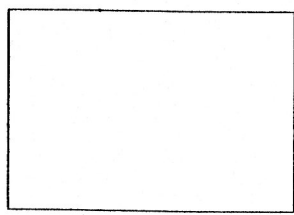


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MULTICULTURALISM – THE AUSTRALIAN WAY

BY

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During my recent visit to Berlin, I was struck by the evidence of ethnic diversity there. As in Australia, I heard many languages being spoken and noted the variety of cafes, restaurants, shops and places of worship, which give cities, suburbs and regions a cosmopolitan flavour. Quite clearly, various ethnic communities are establishing permanent homes in Germany and making a contribution to society.

I was not surprised to learn, therefore, that in Germany there is significant interest in the immigration, settlement and multicultural experiences of other countries and an eagerness to exchange views on the subject. In this context, I am delighted that the Australian Consulate-General in Berlin will be holding a Symposium on Australia Day (26 January), which will provide a forum for such an exchange.

Discussion at this Symposium may embrace an exploration of the similarities and differences between Australia and Germany in this regard. There are some important parallels in the migratory processes. In Australia, however, there have been different developments in the laws and policies regulating migration and toward a multicultural society.

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Australia – a Country of Immigrants

Australia and Germany have had very different historical experiences of the development toward a nation-state. Australia is a new nation and, unlike Germany, one which was built on immigration.

Before European Settlement began in 1788, Australia's indigenous nation was already comprised of a large number of diverse communities. During the early days of the colony and from Federation in 1901 leading up to the Second World War, Australia's diversity extended. During the 200 years from 1778 to 1988, the Australian population grew from some 300,000 indigenous peoples to over 16.5 million persons of many different origins (Australia's population in mid-1993 was 17,661,500). About 40% of this growth has been directly due to a "net migration gain".

Australia has welcomed more than four million new settlers from over 120 nations around the world since World War II, many of them refugees and more than half of them from countries where English is not the main language.(1) We continued to take immigrants for a number of reasons, such as meeting labour needs for postwar reconstruction and economic growth, population growth for increased security, the need for family reunion, and the international commitment to accepting refugees. Asian migration to Australia added a foreign policy dimension: Australian troops had fought in the Vietnam War. When Vietnamese boat people began to arrive in the mid-1970s, Australia accepted some responsibility.

The large scale postwar migration and accompanying settlement and multicultural policies have shaped Australia into one of the world's most successful multicultural societies. Diversity has provided Australia with a unique and vibrant culture and ways of life. Australians born in other countries have contributed to every area of activity in society. Australia's artistic and literary traditions have been fundamentally broadened and enriched. A range of cultural activities and forms of entertainment is now available to the community as a whole and Australians have widened their horizons and become more tolerant and appreciative of different cultures and ways of life.

## Managing Diversity

From the beginning of its existence as a nation-state, Australia has adopted an interventionist approach to immigration.<sup>(2)</sup> Indeed, the *Immigration Act* was the first legislation passed by the Australian Federal Government which was created in 1901. This legislation enshrined the so-called "White Australia Policy" aimed at discouraging immigration from Asia. The White Australia Policy was progressively dismantled in the post-war era and officially ended by the ALP Government under Prime Minister Whitlam during the early 1970s.

Since the Second World War, the Australian model for managing diversity has had three main policy phases:

- **assimilation** a policy which, up to the 1960s, aimed at the disappearance of differences among people living in Australia and based on the expectation that immigrants would readily embrace the Australian way of life, learn English and quickly adopt Australian ways;
- **integration** a policy current until the early 1970s, which promoted the acceptance as full equals all people living legally in Australia and recognised immigrants' legitimate desire to retain their languages and cultures; and
- **multiculturalism** current government policy, which began in the 1970s with the recognition that the presence of ethnic communities enriched Australian society and that special measures were warranted to remove the disadvantages suffered by all Australians, irrespective of their origins.<sup>(3)</sup>

## Settlement, Citizenship and Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is more than the mere presence of ethnic communities and tolerance of cultural pluralism. The institutions and structures of society must, for example, reflect and incorporate diversity. For this reason, there has been significant Government involvement to ensure that the development of our multicultural society is managed through a variety of settlement, citizenship and multicultural policies. Successive Australian Governments have believed that an absence of such policies can lead to the tendency, prevalent in many countries, for immigrants to become marginalised and ethnic minorities subject to discrimination.

Australian scholars have pointed out that there are a number of ways in which countries may deal with the phenomenon of migration for permanent settlement. At one end of the spectrum is a society which is open to settlement, the granting of citizenship, and gradual acceptance of cultural diversity, thus allowing the formation of ethnic communities, which can be seen as part of a multicultural society. At the other extreme, denial of the reality of settlement, refusal of citizenship and rights to settlers, and rejection of cultural diversity may lead to the formation of ethnic minorities, whose presence is widely regarded as undesirable and divisive.<sup>(4)</sup>

Australia has always been open to settlement and has generous provisions for the granting of citizenship.

From the moment legal immigrants arrive in Australia, they have almost all of the same rights and obligations as Australian citizens – exceptions being the right to vote and stand for public office, in some cases there may also be minor restrictions to immediate eligibility for some social services. Newcomers are, however, encouraged to become Australian citizens, with all rights and responsibilities fairly quickly. Initially, the qualifying period was five years of continuous residence, but Labor Governments reduced this to three years in 1973 and, in 1984 to two.

Members of ethnic communities therefore become voters and, as almost one in four Australians was born overseas and many more are second generation immigrants, they can muster significant political power. Ethnic communities have become very effective lobbyists over the years and, as a result, a far-reaching network of consultative bodies, special agencies, multicultural and ethnic media, and equal opportunity legislation has developed in Australia.

About 60% of immigrants take up the opportunity to become Australian citizens. It is realised that, even when citizenship is easily obtained, some immigrants are unwilling to give up their original citizenship for a variety of reasons – some symbolic (cutting ties); others practical (military service, land ownership, pension rights). Some communities have argued that an acceptance of dual citizenship may overcome these barriers. Australian legislation currently discourages dual citizenship. The Government has decided, however, that it is timely to re-examine citizenship legislation as the country heads toward the centenary of its political union in 2001, and I recently announced a Review to examine citizenship legislation, including the matter of dual citizenship.

A number of innovative practical services for a multicultural society have been developed in Australia over the past twenty years, fulfilling the third criteria of "gradual acceptance of cultural diversity". These are too numerous to list here, but I would like to cite two examples which are, to the best of our knowledge, unique in the world: the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and the Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS).

- *Translating and Interpreter Service*

TIS has been in operation for twenty years. Through it, the Government provides the services of 2000 professional interpreters covering more than 100 languages and dialects.

TIS operates a national, 24-hour, seven days a week telephone interpreting service on a toll free network, as well as on-site interpreting where telephone interpreting is inappropriate. The Service aims to provide, free of charge

- direct assistance to non-English speaking immigrants (including the translations of settlement related documents), regardless of their length of residence;
- a means for Government and community agencies to offer language assistance to their clients; and, at cost,
- commercial interpreting and translating services.

TIS telephone facilities allow nationally an immediate conversation between a non-English speaking inquirer, an interpreter, and the third person from whom a service is being sought by the inquirer.

- *Special Broadcasting Service*

The SBS is a national radio and television service which broadcasts in many languages. It represents the single largest area of expenditure by the Government in the implementation of its multicultural policy.

Like many aspects of multicultural policy, the SBS has enjoyed bi-partisan support. Its beginnings - radio - came with the Whitlam Labor Government, while SBS Television was a result of the Liberal Coalition Government.

SBS Radio was founded in 1975 with a staff of volunteer broadcasters and covering only the metropolitan areas of Sydney and Melbourne. Now a national network with professional staff, it still fulfils its original purpose of not only providing entertainment in 64 languages, but also information for newly arrived immigrants about their rights and responsibilities so that they can participate fully in Australian society. It also caters for those who have established themselves in Australia but maintain extensive personal and business links with their original homeland.

While SBS radio has always played a key role in the information field, programs tend to be only in the language of the ethnic group for which the program is intended. Consequently, such programs are generally not accessible or of interest to other groups.

SBS Television, on the other hand, had a clearly multicultural character from the outset. It commenced in 1980, making extensive use of quality overseas programs, which are screened in the original language with English subtitles. Its early news and current affairs slogan, "bringing the world back home", has remained the staple of the programming philosophy of the SBS. A recent review of broadcasting policy has resulted in an improved coverage of multiculturalism in Australia and provision of a diversity of programs accessible to the entire Australian community. It is now widely acclaimed as an innovative cultural, educational and information channel.

### **Multiculturalism under the Hawke/Keating Governments**

I do not wish to claim that multiculturalism is applauded by everyone in Australia all of the time. There have been periodic debates about the level and composition of our migrant intake and the policy of multiculturalism itself. Even as far as refugee policy was concerned, there was during the early 1980s talk of 'backlash' and 'compassion fatigue'.

The Hawke Labor Government, elected in 1983 with a strong multicultural and ethnic affairs platform, in 1984 found itself enmeshed in a public debate in which some had shifted the immigration argument towards social cohesion and the racial composition of society, and argued that the pace of Asian immigration was running ahead of public opinion. The Government rejected these claims, convinced that a minority view was being expressed.

– *Access and Equity Strategy*

Demonstrating how serious the Government was, it set its own house in order by introducing an Access and Equity Strategy. The strategy was to ensure that the Federal Government's policies reflect the multicultural nature of Australian society and that its programs and services are fairly available to all Australians. It imposed on all Federal Government agencies a set of formal requirements to ensure that clients who may face barriers of language, culture, race or religion receive equitable access to their entitlements and equitable service outcomes. All portfolios were initially required to produce three-year Access and Equity Plans which identified obstacles to equitable access and outcomes, and proposed means for overcoming them. Currently, annual reports of progress across all Federal departments and agencies are tabled in Parliament. They indicate that significant progress has been made, but that some departments are performing better than others.

The overall objective of the strategy, and indeed multicultural policies generally, is to ensure that all Australians, regardless of their first language, birthplace, religion, race or cultural heritage, have the same rights and opportunities. Cornerstone of the policy is the concept of social justice, which means that for all Australians there should be a fair distribution of economic resources; equal access to essential services such as housing, health care and education; equal rights in civil, legal and industrial affairs; and equal opportunity for participation in personal development, community life and decision-making.

Access and Equity is an instance in which the tools of economic analysis and cost-effectiveness are deployed for a social justice purpose as well as for an efficiency purpose. The Government sees Access and Equity as a commonsense means to ensure that all people receive a fair share of public resources. The strategy provides public sector managers with a mechanism to market their programs and services effectively and efficiently to clients who might otherwise fall outside their net.

– *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*

In 1987 Prime Minister Hawke further underscored his commitment to multiculturalism by creating within his own Department the Office of Multicultural Affairs and appointing an Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs. Together these two bodies were charged with developing a "National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia", which was adopted in 1989.

The agenda identified three key principles for multicultural policy:

- **cultural identity** – the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage, practice their religions and speak their languages;
- **social justice** – the right of all Australians to receive equal treatment and opportunities and the removal of any barriers which prevent this; and
- **economic efficiency** – the need to maintain, develop and effectively use the skills and talents of all Australians regardless of ethnic origin, and to make the best use of multicultural resources.

The dimensions of multiculturalism are expressed in the eight goals of the National Agenda (see end notes). They apply equally to all Australians, whether they are of Aboriginal, Anglo-Celtic or non-English speaking background; and whether they were born in Australia or overseas.

At the same time the National Agenda identifies some limits to multiculturalism such as that

- all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interests and future;
- all Australians should accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society – the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language, and equality of the sexes; and
- all Australians should accept the right of others to express and share their views and values.

When Prime Minister Hawke launched the National Agenda, he looked back over some of the difficulties along the way and said

We should recognise diversity for what it is – a great source of new talents and ideas, a catalyst for social dynamism, a true source of wealth in both its cultural and economic senses.

Some people see diversity as a threat to our social cohesion .... it is not diversity which creates weakness or discord. It is prejudice and intolerance that sow the seeds of divisiveness.

What the National Agenda made clear is that multicultural policy is not a partial one – it is not simply a concern for 'ethnic' Australians even if the policy is required because Australian society is ethnically diverse – rather that multiculturalism is for **all** Australians; the policy must serve all Australians. Moreover, the policy has three dimensions – cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency – which are integral components and must be reconciled.

Also, the National Agenda made it clear that the policy is a matter of "managing the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and the society as a whole"; the concern with comprehensive governance is explicit. Multiculturalism as public policy is increasingly seen by Government and the community as not only a matter for dealing with the special problems created by diversity, but also as an asset to be harvested in the interests of Australia as a whole; its economic as well as its cultural, social and political interests.

– *Productive Diversity*

Within the broad economic agenda, the priorities which stand out as particularly relevant for multicultural policy or as being particularly susceptible to a multicultural analysis or solution are

- the relevance of Australia's cultural diversity to the need to improve Australia's trade performance;
- employment prospects for workers of non-English speaking background in an era of industrial restructuring and at a time of high unemployment; and
- management of cultural diversity within the workplace.

While it is recognised that these are complex problems and cannot be addressed by multicultural policies alone, the Government in 1992 took the National Agenda a step further with the policy of "productive diversity". As Government policy, it recognises that the diverse linguistic, cultural and business skills of Australia's multicultural workforce are an asset in the country's efforts to compete in the global marketplace. When launching this policy, Prime Minister Keating urged Australians to "take advantage of the potentially huge national economic asset which multiculturalism represents" and emphasised the need to use effectively the skills and talents of all Australians to contribute to the country's economic efficiency and prosperity.

The policy is particularly relevant to three areas of business:

- trade – through the opportunities provided by diverse language and cultural skills, international networks, personal knowledge of other countries' markets and business practices;
- production – through ethnic communities representing valuable consumer 'niche' markets as well as testing grounds for potential export products; and
- management – through the opportunities to improve workforce productivity and creativity.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs in the Prime Minister's Department is taking a lead role in promoting this policy and working with government agencies and the business community in ensuring that Australia's multicultural resources are fully utilised.

– *Multicultural Olympics*

The success of Sydney's bid to host the Year 2000 Olympic Games, and the early promotion of the Games as the "Multicultural Olympics" has provided Australia with a magnificent window of opportunity for showcasing our multicultural success story. Events in Monte Carlo clearly showed that Australia has more to offer the world than sunshine, sand and sport – it is also a rich source of cultural diversity.

Mrs Keating's speech to the assembled IOC delegates demonstrated what Australia's multicultural advantage means. The wife of the Prime Minister, herself an immigrant from the Netherlands, pointed out how fortunate we are in that we have Australians who know how to make people feel at home – in their languages and with their cultures – wherever in the world our guests may come from:

Australia has taken the best of what millions of migrants have brought to their new home – and made it even better. Attitudes, languages, religions and foods mix easily with Australian friendliness and fairness. The result is a rich culture and a welcoming community.

Sydney's ethnic communities played an outstanding part in demonstrating this point in securing the bid – they invited IOC delegates into their homes to make them welcome and to give them a taste of Australia's multiculturalism.

The Federal Government will work closely with the relevant agencies in Sydney to ensure the continued involvement of ethnic communities in the lead-up to the Games and that the multicultural flavour will be maintained for Sydney 2000.

## Conclusion

In summary, as Australian public policy multiculturalism encompasses government measures designed to respond to societal diversity. It is a policy for managing the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole. It is about providing all Australians, regardless of their background, with the opportunity to fully participate in and contribute to Australia's development.

To us, this has been a recipe for success. Immigrants have contributed to Australian society and the economy in many ways, and as a nation we are immensely proud of the way in which the massive post-war influx of immigrants from Europe and Asia has been achieved without significant social conflict.

Continuing international population movements will increase the ethnic diversity of more and more countries. The model which has evolved in Australia and continues to develop here, is one tailored to our own circumstances. It is currently being observed by some Governments recognising that their own societies are changing. While there may be much that can be learnt from the Australian model, other countries must find their own way; if they look to foreign models for guidance, they must adapt them to meet their own circumstances and needs. Debates over how best to do so will shape the politics of many countries in the coming decades.

I understand that some 60 German social scientists have recently presented a framework for such a debate in the German context.<sup>(5)</sup> While some of its assumptions and recommendations are at great variance from the "Australian Model", there are also many which head in similar directions. I will be watching with great interest how the German debate will be advanced in the coming years.

Australia will play its part in the international discourse and, as a first step, the Government has decided to host an International Conference in 1995. We look forward to meeting with people from around the world who have an interest in these matters, be they representatives of Governments or political parties, NGOs, academia, or any other walk of life. I am sure that they will find a warm welcome in multicultural Australia.

## END NOTES

### EIGHT GOALS OF MULTICULTURALISM

1. All Australians should have a commitment to Australia and share responsibility for furthering our national interests.
2. All Australians should be able to enjoy the basic right of freedom from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity religion or culture.
3. All Australians should enjoy equal life chances and have equitable access to and an equitable share of the resources which governments manage on behalf of the community.
4. All Australians should have the opportunity fully to participate in society and in the decisions which directly affect them.
5. All Australians should be able to develop and make use of their potential for Australia's economic and social development.
6. All Australians should have the opportunity to acquire and develop proficiency in English and languages other than English, and to develop cross-cultural understanding.
7. All Australians should be able to develop and share their cultural heritage.
8. Australian institutions should acknowledge, reflect and respond to the cultural diversity of the Australian community.

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## REFERENCES

- (1) It may be of interest to *Forum* readers that, between 1945 and 1986, some 145,000 people arrived from Germany, comprising 3.2% of the migration intake during that time and being the 6th largest group of immigrants from non-English speaking countries.
- (2) Policies for Aboriginal peoples, while dealt with separately, broadly corresponded to the assimilation/integration phases. During the 1970s they were followed by policies of self-management and self-determination. Australian indigenous peoples are now articulating aspirations for greater self-government.
- (3) When we use the word "Australian" we do not just refer to those who formally hold Australian citizenship, but all persons legally resident in Australia.
- (4) S Castles/M J Miller, *The Age of Migration : International Population Movements in the Modern World*, The MacMillan Press, London 1993, p 26
- (5) K J Bade (Hrsg.), *Das Manifest der 60 - Deutschland und die Einwanderung*, Verlag CH Beck, Munich 1993