

Child migration used to keep Commonwealth white, legal expert claims

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Professor Kenneth Norrie has been giving evidence at the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry in Edinburgh.



Lady Smith

Child migration was pursued as a racial endeavour to keep the Commonwealth white, a legal expert has said.

At the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry on Tuesday, Professor Kenneth Norrie spoke about the practice of moving youngsters abroad to be cared for by institutions.

He pointed to a 1959 debate in the House of Commons, which talked of using child migration to increase “British stock” in Australia amid fears of people from “Asiatic” countries populating the continent.

They were thinking about stocking the British empire with as many white people as possible

It was heard that child migration became common towards the end of the 19th century and lasted until the middle of the 20th century. Professor Norrie, a leading scholar in Scots family law, said: “I think we can take ‘British stock’ to be a racial description – they meant white stock.

“Charitable institutions genuinely thought they were giving children a good chance at life.

“The Government had different intentions – they were thinking about stocking the British empire with as many white people as possible.”

He also claimed to be “unconvinced” there was legal capacity for a parent or child to consent to the youngster being sent abroad.

It was heard he believed residential care organisations such as Quarrier’s took advantage of nobody wishing to challenge the process.

The legal expert said “big efforts” were made to seek out “waifs and strays”, such as children who were rough sleeping.

Prof Norrie added: “These charities thought they were doing the right thing. Society as a whole thought this was a good thing.”

Canada was the prime destination for migration until after the Second World War, when it became Australia.

Meanwhile, it was also heard that the academic described the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as the “most important and far-reaching” legal source of its kind.

The inquiry, before judge Lady Smith in Edinburgh, continues on Wednesday.

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