

August 31, 1988

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BOARD OF APPELLATE REVIEW

THE MATTER OF: D [REDACTED] A [REDACTED] R [REDACTED]

This is an appeal from an administrative termination of the Department of State that appellant, vid A [REDACTED] R [REDACTED], expatriated himself on September 9, 1970 under the provisions of section 349(a)(1) of the migration and Nationality Act by obtaining naturalization in Australia upon his own application. ↓/

The State Department made its determination of loss of appellant's nationality on March 7, 1978. R [REDACTED] entered an appeal therefrom on April 8, 1988. As an initial matter we must determine whether the Board has jurisdiction to entertain an appeal so long delayed. For reasons given hereafter, we conclude that the appeal is time-barred and not properly before the Board. It is accordingly dismissed for lack of jurisdiction.

I

Appellant became a United States citizen by virtue of his birth at [REDACTED], and resided in the United States until 1960 when he went to Australia. Appellant stated to the Board that he was employed in 1970 by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), a body wholly controlled by the Australian government. CSIRO allegedly exerted "considerable pressure" on appellant to become an Australian citizen. Accordingly, he applied for

In 1970, section 349(a)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1481(a)(1), read as follows:

Sec. 349. (a) From and after the effective date of this Act a person who is a national of the United States whether by birth or naturalization, shall lose his nationality by --

(1) obtaining naturalization in a foreign state upon his own application,...

Pub. L. 99-653 (approved Nov. 14, 1986), 100 Stat. 58, amended subsection (a) of section 349 by inserting "voluntarily performing any of the following acts with the intention of relinquishing United States nationality:" after "shall lose his nationality by".

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Australian citizenship and was granted a certificate of Australian citizenship on September 9, 1970.

The only evidence that appellant obtained naturalization in Australia is the certification of a consular officer on the certificate of loss of nationality that the officer executed in appellant's name in 1976 which reads as follows: "The evidence of such action consists of the following: Official confirmation from the Australian Department of Immigration V70/2669 dated June 8, 1974." There is no copy in the record of that communication from the Australian government. Nor is there here any record of the circumstances surrounding appellant's naturalization or the naturalization ceremony in which he presumably participated. The Board takes note, however, that applicants for naturalization in Australia in 1970 were required to make the following oath of affirmation of allegiance as prescribed by schedule 2 of the Australian Citizenship Act of 1948-69:

I, ..., renouncing all other allegiance, swear by Almighty God [solely and sincerely promise and declare] that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Australia, Her Heirs and Successors, according to law, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Australia and fulfil my duties as an Australian citizen.

Having been informed by the Australian government's communication of June 1974 that appellant had obtained naturalization, the Consulate General at Melbourne wrote to him on October 8, 1974 to state that he might have repatriated himself. He was offered an opportunity to submit evidence for the Department to consider in determining his citizenship status, and asked to complete a form on the reverse of the letter regarding his performance of the expatriative act. The Consulate General wrote appellant again on December 10, 1974 to note that he had not replied to its letter of October 8th and would have 60 days to do so; failure to reply by that time would be taken to mean that he intended to relinquish his United States nationality when he obtained Australian citizenship. Appellant informed the Consulate on December 19, 1974 that he had not received its letter of October 8th. His letter continued:

Regarding the content of your recent letter: I was not aware that there was any alternative to relinquishing my U.S. citizenship when I became a

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naturalized Australian citizen. Do you mean that this is not the case? In any event, I have a permanent job here and there is little likelihood of my wishing to return permanently to the United States. There is one matter that does concern me. My parents, who are retired, live in Florida. If I should ever have to visit them on very short notice (illness or death), would there be any difficulty in my obtaining a visitor's visa in a hurry?

The Consulate General replied to appellant on January 8, 1975 as follows:

The letter attached is a replacement for the Consulate General's letter of October 8 which you did not receive. A prompt reply would be appreciated.

Former United States citizens are treated the same as any other alien visa applicant. If it is determined that you have lost your United States citizenship, it will not prejudice future applications for visitor visas.

On January 15, 1975 appellant answered the Consulate General's letter by completing the form on the reverse of that letter, a facsimile of which follows:

1. I was naturalized as a citizen of Australia on _____
I further **state** that this was *my* free and voluntary act and that no influence, **compulsion**, force or **duress** was exerted upon me **by any** other person, **and** that it was done without **any** reservation and with the intention of relinquishing **my** United States citizenship.
2. I would like to **discuss my** possible loss of United States citizenship with a consular officer. I request **an appointment** on _____
(date and time)
3. I will be unable to **come** to your office but I wish to submit evidence to show why I should not be held to have lost United States citizenship.
 - A. The evidence I wish to submit is attached. It consists of:

- B. I will forward the evidence to your office within sixty days.
- 4. I do not wish to submit any evidence or contest a decision that I have lost United States citizenship by obtaining naturalization in Australia with the intention of relinquishing my United States nationality thereby.
- 5. I would like to make the following statement explaining my reasons for performing the act to which you have referred and my motives and purposes in doing so as they relate to my allegiance to the United States and my intent to retain or to relinquish my United States citizenship. (Statements of others or documentary evidence should be attached.)
I AM A PERMANENT RESIDENT IN AUSTRALIA
AND THEREFORE I DECIDED TO TAKE AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP

It was not until fourteen months later that the consulate General took any further action in appellant's case. On March 25, 1976 a consular officer executed a certificate of loss of nationality in appellant's name, as required by section 358 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. 2/ Therein the officer certified that appellant

Section 358 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1501, reads as follows:

Sec. 358. Whenever a diplomatic or consular officer of the United States has reason to believe that a person while in a foreign state has lost his United States nationality under any provision of chapter 3 of this title, or under any provision of chapter IV of the Nationality Act of 1940, as amended, he shall certify the facts upon which such belief is based to the Department of State, in writing, under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of State. If the report of the diplomatic or consular officer is approved by the Secretary of State, a copy of the certificate shall be forwarded to the Attorney General, for his information, and the diplomatic or consular office in which the report was made shall be directed to forward a copy of the certificate to the person to whom it relates.

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quired the nationality of the United States by birth herein; that he acquired the nationality of Australia by naturalization upon his own application; and thereby expatriated himself under the provisions of section 49(a)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The record does not disclose why the State Department did not receive the certificate until March 3, 1978. A few days later on March 7, 1978 the Department approved the certificate, approval constituting an administrative determination of loss of nationality from which a timely and properly filed appeal may be taken to the Board of Appellate Review.

Ten years later on April 8, 1988 appellant entered his appeal.

II

A threshold issue is presented: whether the Board may entertain an appeal that was entered ten years after the Department of State determined that appellant lost his United States nationality. Although the passage of so many years might of itself warrant dismissal of the appeal as untimely, we will examine the case to determine whether there are any circumstances that might warrant our allowing the appeal.

To exercise jurisdiction, the Board must find that the appeal was filed within the limitation prescribed by the applicable regulations. This is so because timely filing is mandatory and jurisdictional. United States v. Robinson, 361 U.S. 220 (1960). Thus, if an appellant, providing no legally sufficient excuse, fails to take an appeal within the prescribed limitation, the appeal must be dismissed for want of jurisdiction. Costello v. United States, 365 U.S. 265 (1961).

In 1978 when the Department determined that appellant expatriated himself, the limitation on appeal to the Board of Appellate Review was "within a reasonable time" after the affected person received notice of the department's determination of loss of citizenship. 3/

/ Section 50.60 of Title 22, Code of Federal Regulations, 22 CFR 50.60. These regulations were in force from November 1967 to November 1979, when the limitation on appeal was revised. It now is "within one year after approval by the Department of the certificate of loss of nationality." 22 CFR 7.5(b)(1).

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nsistently with the Board's practice in cases where the certificate of loss of nationality was approved prior to the effective date of the present regulations (November 1, 1979), we will apply the limitation of "reasonable time" in this case.

"Reasonable time" is a term of settled meaning. Whether an action has been taken within a reasonable time depends on the facts of the particular case. Chesapeake and Ohio Railway v. Martin, 283 U.S. 209 (1931). Reasonable time has been held to mean as soon as circumstances will permit and with such promptitude as the situation of the parties will permit. The rule presumes, however, that an appellant will prosecute his appeal with the diligence and prudence of an ordinary person. Metrich v. U.S. Shipping Board Emergency Fleet Corp., 92 F.2d 733 (2nd Cir. 1926). A party may not determine a time suitable to himself. In re Roney, 139 F.2d 175 (7th Cir. 1943). In loss of nationality proceedings reasonable time begins to run when the affected party receives notice that an adverse decision has been made with respect to his citizenship. In determining whether an appeal has been taken within a reasonable time, the courts "take into consideration the interest in finality, the reason for the delay, the practical ability of the litigant to learn the merits of the grounds relied upon, and prejudice to other parties." Ashford v. Steuart, 657 F.2d 1053, 1055 (9th Cir. 1981). Reasonable time thus makes allowance for the intervention of unforeseen circumstances beyond a person's control that might prevent him from taking a timely appeal.

The rationale for allowing one a reasonable period of time to appeal an adverse decision with respect to citizenship is pragmatic and fair. It allows such a person sufficient time to prepare a case showing that the Department's decision was wrong as a matter of law or fact, while penalizing excessive delay which may be prejudicial to the rights of the opposing party because the passage of considerable time has obscured the events surrounding the citizen's performance of the expatriative act. It is incontrovertible that passage of many years between performance of an expatriative act and taking an appeal can make it difficult if not impossible for the Board as trier of fact to make an objective determination whether the act was done voluntarily with the intention of relinquishing United States nationality.

Appellant in this case states that his delay in bringing this appeal is attributable to two reasons.

The first concerns the paragraph on the back of the Certificate of Loss of Nationality, under the title 'Appeal

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Procedures', which reads as follows:
'Unless you have new or additional evidence to submit, or you believe that the holding of loss of nationality was contrary to the law or to the facts in your case it is unlikely that an appeal will be successful.' This statement does little to encourage the appellant [sic] to procede [sic] with an appeal! The second reason concerns the fact that the situation has changed, as witness the Supreme Court cases that are cited in extracts from the 'Code of Federal Relations' [sic] that you sent me with your reply to my letter. While I was still in Australia, in the process of immigrating to the country of my birth, I was told that the situation has altered from what it had been previously and that I should look into making an appeal when I reached the United States. It is clear to me from the cases of Afroyim v. Rusk and Vance v. Terrazas, especially the latter, that unless the person who performed the expatriating act intended [emphasis appellant's] to relinquish citizenship of the United States, by that person's words or proven conduct, then the Constitution does not give the Government the right to deprive an American citizen of his/her birth-right.

These reasons are patently insufficient to excuse a one-year delay in seeking redress from this Board.

Perhaps the phraseology of the appeal information in 1978 was infelicitous, but the affected party was also informed that even if he had no new or additional evidence to submit an appeal might be based on allegations that the Department's decision was wrong as a matter of law or fact. One who attached value to his citizenship and was genuinely concerned about an adverse decision might reasonably be expected to lodge a timely protest and would not be deterred from appealing by somewhat discouraging official language. In any event, appellant was duly apprised by the information on the reverse of the certificate that an appeal procedure was available to him and that he could obtain additional information about

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appeals from the Board. Yet, he did not act until ten years later.

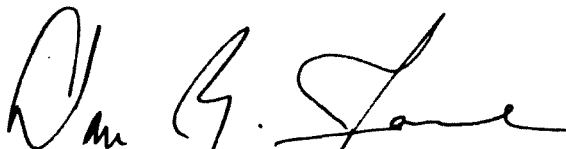
We now consider appellant's second reason. That he may have learned of the Supreme Court's decisions in Froyim v. Rusk, 387 U.S. 253 (1967) and Vance v. Errazas, 444 U.S. 252 (1980) only recently cannot excuse his delay. As a matter of law appellant could have based an appeal either in 1978 or 1980 on the grounds that he did not intend to relinquish his United States nationality when he obtained naturalization in Australia. Had he been diligent about seeking restoration of his citizenship and addressed inquiries to the Board or to the Consulate General about what he might do, he would have ascertained what he might raise the issue of his intent when he performed the expatriative act.

Reviewing the record, it is clear that appellant is not prevented by unforeseen circumstances that he could not control from moving much earlier to contest the loss of his United States nationality. Indeed, he and his spouse was responsible for the delay. For the Board to allow the appeal obviously would be prejudicial to the State Department which bears the overall burden of proving that appellant voluntarily obtained naturalization in Australia with the intention of relinquishing his United States nationality.

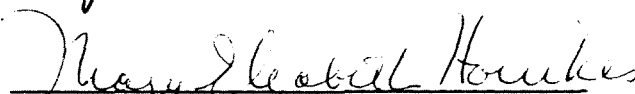
Appellant's unexcused delay of ten years in taking the appeal is unreasonable under any objective criterion. It is accordingly time-barred and not properly before the Board.

III

Since the Board lacks jurisdiction to consider an appeal that is time-barred, we hereby dismiss this appeal. Given our disposition of the case we do not reach the other issues presented.


 Alan G. James, Chairman


 J. Peter A. Bernhardt, Member


 Mary Elizabeth Hoinkes, Member