

[PROOF]



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## Daily Hansard

WEDNESDAY, 19 AUGUST 1981

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
CANBERRA 1981

HR 32.1.44

BP000345

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	NSW	Vic.	Qld	S.A.	W.A.	Tas.	ACT	N.T.	Aust.
1978-79	38.7	25.5	25.4	7.4	15.1	3.7	2.1	1.2	119.1
1979-80(f)	45.0	26.8	28.1	7.6	16.2	3.4	1.5	1.4	130.0
1980-81(f)	42.0	29.5	28.0	8.2	16.5	3.5	1.3	1.4	130.4
Completions—									
1975-76	36.1	34.3	22.0	14.0	15.0	3.7	5.1	1.9	132.0
1976-77	35.9	37.8	24.0	15.4	21.3	4.0	3.5	2.8	144.8
1977-78	33.8	33.5	23.9	11.7	17.4	3.9	3.2	1.5	128.9
1978-79	34.9	28.0	24.4	8.4	14.7	3.5	2.0	1.3	117.1
1979-80(f)	41.0	26.0	27.7	7.8	16.1	3.4	1.5	1.4	124.9
1980-81(f)	44.0	28.5	28.1	7.8	16.5	3.5	1.3	1.4	131.1

**Mr BRADFIELD**—I thank the House. When honourable members look at these tables they will see that there must be a balance in Australia between home ownership and other investment. More importantly, there must be a balance between homes required and vacant homes so that anyone who wants to buy a second home has a satisfactory and stable market in which he can sell his first home. The honourable member for Reid spoke about people who wanted to buy a second home. They cannot buy a second home if the market on which they would seek to sell their first home has been destroyed. If we have too many vacant homes or a surplus of homes there is no way that a person can sell a first home and use the money obtained from it as a deposit for a second home. It is like the new car market. If new cars are for sale but the second hand car market has been destroyed, if a person cannot get a satisfactory price for his second hand car, he cannot buy a new car. Home ownership is exactly the same. The whole area needs to be controlled and there is a complete lack of understanding by the Opposition of the reasons why interest rates have risen in recent years and the need to have a market for second hand homes so that new homes can continue to be purchased.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Ian Robinson)**—Order! The discussion is concluded.

#### GENERAL BUSINESS

##### Suspension of Standing Orders

Motion (by Mr McVeigh)—by leave—agreed to:

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended as would prevent Notice No. 29, General Business, being called on forthwith, and, after conclusion of consideration of that business, Notice No. 8, General Business, being called on.

#### ADHERENTS OF BAHAI FAITH IN IRAN

**Mr CARLTON (MacKellar) (4.11)**—I seek leave to amend the notice appearing in my name on the Notice Paper relating to the treatment of adherents of the Baha'i faith in Iran. I am seeking leave to amend it because I put it down some time

ago and certain matters of fact have changed since then.

Leave granted.

**Mr CARLTON**—I move:

That this House—

- (1) expresses its grave concern over the persecution of the adherents of the Baha'i faith in Iran by the regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini, and notes with alarm and abhorrence the continuing executions of Iranian Baha'is purely on the grounds of their religious faith;
- (2) calls upon the Government of Iran to release from custody those Baha'is who have been unjustly detained, and to restore the holy places, properties, community centres and companies that have been confiscated;
- (3) commends the Australian Government for its assistance to Australian Baha'is in expressing their protest to the Iranian Government, and
- (4) requests the Australian Government to continue to lend its support to moves in international forums designed to restore to the Iranian Baha'is their freedom to live in peace and practice their religion in harmony with their fellow citizens of other faiths.

Visitors to the northern beachside suburbs of Sydney will have noticed that remarkable building at Ingleside which can be seen for many kilometres. It is a beautiful shrine and I would advise anybody in the area to visit it and, if possible, to attend services there. More recently, and certainly since the Iranian revolution, the Baha'is who worship at Ingleside brought to my attention the very severe difficulties being experienced by their brethren in Iran. Certainly, following the Iranian revolution, there was a major persecution to which I shall refer later.

On 10 September last year I made a speech in the adjournment debate drawing the attention of the House to this problem, and on the following day, 11 September, I gave notice of the motion which is substantially the same as the one I moved today. Last year the former Minister for Foreign Affairs—the honourable member for Kooyong (Mr Peacock)—saw members of the Baha'i faith in Australia and as a result had the Iranian charge-d'affaires called in to hear the Australian Government's concern about the persecution of Baha'is. With the formation of the new Parliament, I renewed the motion on notice. On 9

March 1981 Senator Wheeldon asked a question in the Senate of Senator Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Dame Margaret was able to indicate that the Australian representative at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights had specifically raised the problem of religious persecution in Iran and had raised the question of Baha'is in particular. Dame Margaret also indicated in that answer that the present Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr Street) was continuing the role of the previous Minister in pursuing this matter in international forums and, where possible, with the Iranian Government.

On 25 March of this year the honourable member for Diamond Valley, now the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs (Mr N. A. Brown), spoke on the Human Rights Commission Bill and detailed the problems being experienced at that time by Iranian Baha'is. On 26 March 1981 Senator Puplick moved a motion in the Senate to this effect:

That the Senate deplores the continued persecution of religious minorities in Iran, particularly the large community of Baha'is, and urges that this total abuse of the right to religious tolerance be brought to the attention of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations.

That motion was supported by Senator Gareth Evans on behalf of the Australian Labor Party and it was carried by the Senate. There have been, of course, individual cases of Iranian citizens who have come to Australia, possibly before the revolution, and found that they are subject to religious persecution. I have made representations, as I am sure many other honourable members have, to the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (Mr Macphie) on behalf of such people, hoping that the Australian Government will be able to take a sympathetic view of their plight. I am happy to say that the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs has advised me that he is giving this matter very sympathetic consideration, and in a forthcoming statement on immigration policy matters he will refer to the status of Iranian citizens suffering persecution.

I thought that in order to indicate to the House just how outrageous it is that this should be happening to adherents I would refer to some of the basic Baha'i teachings. The Baha'i faith, which rose out of Islam but is different from Islam, proclaims the unity of God and His prophets. It recognises the basic oneness of all religions and the oneness of the entire human race. It encourages an independent investigation of truth. It provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace as the supreme goal of mankind. It states

that religion must go hand in hand with science and that it constitutes the ultimate basis of a peaceful, ordered and progressive society. It upholds the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for men and women. It advocates universal compulsory education. It exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship. The Baha'i faith is particularly emphatic in its teachings about obedience to government, non-involvement in politics, the oneness of religion and the far-reaching implications of the oneness of mankind.

I certainly have found from my contacts with individual Baha'is and also from attending religious services which are conducted by the Baha'is that they are indeed a very gentle people. The set of religious principles that I have underlined must have been startling indeed not only in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century but surely throughout much of the world. It is hard to imagine that such foresight and such understanding of the movement of human progress over the forthcoming centuries would be seen by such a small band in such a place so long ago.

Many find it difficult to understand why members of a religious minority dedicated to tolerance, peace and universal brotherhood arouse hatred in those amongst whom they live. The reasons for persecutions, the hatred and the violence lie deep in the socio-psychological structure of Persian society and go back more than a century to 1844 when a young merchant of Shiraz, later known as the Bab, founded this religion whose followers rejected the literal interpretation of the Koran and held that soon he whom God shall make manifest would appear on earth to bring a new law and to inaugurate a new era in the history of mankind. In nineteenth century Iran where even the notion of religious liberty did not exist the teachings of the Bab were bound to produce a violent reaction. Accused of heresy the Bab was imprisoned and finally executed in 1850. This did not stop the spread of the Bab's teachings nor did it stop the resistance of his disciples who defended themselves with great valour against attacks by the united forces of the clergy, the mobs and the government. There ensued a campaign of extermination in which some 20,000 Babis, as they were then called, were killed. The cruelty of the suppression, the indiscriminate massacre of women and children and the tortures inflicted upon masses of innocent people have been eloquently described both by participants and by Western observers. The bloodshed left a legacy of suspicion, fear and pain.

Thirteen years after the martyrdom of the Bab one of his leading disciples who had been exiled by

the Persian Government to Baghdad proclaimed himself to be the one whose advent the Bab had prophesied. He became known as Bahauallah and is seen as the main founder of the religion. Most of the Bab's followers accepted Bahauallah's claim and they became known thereafter as Baha'is. Over the next 40 years Bahauallah produced a vast number of works that today constitute the scripture of the religion he founded, the Baha'i faith. Bahauallah taught the unity of mankind and the equality of races and nations. He proclaimed the essential harmony of religion and science, equality of the sexes and the need for universal education. He also established the principles on which this currently world-wide religion would be founded.

The authorities, both religious and secular, kept Bahauallah in confinement and exile for some 40 years. Fundamentalist Muslim clergy feeling threatened by ideas that challenged the theological formulas they had repeated for hundreds of years, continued to demand the extermination of the Baha'is whom they denounced as heretics and harmful misleaders. In time, the Baha'is were turned into the scapegoats of Iranian society. As their numbers increased they became an evermore attractive target for demagogic attacks by those who wanted to distract the public or create turmoil. Since the Baha'is emphasised education and placed high value on work, they achieved a relatively high standard of living which made them attractive targets of pogroms.

Last, but not least, the peaceable nature of the Baha'i community made it possible to attack Baha'is without fear of violent retaliation. In moments of national stress, during famines, revolutions and invasions of the country, Baha'is could be blamed for the nation's miseries. If one did not wish to pay a debt one could accuse the creditor of being a Baha'i. If an epidemic spread throughout a province one could blame the Baha'is. Baha'i ideals of world unity could be twisted to appear as a lack of patriotism. Baha'i acceptance of the truth inherent in all great religions of mankind could be interpreted as a betrayal of Islam. When in 1896 Nasiri'd-Din Shah was assassinated by a pan-Islamist terrorist the Baha'is were automatically accused of that deed. In a brief but violent persecution that followed several Baha'is lost their lives. In 1903 more than 100 Baha'is were massacred in Yazd. The outbreak of the revolution in 1906 precipitated new attacks on Baha'is. As the constitutional movement developed reactionaries brought groundless accusations against the Baha'is, denouncing them as supporters and inspirers of the reformist cause. In the chaotic conditions of World War I and its aftermath

Baha'is once again suffered scattered attacks in various parts of the country.

During the 1930s things calmed down somewhat but a large scale attack on the Baha'i community was launched in the month of Ramadan in 1955. At one of Tehran's mosques Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Falsafi, a fanatical mullah, daily urged his flock to rise up against the false religion. He accused the Baha'is of being enemies of Islam and called for severe measures against them. One can certainly see in this little piece of history as in the earlier ones precursors of what has been happening in recent times. It is almost a repeat of that old history. In 1955 there was an orgy of senseless murder, rape, pillage and destruction. The details were published in a number of leading European and American newspapers and aroused the concern of a large number of Western statesmen and scholars. The outbreaks were mentioned by President Eisenhower in a press conference reported in the *Chicago Daily News* on 14 July 1955. The renowned Oxford scholar, Professor Gilbert Murray, wrote an open letter in the *Manchester Guardian* on 22 August 1955 where he said:

A country such as Iran, whose Government approved the Declaration of Human Rights, can ill-afford to permit fanatics to attack with violence the peaceful followers of a harmless and progressive religion.

His remarks were echoed by the British historian, Professor Arnold Toynbee, who wrote to express his concern in the 3 September issue of the *Times*. He stated:

In publishing your leading article of August 30, 'A Persecuted Sect', I am sure you have done a service to Persia as well as to her Baha'i citizens. The Persian Government has, as you say, an interest in keeping order and protecting its nationals. . . . The Baha'is have a particularly strong claim to be tolerated, because non-violence is one of the cardinal principles of their religion.

This is quite significant because in 1955 a world-wide campaign of publicity, expressions of sympathy for the Baha'is of Iran on the part of outstanding individuals throughout the world and two formal appeals to the United Nations eventually resulted in some relief. The Iranian Foreign Minister gave formal reassurances to the Secretary-General of the United Nations that the persecutions would be halted. However, it took several years for passions to abate, for normalcy to return and for the Iranian Baha'i community to begin to rebuild its shattered and desecrated holy places, community centres and educational facilities. Since then Baha'is have continued to live under the threat of further outbreaks and the burden of severe civil restrictions.

Though the Baha'is are the largest religious minority in the country their existence was not

officially recognised by the government of the Shah. Unlike other minorities, such as the Christians, the Jews and the Zoroastrians, they enjoyed no protection under the imperial constitution. Being in their vast majority ethnic Iranians, speaking Persian or Azerbaijani, they are no foreign element but a part of the Iranian nation to which they have always been loyal. It is the medieval intolerance of fanatical elements that strives to set them apart from their Muslim brothers and fellow citizens. Being non-political, law abiding, and opposed to all violence they constitute no threat to anyone. Yet they have been the most frequently persecuted group in the nation. The current outbreaks of persecution are only one more episode in the long history of cruel and senseless oppression.

There have been six stages in what happened in Iran in recent times. The first stage was the seizure of the complete records of the National Baha'i Centre. This action provided those responsible for the persecution with the means of identifying members of the Baha'i community throughout Iran. The numbers are estimated—I am not quite sure of the total number—at somewhere between 200,000 and 500,000 people, which is a fairly large minority. The second stage, which began immediately, was a campaign of systematic destruction of the economic base of the community. Baha'i assets were arbitrarily seized, pensions were cancelled and bank accounts confiscated, private enterprises were looted or wrecked, farms and orchards were burned and thousands of Baha'is were discharged from public and private employment.

The third stage was the effort to terrorise the community. Urged on by sermons of the Shiaah clergy and supported by so-called revolutionary guards, mobs destroyed Baha'i shrines and holy places, desecrated cemeteries and raped and beat members of the faith in scores of towns and villages. The media collaborated by giving wide publicity to hate propaganda against the Baha'is. This has been followed by the current attempt to cut the head off the Baha'i community, so to speak. The members of the National Baha'i Assembly and many members of local assemblies in major cities and towns have been arrested and held without legal process. Unsubstantiated charges have been widely published that the prisoners were agents of imperialism, heretics, apostates or Savak collaborators, that is, collaborators with the Shah's secret police. The fifth stage took place this past summer and fall in Europe when the campaign moved into its most ominous stage with the beginning of a series of farcical trials by local komitehs in which a dozen or more prominent

Baha'is have been sentenced to death on these same charges. It is apparent in the sixth phase that they wished to demoralise the whole of the Baha'i community. All those sentenced to death were offered their lives if they would take this step. They have not done so. My colleague, the honourable member for Tangey (Mr Shack), will indicate that many people have lost their lives in this battle, although it was a one-sided battle.

Why are they such a threat to the regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini? I think the reason is that they are such a liberal sect. Nothing they put forward could possibly be harmful to anybody except a fanatic. The principles of their religion are for openness of inquiry, equality of the sexes, independent investigation of the truth and the use of science in advancing the human race. These are all liberal principles which I hope all of us in this House share. But these principles, of course, are a dire threat to a regime such as that of the Ayatollah. It is for that reason that these people are losing their lives. I ask the House to consider this motion and pass it unanimously in the hope that these poor beleaguered people will be assisted in world forums.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Ian Robinson)**—Is the motion seconded?

**Mr Shack**—I second the motion and seek leave to speak later.

**Mr LIONEL BOWEN (Kingsford-Smith) (4.32)**—I wish to make a few comments on behalf of the Opposition. I welcome the remarks made by the honourable member for Mackellar (Mr Carlton). This matter has been the subject of debate in this Parliament. It was not raised by the honourable member for Mackellar, but was raised by his colleague, the honourable member for Diamond Valley (Mr N. A. Brown), in the debate on the Human Rights Commission Bill last March. The honourable member for Diamond Valley then referred to a notice of motion which has been brought on for debate today. In that context we welcome the Government's refreshing approach to dealing with notices of motion. They are not often dealt with. It appears that we will have a chance to debate some of them. My colleagues in the Opposition also have given notice of motions that they are anxious to have discussed. We look forward to continued co-operation in that respect.

This matter is a very serious one for the reasons that the honourable member for Mackellar mentioned. I am pleased to note that he has given, in support of his motion, a number of facts which clearly indicate that over the centuries—certainly over this century—the Baha'is have been subjected to dreadful treatment by those who have

been in charge in Iran. This motion mentions the present regime in Iran, but the facts clearly indicate that for some time there has been persecution of Baha'is in Iran whether it be under the regime of the Shah or under the regime of some other controller of Iran. I note that the Senate has discussed this matter. I think Senator Puplick raised the matter on 25 March. The motion was passed and it was supported by my colleagues in that august chamber. With the permission of my friends opposite I seek leave to incorporate in *Hansard* a letter written by my Leader to the Prime Minister (Mr Malcom Fraser) on 5 August indicating that the Senate had passed the resolution in the following terms:

That the Senate deplores the continued persecution of religious minorities in Iran, particularly the large community of Baha'is, and urges that this total abuse of the right to religious tolerance be brought to the attention of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations.

Leave granted.

*The letter read as follows—*

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

5 August 1981

The Rt. Hon. Malcom Fraser C.H., M.P.,  
Prime Minister,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra, ACT 2600

My dear Prime Minister,

In the Senate on 26 March 1981 the following resolution was unanimously approved by the Senate:

'That the Senate deplores the continued persecution of religious minorities in Iran, particularly the large community of Baha'is, and urges that this total abuse of the right to religious tolerance be brought to the attention of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations.'

I would be grateful for your advice as to whether the Government has yet had the opportunity to bring the issue of the Baha'is to the attention of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations.

Yours sincerely,  
BILL HAYDEN, M.P.

Mr LIONEL BOWEN—I thank honourable members. This letter shows that the Leader of the Opposition was anxious to co-operate in the case of that resolution. We are also anxious to indicate to the honourable member for Mackellar that we have no objection to his motion. In the course of mentioning support for the Senate's resolution, I note also that other people have had cause for concern about discrimination particularly religious discrimination in Iran. Reference has been made to the persecution of the Christians and the Jews who have had a pretty tough time in Iran. This indicates that we do have some problems in our society. Christians and Jews could hardly be said to have had an easy time in Iran under the Ayatollah, but the group that has suffered the most has certainly been the Baha'is. I suppose one

could say also that the Kurds are having a difficult time in Iran. We talk about human rights, religious freedoms and freedoms generally. At present we have difficulties in our own land. We have accepted refugees from Asia, Latin America, Cyprus and Lebanon. We now see the problems of Northern Ireland being raised in the cities of Australia such as Sydney. We are seeing the problems of what is deemed to be religious discrimination and religious persecution.

The Australian Labor Party deplores religious intolerance wherever it occurs. There is no doubt that the Baha'is have been persecuted by past regimes and by the present regime in Iran. It is important that the Australian Government speaks out and condemns that persecution. We have an obligation to speak out under the Universal Declaration of Human rights. It is a matter of considerable regret that in spite of many years work by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, an effective international convention directed at the practice of religious intolerance by governments is still not in force. I understand that the Human Rights Commission has recently completed a draft convention and submitted it to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for transmission to the United Nations General Assembly.

I urge the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr Street) to instruct the Australian delegation to the forthcoming meeting of the General Assembly to give the completion of work on this convention the highest priority and to lobby other governments to give the convention the highest priority. The Human Rights Commission is a very broadly based body with 40 member countries from all regional, religious and socio-economic groups. All the arguments which could or should be reasonably advanced with respect to the substance of a convention on religious intolerance have already emerged and been thoroughly debated. There is no reason for any further delay. It appears that the Baha'i minority in Iran is suffering from acute repression as its members cannot enjoy normal human rights and practise their religion free from intimidation and oppression. The honourable member for Mackellar and his colleagues have said previously that there have been executions, confiscations and complete discrimination against this community which has nothing but good to offer its fellow citizens. So the Labor Party is concerned about the persecution of minorities, particularly of those such as the Baha'is.

There are many other problems which we cannot canvass in this debate, but I have mentioned some in my opening remarks. This is a country which accepts many migrants. Migrants who have

come to Australia have brought home to us the problems they have experienced in their own countries. There is no doubt that the Baha'is in Australia are anxious to have the Australian Government take some action. There are many others in the same boat and that is rather tragic. It is of some satisfaction that in the development of our democracy in Australia we have made progress in giving everybody the same rights. There are some difficulties and objections which are certainly valid in respect of our Aborigines and others. But it is important that matters such as this have a chance to be aired because people have come to Australia, perhaps not because they want to come here but to escape persecution. We cannot let that pass unnoticed. We wish to see a continuation of a responsible and humane attitude to our citizens and also to our international obligations. We cannot turn people away from Australia because they are in fear of their lives. Certainly it is tragic to think that they could be in fear of their lives because of their religious beliefs.

There are many hundreds of thousands of Baha'is in Iran. The Baha'is are a pacifist religious group emphasising unity and prohibiting involvement by their members in politics. The Baha'is broke away from Islam in the mid-nineteenth century. It is clear that members of that faith have been persecuted in Moslem countries ever since. They have been in Australia for over 60 years. There are Baha'i communities in every State and Territory of Australia. There have been threats against Iranian members of the Baha'i faith in Australia. Some members, apparently, fear for their safety and the safety of their families. That has to be deplored. It is intolerable in a democracy such as ours. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that members of this faith have been other than hard-working citizens whose conduct is beyond reproach.

I note that the previous Minister for Foreign Affairs, the honourable member for Kooyong (Mr Peacock), received representations from members of the Baha'i faith and instructed his Department to call in the Iranian charge-d'affaires and protested to him about the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran. I commend him for so doing. I urge the current Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr Street) to consider whether it is not time to take such further action. Apparently, under the present regime the Baha'is have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, job discrimination, and, as has been indicated, the desecration of graves—in other words, to every form of persecution. Many people have been executed; I am told at least seven last September and many more

in recent times. So, as I have indicated, the Opposition supports what the honourable member for Mackellar has said.

We have obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and it is significant that the signatories of this latter Covenant include the Iranian Government. Whilst we still do not have in force an international convention against the practices of religious intolerance, there are steps which the Australian Government could take, within the framework of international law, and in accordance with its international responsibilities to assist the Baha'i. We could, in particular, raise the serious violations to which I have referred in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights of which we are a member. I advert to the fact that Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states:

In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion or to use their own language.

Quite clearly, on the evidence available this provision of international law has been violated by the regime in Iran. Other articles including Article 18 of that Covenant have also clearly been breached. We therefore have a duty as well as a right to raise the matter in the Human Rights Commission and we should do so.

Mr SHACK (Tangney) (4.42)—Less than 24 hours have passed since the Treasurer (Mr Howard) brought down this year's Budget. Next week in this chamber we will be involved in the hurly-burly of debating the Budget, disputing with one another about its particular terms, criticising one another about the level of income redistribution, the size of the cake and how it is to be split up, whether we are taking too much from one sector or whether we are not giving enough to another sector. Against that background, I think it is extremely sobering that we can join together as one chamber—the House of Representatives—in recognising the persecution of a religious minority in a foreign country many thousands of miles from this place and in condemning the persecution that is taking place in that society. Of course, we are talking about the persecution of the adherents of the Baha'i faith in Iran.

As my colleague the honourable member for MacKellar (Mr Carlton) has pointed out, there is a small Baha'i faith community in Australia. I was impressed with them when two representatives came to see me in my Perth electorate office soon



after I was elected in 1977. They came to inform me of their religion in a very self-effacing, low-key way, and to leave me some booklets and pamphlets relating to their beliefs. I certainly found it a very humbling experience because they had not come to propagandise their faith but, in my presence, to genuinely pray for me and my efforts in this Parliament. It was a very humbling experience and it bears out the fact that they are a gentle and very tolerant people. It is an extremely pacifist religion. The Baha'is are concerned with unity and consensus. Indeed, those concerns lead them to prohibit themselves from any involvement in the day to day political process. Yet we know that for some time now in Iran they have been facing extreme persecution solely on the basis of that very pacifist religion.

We have learned in this debate that the position of Baha'is in Iran has always been bleak and if we cannot relate to the circumstances surrounding the foundation of that religion in the 19th century and the persecution that followed we can certainly relate to this century. My colleague has drawn attention to the flare-ups in the 1930s when there was extreme persecution against adherents of the Baha'i faith. In my own lifetime, in 1955, the then Minister for the Interior for the Iranian Government declared that the sect be banned and all their centres be liquidated. As my colleague has pointed out, what followed was an orgy of senseless murder, rape, pillage and persecution of every variety. It was only because of extreme world pressure that the then Iranian Government gave formal reassurances to the United Nations that the persecution would be halted. It really has been a century of persecution with particularly nasty flare-ups. We are now seeing in the anarchial situation in Iran a heightening of that persecution. I have a quote from the Ayatollah Sadoughi when he called on the faithful masses to hunt the Baha'is they knew from all administrations and to deliver them to the revolutionary court.

What is extremely worrying about the present context is that it is not persecution prosecuted by a few outrageous individuals; it is persecution which is orchestrated and organised from the top. My colleague from Mackellar did us a very great service when he outlined in a very clear form the six stages of this conspiracy to destroy the Baha'i faith, namely: To seize all their records; to destroy systematically the economic base of the adherents of the Baha'i faith; to terrorise the Baha'i community; to cut off the head of the Baha'i community; to leave it leaderless and speechless; to move into a campaign of farcical detentions and trials; and, of course, organised murder and death.

I am reluctant, against the background of that experience, to portray in detail in this Parliament the particular instances, but there are people well known in Australia—Mr Parsa, Mr Sobhani and Mr Firuzi, Professor Hakim, Mr Nafti and Mr Dehgani—who are no longer with us because they have been subjected to the organised persecution campaign going on in Iran. I have a letter here which was published in the *Australian Baha'i Bulletin* in July 1979. I shall read a couple of paragraphs from the letter which obviously has come out of Iran and which was written by an adherent of the Baha'i faith:

About 2,000 men, women, children and youth have sought refuge in the mountains and deserts and live in tents. They have spent many cold and rainy days in the caves of the mountains. Many are injured with broken arms and legs. The small children have lost their ability to talk, having been frightened so much because of the incidents—

#### The incidents of persecution—

These believers, without having any means of livelihood, pass their days with utmost difficulty—  
In this modern world—

and are banished from place to place.

This is only a glimpse into one incident. Every day, from every corner, there is another cry of grief. The number of Baha'is in prisons for one reason or another has increased to 200. Many have been discharged from their jobs. Many have lost their retirement allowances. The Ministry of Education has officially sent a circular that those Baha'is who do not deny their faith be immediately discharged.

At present thousands of friends in Iran have lost everything, or have lost their jobs and are meeting their expenses by the sale of their belongings. And then there are those who are fleeing from one place to another and in grave danger. This is only the beginning of the journey of love, and its end is not known.

We can be very grateful this afternoon that the honourable member for Mackellar has raised the matter in this chamber. He, of course, referred to the fact that he first raised it last year and, as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition (Mr Bowen) has mentioned, it was raised by the honourable member for Diamond Valley (Mr N. A. Brown). Former Senator Puplick also made quite an extensive speech on the matter in the Senate last March. The Senate passed a motion deploring the persecution of Bahai's in Iran and urged that the matter be brought to the attention of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations. I am very pleased that since this matter has been brought to the attention of the Australian Government it has seen fit to express an opinion. The former Minister for Foreign Affairs—the honourable member for Kooyong (Mr Peacock)—instructed his Department to call in the Iranian chargé d'affaires to voice the Australian Government's protest. This protest has been continued by the present Minister. There has

been world-wide condemnation from Amnesty International. The Canadian House of Commons has passed a motion similar to the motion we are considering this afternoon. The United Nations has expressed considerable concern about the situation as have many European countries. As I have said, a motion was passed in the Senate.

An important point made by my colleague the honourable member for Mackellar was that the persecution which was perpetrated in 1955 in Iran ceased because of the weight of world opinion and condemnation. We now have an opportunity to contribute to the world condemnation so that the situation presently being perpetrated in Iran may again cease. I do not know whether, by passing this motion in the House of Representatives, we will save one Iranian life. I do not know whether we will preserve and protect the position of those presently under threat. But at least the passing of the motion in this House will draw the attention of the Iranian authorities to the Australian view that what is happening is objectionable. A free and independent democratic society like Australia has as one of its cornerstones a belief in the freedom of worship and religion. At least this motion will put forward our view that what is happening in that country is extremely objectionable and should cease forthwith.

**Mr BARRY JONES (Lalor) (4.53)**—As has been pointed out by the honourable member for Mackellar (Mr Carlton), who moved this motion, the Baha'i faith originated in Persia, as it was then known, in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Baha'is trace their faith back to the Babi faith of the 1840s, which sprang from the Shiite tradition of Islam to which the Ayatollah Khomeini belongs. It is true that Persian history has been marked by horrific persecutions of religious dissenters. I think it is important to make clear that those dissenters have not been confined to the Baha'is. No doubt the Baha'is deserve special treatment, but it also needs to be pointed out that the Jewish community of Iran, which dates back more than 2,000 years, has been virtually eliminated. The Zoroastrians, who are followers of another important religion which began in Iran, have been subject to enormous persecution. The overwhelming bulk of the members of that faith have migrated over the years to India and Pakistan. In India they are known as Parsees. The Zoroastrian religion is a native religion of Iran that has been subject to the most acute persecution. The Baluchis and the Azerbaijanis have also been persecuted. So have the Kurds and to some degree the Druses, the Ishmaelite Shiites.

They suffer. They have committed the abominable crime of constituting a minority—not necessarily a dissenting vocal minority but simply a recognisable minority. The majority is disposed to express its prejudice and its lack of understanding and humanity by visiting the most barbarous treatment on these minorities.

My only reservation about the motion moved by the honourable member for Mackellar is that it appears to suggest that we express concern for only one minority group. I hope the entire House agrees—I see that the mover and the seconder of the motion indicate their agreements—that we should convey to the Government that the motion ought to be read as though it applies to other persecuted minorities as well as the Baha'is. In 1850 the Bab, Sayyid Ali Muhammad, founder of the Babi faith, as mentioned by the honourable member for Mackellar, was executed in Tabriz and about 20,000 members of the Babi sect were killed in large scale persecutions over the next few years. When in 1863 Bahauallah proclaimed his new faith, the Baha'i, he was expelled from Persia into the Ottoman Empire and then confined to Akka, which was then in Palestine and is now in the modern state of Israel. Bahauallah died in 1892 but by his death the Baha'i faith had spread from Burma through the Middle East to the Sudan. The Baha'i faith was further promoted by the founder's son and grandson and extended to small groups in North Africa, the United States and Australia. Later still the faith was taken up with some success throughout the continent of Africa and in a number of Pacific islands.

As has been mentioned, the teaching of the Baha'is is universalist and syncretist. The Baha'is do not accept the description of syncretist, although the Baha'i faith is the best example of a syncretist faith I can think of. In their services there is no priesthood and no sermons but they read from the writings of other faiths. Shoghi Effendi, one of the leading spokesmen, described the faith in the following words:

... proclaims the necessity and inevitability of the unification of mankind ... enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition ... declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord ... (and) proclaims its essential harmony with science ... maintains the principle of equal rights ... insists on compulsory education, (and) ... eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth.

The Baha'i community is organised on an elective basis, but not in Calvin's sense. The Baha'i community has made representations to the United Nations about the treatment of its members in Iran. The Baha'i International Community is a

non-government organisation in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in New York. The community reported to the United Nations that their members have:

... been harassed, dismissed from their jobs, denied back pay and pensions; they have been terrorised, individuals and families beaten, and in some instances driven to the mosques and forced to recant their faith; and their homes, shops, and businesses have been looted, burnt down, or otherwise destroyed. Baha'i homes have continually been invaded by armed groups, and the family members subjected to long and harsh interrogations. The Iranian Baha'i community has had its holy places, centres, and businesses confiscated, even destroyed and its cemeteries have been seized and desecrated.

The national spiritual assembly of the Baha'is reported to the United Nations. It said:

... they were denied civil rights, such as permission to register their Baha'i marriages, the privilege to hold Baha'i religious endowments in the name of the Baha'i community, and freedom to publish Baha'i literature or establish Baha'i schools (indeed, during the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah's father—

That is, the late Shah's father—

more than 30 Baha'i schools throughout the country were permanently closed). Many from the rank and file of the Baha'is were denied jobs and sometimes even their rights to pensions because of their refusal to deny their Faith.

So the events of the last few years—the persecution under the Ayatollah Khomeini—ought not to be thought of as peculiar. No doubt it has been heightened and it has become quantitatively and qualitatively worse. But it is a long tradition that goes back to the Pahlavi monarchy and the Quaja dynasty from the nineteenth century that preceded it. I draw the attention of the House to a particularly distressing case referred to in the *Medical Journal of Australia* on 16 May 1981. It referred to the murder of Dr Manuchir Hakim in Iran, which was mentioned by the honourable member for Tangney (Mr Shack). The article reads:

Professor Hakim returned to Iran in 1938 where he established the Chair of Anatomy at Teheran University. He was also a well known specialist in the field of gastroenterology and he served for 30 years as a director of the Baha'i Hospital in Teheran. This charitable hospital treated all, irrespective of their religious affiliations or nationality, and cared for the poor free of charge where necessary.

His other great humanitarian work was as the founder of the Baha'i Home for the Aged which accepted people of all religious and racial backgrounds. He was decorated by the French government in 1976 with the *Legion D' Honneur*.

He does not sound to me like a very dangerous terrorist.

It continues:

In the months before his assassination, Professor Hakim received constant threats and anonymous telephone calls. During a short visit to Europe in 1980 he was warned by friends not to return to Iran, but his high sense of duty made him return to serve people in need despite the knowledge of danger to his own life. On January 12, 1981, he was murdered

by an unknown assassin who entered his office and shot him to death after his last patient had left his clinic.

Professor Hakim was in no sense a political dissident and one is even more concerned at the loss to the world of this eminent humanitarian and gravely disturbed to learn that his property was confiscated by the Islamic Republic on January 14, two days after he was murdered, despite legal protests, and that his family is without the protection of Iranian law.

The Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland, through its Human Rights Commission has declared its belief that the new constitution of Iran should include protection for all religious minorities so that Professor Hakim's family and fellow Baha'is may enjoy religious freedom.

Before I conclude I want to return for just a moment to the question of the Zoroastrians. A letter that appeared in the *New York Times* on 21 January 1979 pointed out:

Over the past millenium, most Zoroastrians have fled to India, where they live in freedom and safety; these have come to be known as Parsis. The Parsis have distinguished themselves in commerce, science and the arts (Zubin Mehta, conductor of the New York Philharmonic, will be well-known to your readers). But some 27,000 Zoroastrians remain in Iran, mainly in Teheran and in the Yazd area.

That is considerably less than the number of Baha'is. The twentieth-century has been the most appalling era in terms of religious and tribal persecution. The elimination of six million Jews in Europe in World War II stands out, but there are very many other horrific examples in other continents. The Ayatollah Khomeini presides over one of the most unattractive regimes in the world today with strong elements of obscurantism and cruelty. In the *Iranian Bulletins*, the news bulletins of the Committee for Defence of Political Prisoners in Iran, published by Index on Censorship in London in 1979 there is an introductory comment by the writer, Edward Mortimer, which says:

... the future of human rights in Iran is far from being assured, and it is still possible that the revolution will in the end produce a new dictatorship no less savage than that of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. It would not be the first revolution in the world to follow such a cycle. What would be wrong would be to attribute any such tendency to the Islamic and or anti-Western character of the revolution and the regime that is emerging from it. . . . It is hardly surprising if they suspect the good faith of criticisms of their new rulers emanating from the West in the name of freedom or human rights. . . . Even those of us in the West who did speak out against the Pahlavi dictatorship in the days of its strength have to admit that we were quite unsuccessful in changing the policies of our own governments towards it.

I point out that the Baha'i faith has not emanated from the West. It is not something imposed historically. It is something that has arisen out of the Iranian tradition, out of Iranian history. This persecution is a black mark against the record of the current Iranian Government. Why are we in the Australian Parliament raising the question of the Baha'is, people who are mistreated in a distant

country? The reason, of course, is that we recognise our common interest—we are all part of the human race. Before I close I should mention that the honourable member for Hawker (Mr Jacobi) was very anxious that I should indicate his very strong support for the motion. He has had many representations on this issue. The matter was raised—the honourable member for Mackellar should be congratulated for doing so—because of the common bond, membership of the human race.

**Mr Jacobi**—They opposed the human rights standing committee in the Parliament. They opposed that when they had the chance. That is to be deplored.

**Mr BARRY JONES**—That is to be deplored, but there will be a unanimous resolution here today. I close with the famous words of John Donne, the great metaphysical poet, which express the feeling we all have:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee

Question resolved in the affirmative.

#### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES: PROPOSED STANDING COMMITTEE

**Mr SCHOLES (Corio) (5.8)**—I move:

- (1) That a standing committee be appointed to maintain a continuing surveillance of the practices and procedures of the House of Representatives with a view to making recommendations which would enhance the role of the House and its operational efficiency.
- (2) That the committee consist of 4 Government Members and 4 Opposition Members to be appointed by Mr Speaker after consultation with the Party Whips.
- (3) That Mr Speaker also appoint a Chairman of the Committee who shall have a casting vote only.
- (4) That any additional terms of appointment of the committee be the subject of a subsequent resolution of the House.

The motion which I have moved arises out of a select committee of this Parliament which met some years ago to examine the procedures of the Parliament and to make recommendations in respect of a committee system for the Parliament. That committee was the Procedures Committee of the House of Representatives. The purpose of the committee I am seeking to set up is to provide the means by which the House itself can review its own procedures, can make recommendations or can have recommendations on changes in procedures brought before the House to enhance and improve the efficiency of the House and the role

that the House plays in the government of the country. Unfortunately, in recent times the Standing Orders have ceased to be the prerogative of this chamber. That prerogative has been transferred outside this chamber, largely to a committee of Government back bench members and the Executive. That is not the manner in which the Standing Orders were handled when you and I, Mr Deputy Speaker, came to this Parliament. At that time they were dealt with on their merit by members of this chamber voting without party whip. So whilst the Standing Orders were not all that we would have liked, and certainly advantaged the Executive to an extent which is probably beyond the wishes of most back benchers, they were approved in free vote by members of this House at the time they were put forward.

In recent times the procedures by which changes to the Standing Orders have taken place have almost always consisted of an Executive resolution and a subsequent reference to the Standing Orders Committee after a long term of practice based on the change. Whilst one does not deny the input of the Executive into the chamber, it is highly desirable that a house of parliament should reserve unto itself the right to consider its own procedures and to bring forward wherever possible recommendations which would amend those procedures in such a way as to make them more effective for the house of parliament to carry out its function.

It can be argued, and I have no doubt that it will be argued, that there is a Standing Orders Committee. The House of Commons also has a standing orders committee and has found that it is not a satisfactory vehicle for examining ongoing matters relating to procedures or new procedures which may be desirable for a parliament to fulfil its role in a society which is ever more demanding on members of parliament and the government of the day. Clearly, in the Westminster system, the parliament has more than one role. First of all, it has a responsibility to facilitate the government of the country by enacting and dealing with legislation in a manner which does not unduly inhibit good government. It should seriously inhibit bad government. This chamber has allowed to pass from its control the procedures by which it operates. I do not deny that resolutions are carried by a majority of members, but on almost all occasions now when Standing Orders matters are dealt with, they are carried by a majority of members after party decision and on party lines, and rarely with any adequate consultation with the Opposition. Usually it is a take-it-or-leave-it proposition.