those countries, the evidence is that as a result of the recent war and its economic and territorial repercussions, a large number of people have sought to leave their national homes and settle in new lands.

Whether these migrants will continue to come to this country is largely dependent on Australia's ability to continue to offer real wages high enough to attract them. If the disparity between real wages in Australia and those in other English-speaking communities which seek migrants increases to Australia's disadvantage, we may not only fail to attract migrants, but may even have more people leaving the country than entering it as has already happened in the past. On the other hand, the continued adverse economic position in Britain raises the possibility that some mass migration scheme may be necessary at some stage which could result in a considerable boost to our population growth.

The foregoing is not meant to be a complete summary of all the possibilities and factors associated with overseas migration to this country. It is intended merely to serve as some indication of the uncertainty of future migration. In the light of past experiences it is considered unwise, therefore, to be too optimistic, and to base conclusions on the continuance of a high rate of migration for any long period, no matter how successful the programme may have been in recent years. On the other hand, it is dangerous from a planning viewpoint to be too conservative.