Muslims and the Policy of Racial Exclusion from 1901

https://www.islamiccouncilwa.com.au/muslims-and-the-policy-of-racial-exclusion-from-1901/

The Immigration Restriction Act was passed in 1901 as soon as the new Commonwealth Parliament was established. It provided that all ‘coloured’ people trying to enter Australia would be required to submit to a medical examination and to a dictation test. This test could be in any European language. In practice this meant any language of which that individual was ignorant. Resident ‘coloureds’ were also required to apply for a special certificate to enter another state. The free crossing of inland borders, a necessity for the Afghan cameleers inland trade, was thus abolished at a stroke. This discrimination was intensified by the 1902 Roads Act.

The 1904 petition against this Act, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia, signed by M.H. Musakhan and 2,500 camel men, indicates how the camel men interpreted it at the time.

The intent of the legislation was very clear. It placed a registration fee on each camel, varying from five pounds per annum on bull camels over the age of three, the breeders, to one pound for camels which were hired out. This was added to the license fee of ten shillings a year on all camels used in transport. It also prevented “any camel from being driven along any part of a road or track or within 20 yards of the centre thereof”.

Obviously dismayed, the petitioners complained that it was meant to favour horse teamsters showing that “…a team of camels carrying the same load as the wagon team and doing no harm to the road, while the wagon ploughs into it, is taxed at from 20 pounds to 35 pounds per annum as against the tax on a horse team of one pound.”