

## **Jim Evans on Racism**

It is sometimes claimed that as a result of 26 January 1788, Australia became an inclusive society. This is hardly what a reading of historical events since that time would bear out. Indigenous Australians refer to the ceremony at Sydney Cove as 'Invasion Day'. At Federation in 1901, aborigines were excluded from the Constitution and were not officially counted as part of the population figure until after the Referendum of 1967.

Australian women fared slightly better at Federation, owing to the work of Louisa Lawson, Rose Scott, Vida Goldstein and others, and women were allowed to vote at the Referenda that approved the Constitution. However, the Commonwealth was created by an assembly of white males.

The early work of the Commonwealth politicians was devoted to an issue which still resonates today – who should be 'in' and who should be 'out'. It would seem that, at Federation, only whites should be in and non-whites out. Thus indigenous Australians and Chinese were out and the reading of history bears out the extreme discrimination faced by those two minority groups. Migrant groups since World War 2 have fared little better.

Most of the statements made by the politicians at Federation would not be regarded today as being politically correct. Take for example the call by the Labor Member for Southern Ports during the Commonwealth debates on the Immigration Bill: "Let those people come in here and our race will become piebald in spite of our efforts to prevent it. Let us keep before us the noble idea of a white Australia – a snow-white Australia if you will. Let it be pure and spotless. If we thought that statement was not typical, a future Labor Prime Minister, J.C. Watson, said during the debate: "As far as I am concerned, the objection I have to the mixing of these coloured people lies in the possibility and probability of racial contamination.

In an article published last year, Bendigo lawyer Peter Noble wrote of Muslims in Australia, from the early hawkers and cameleers, to later Bendigo Muslims. He quoted from a Melbourne 'Argus' report of the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. It

is worth repeating. 'The celebration of the last day of the feast of Ramadan by Mohammedans, started at 10 o'clock in Rosalind Park. On being informed by Bendigo Town Clerk Mr W. Honeybone, of the death of Queen Victoria, they suspended their service and their High Priest said, "The dear good Queen, whom we all love, is dead. Kings and Queens pass away everyday, but never did a Sovereign die who was so widely loved. We will sorrow for her."

Today in Bendigo, it is quite likely that your medical practitioner or sporting hero is a Muslim and an Australian citizen.