What's the story?
Encyclopedia of New Zealand

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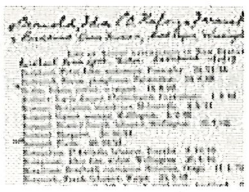
Citizenship

Towards New Zealand citizenship

The First World War

Naturalisation was halted during the First World War, and in 1917 the Revocation of Naturalization Act was passed. The grounds for revoking the citizenship of those who had been naturalised remained vague for the next 40 years. In practice, few naturalised 'enemy aliens' were seen as threatening New Zealand's 'peace and good government'. During the First World War all adult aliens had to register with the local police, and do so again whenever they moved. Some 9,000 had registered by 1921.

Gustav Kronfeld, 'enemy alien'



Naturalisation lists (1st of 2)

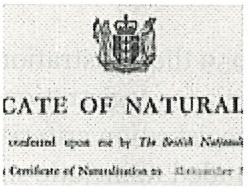
Naturalisation between the wars

After the war, empire-wide consistency was sought and the naturalisation process became steadily more bureaucratic. From 1923, applications for naturalisation could be made to the minister of internal affairs by aliens of 'good character' who had lived in New Zealand for at least three years, had 'an adequate knowledge of the English language', and did not suffer from any 'disability'.

Naturalisation could still be revoked for misrepresentation, and now also if a citizen had 'shown himself by act or speech to be disaffected or disloyal to His Majesty'. (Disloyalty remained grounds for deprivation of citizenship until 1959.) The definition of British nationality was brought into line with that in the United Kingdom.

New Zealand issues its own passports

From 1928, people who had been naturalised anywhere in the empire automatically became British subjects in New Zealand. Conversely, anyone naturalised in New Zealand enjoyed the rights of British subjects anywhere in the empire. People wanting to be naturalised had to have lived in the empire for five years and in New Zealand for at least one year before they applied.



Naturalisation certificate

The Second World War

From the beginning of the Second World War until 1977, resident aliens were again required to register with the police, and to notify changes in their circumstances. About 90 resident 'enemy aliens' were interned during the war on Somes Island in Wellington Harbour. Naturalisation was suspended for the duration of the war, except for aliens serving in the armed forces. When it was resumed, the Department of Internal Affairs was inundated with applications from aliens who considered they had proved themselves worthy to become citizens.

New Zealand citizenship

By the end of the Second World War, the prolonged attempt to enforce a common citizenship code across the British Empire was breaking down. Most New Zealanders were reluctant to have separate New Zealand citizenship and wanted to remain only British subjects, but in 1947 a conference of experts agreed that citizenship criteria should be decided separately in each country. All would accept the citizens of other Commonwealth countries as British subjects or Commonwealth citizens (the two expressions were used interchangeably).

The 1948 Citizenship Act

The British Nationality and New Zealand Citizenship Act 1948 (the order of the words showed their relative importance) gave New Zealand citizenship to all current New Zealand residents who had been either born or naturalised as British subjects. Almost all children subsequently born in New Zealand would become New Zealand citizens. New residents who were citizens of the British Commonwealth or Ireland could become New Zealand citizens simply by registering, a regime that particularly benefited resident and arriving Indian people.

'Good character' remained necessary for those seeking naturalisation – Communist leanings or affiliation ruled out some applicants in the early 1950s. Only about 10% of British-born immigrants who arrived between 1948 and 1951 chose to register: there was little practical reason for them to do so.

Born a Kiwi, but not a citizen

Until 2006 there was only one exception to the rule that a baby born in New Zealand was automatically registered as a New Zealand citizen. Children born to diplomats who are serving in New Zealand posts enjoy the diplomatic immunities of their parents but are not entitled to New Zealand citizenship. In 2003 claims were made that some women were coming to New Zealand solely to have their babies, so that the babies would have New Zealand citizenship by birth and their parents' citizenship by descent. In 2005 the Citizenship Act was amended so that any child born after 1 January 2006 is a New Zealand citizen by birth only if at least one parent is a New Zealand citizen or entitled to reside in New Zealand indefinitely.

Towards consistency for all

In 1959 the registration of Commonwealth citizens as New Zealand citizens was tightened: the criteria for registration became basically the same as for naturalisation. It was no coincidence that the registration criteria were tightened at the same time as the list of Commonwealth countries was expanded to include several African and Asian former British colonies.

The Citizenship Act 1977

The Citizenship Act 1977 imposed the same requirements on all people who applied for citizenship by grant regarding length of residence in New Zealand, character, and knowledge of the English language. The distinction between Commonwealth and foreign citizens was replaced by one between New Zealanders and foreigners. 'Naturalisation' became 'citizenship by grant', and the expression 'British subject' finally disappeared from New Zealand passports.

From 1992 immigrants seeking citizenship had to prove their intention to remain ordinarily resident

in New Zealand. New immigration policies favoured those with professional skills and assets. This led some to conclude that citizenship could be bought.

Biographies

Herbert Otto Roth, 1917–1994

Ivan Tomasevic, 1897–1988

George William Edward Ernest von Zedlitz, 1871–1949

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