

Ethnic rights – Recommendations for a Multi-Cultural Australia

Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre Ethnic Action Movement - Draft Policies and Principles and Ethnic Rights - Recommendations for a Multi-cultural Australia Melbourne, Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre, 1973.

Ethnic Action Movement

Draft Policy and Principles

The Ethnic Action Movement fundamentally believes in the right of every group and each individual to preserve and develop their own culture and values within the general Australian context.

The Movement stands for a policy designed to encourage tolerance, respect and mutual appreciation among people of all cultural derivations. E.A.M. rejects uniformity as a desirable social goal because of the intolerance and mediocrity that this results in.

The right to maintain one's own cultural identity cannot merely be stated as desirable. It is a policy which the governments and people of Australia must foster and pursue actively.

E.A.M. maintains that a multi-cultural approach is the only appropriate form for the social reality of present day Australia. This is based on the knowledge that approximately one person in four is either a post-war migrant or the child of one.

Aims

To work for the acceptance of Australia as a multi-cultural society for the end of all racial and cultural discrimination and to ensure that all ethnic people participate in and contribute to Australia's social and political life.

Clarification

E.A.M. would work to:

1. Promote by all possible means the acceptance of multi-culturalism as a national principle of Australian society; and to take such steps as are necessary for the implementation of such a policy.
2. Oppose all forms of racial and cultural discrimination in Australia.
3. Press for the acceptance of responsibility by governments for the particular welfare of migrant people and ethnic communities, as is the privilege of all groups in society.
4. Ensure that migrant and ethnic people have an effective and significant say in determining the nation's priorities and policies, particularly, though not exclusively, legislation related to ethnic and migration questions.
5. Facilitate and promote creative cultural interchanges so that all cultural groups are encouraged to share their heritage with all other Australians in order to allow everyone to become aware of our cultural diversity and to provide a basis for mutual understanding and respect.

Policies

To pursue these aims, E.A.M. will work for a Ministry of Multi-Culturalism, for a permanent, independent Cultural Relations Commission and for co-operation and communication between all ethnic groups.

Clarification

1. To work for a Ministry of Multi-Culturalism

which would ensure, through permanent departmental staff and government grants, the development of an Australia as a truly multi-cultural nation. A ministry would ensure that considerable priority is given to all aspects of Australian cultural development.

2. In addition to the Ministry, to advocate the establishment of a permanent, independent Cultural Relations Commission to be comprised of representatives of the various ethnic communities. This body would not replace or subsume any other ethnic organisation but, as a government instrumentality, its task would be:

- a) To investigate all aspects of Australia's immigration policy, citizenship and the welfare of ethnic people.
- b) To act as a research and policy forming instrument - its work to be published at least annually in a comprehensive, public report and from time to time through occasional publications.
- c) To take responsibility for educating the wider Australian community towards an understanding and appreciation of different cultures, and to be responsible for the promotion of the various ethnic communities in their attempt to maintain themselves.

3. In order to prepare for the development of these bodies, E.A.M. will work towards:

- a) Developing a means of co-operation, at least for limited purposes between all ethnic groups and communities, possibly through a structured organisation or in the creation of effective channels of communication between the various bodies.
- b) Conducting seminars, conferences, training programs and other educational initiatives to inform Australians of the implications of multi-culturalism and to encourage and strengthen the ethnic communities

in propagating their values and heritage.

- c) Soliciting grants, financial assistance and other forms of support from governments, trusts, foundations, agencies and organisations in order to:
 - i) Undertake research and investigations into all aspects of cultural relations in Australia.
 - ii) Promote a climate of understanding through publications, T.V. and radio material etc., and to facilitate cultural interchange within the total Australian society.
 - iii) Assist local ethnic communities to maintain their own identity, to vigorously enforce their rights and to effectively participate in the social and political systems that affect them.

Platform

The specific goals of E.A.M. will be documented in a continuously updated version of "Recommendations for a Multi-Cultural Australia." (see below)

Clarification

Broadly it is envisaged that E.A.M. would work in conjunction and in co-operation with governments and government bodies, but also independently, to achieve the following broad reforms:

1. Assistance to newly arrived migrant people including social security, language training, information etc. The general principle here (as for all Australians) would be to provide economic and social security together with suitable orientation facilities as a necessary basis for migrant people to become Australian citizens.
2. Assistance to ethnic groups and communities to enable them to maintain their own culture,

heritage and identity. This would include financial assistance for cultural centres, interpreters, welfare officers, social workers, etc., scholarships for training bi-cultural professional workers, support for the ethnic press etc.

3. Assistance and legislation to enable the various ethnic communities to have access to the media, particularly the A.B.C., in terms of educational and cultural programmes that relate to the ethnic diversity of Australia.

4. Restructuring of the Victorian education system to ensure that migrant children have an equal opportunity in obtaining the benefits of education and that school curricula and facilities be related to the cultural reality of Australia, particularly within the inner city area.

Structure

The organisational structure of E.A.M. has not, and cannot at this stage be determined. It is expected that ultimately it would have representation from or access to, if possible, all ethnic groups and communities in Victoria. However, of necessity, it must be a broadly based organisation representing all ethnic, religious and national groups. It should also devise means whereby individuals can participate in its work.

Organisationally our aim would be to make E.A.M. financially self-sufficient so that the rights of ethnic people and their ability to participate on an equal footing with other Australian groups can be assured.

At some future date it may be appropriate to adopt a constitution to formalize the Movement. At present the need for this is not urgent.

Ethnic Rights - Recommendations for a Multi-cultural Australia

This paper represents a first draft of a platform on ethnic rights. It has been produced by the undermentioned people. We desire comment and criticism of this platform and ask that all correspondence be addressed to Arthur Faulkner, Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre, 124 Napier Street, Fitzroy (3065).

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For a variety of economic and historical reasons there has been a significant growth in the number and proportion of non-British migrants to Australia. In the census of 1947, 78% of the non-Australian born residents were British; by 1966 only 44% were British and it is expected that the 1971 census will show further reduction in the proportion of non-Australian residents who are British born. Frequently the assumption is made that Australia is a homogeneous British society.

It is appropriate to question whether government and social attitudes have kept abreast of the multi-cultural reality of Australia in the seventies.

The time is overdue for the people of Australia to become more aware of the rich tradition of the many cultures in Australia and to recognise

the cultural needs of migrant peoples. Australia's citizens come from almost every country in the world, and bring with them every major world religion and language. This cultural diversity endows all Australians with a great variety of human experiences. This heritage should be regarded as a treasure; Australia would be poorer if assimilation programmes were adopted which forced citizens to forsake and forget the cultures they have brought to Australia.

Australia is at present a multi-cultural society. Approximately one person in four is either a post-war migrant or the child of one, of whom 58% come from a non-British background. All Australian institutions and certainly government ones, should be structured to meet the reality of this cultural diversity.

Government attitudes and actions should make it quite clear that migrant people are Australian citizens in the full sense of the term, having, therefore, the full benefits, privileges and obligations of that status and having equal right with other sections of the community to have consideration taken of their special needs and requirements.

By accepting cultural pluralism Australia, as a nation, may develop a more critical open society and may be better able to adapt to rapid social change, particularly with regard to international relationships.

The most appropriate form of development for such a heterogeneous society is through a process of multicultural development in which the flourishing of all people's cultures is seen as essential not only for the fullest possible expression of their needs but also for the enrichment of Australia's heritage. Australia's immigration programme has been an integral part of Australia's economic and cultural development yet frequently migrant people are looked upon as liabilities to the rest of the community.

All people within the Commonwealth of Australia have a basic right to expect from their government or government authorities, an

adequate system of social security, education and participation in the political system and the means to act as responsible members of the community.

The following recommendations are reforms and rights which migrant people support (together with an increasing number of Australian people) and which can reasonably be asked of the general Australian community.

1. Citizenship

All people have a right to participate in the affairs of their community. In particular there is an obligation upon governments to consult with ethnic organisations, and representatives in regard to problems of immigration and citizenship. Further, in a multi-cultural society, citizens of diverse cultural backgrounds can reasonably expect that society through government should enable the various ethnic groups to preserve this cultural heritage to their own advantage and to the enrichment of Australian society.

To this end it is recommended:

A..

- (i) That a permanent, independent cultural commission be established.
- (ii) The commission to comprise representatives of various ethnic groups.
- (iii) That financial assistance be provided by government to enable the commission to adequately fulfil its functions.
- (iv) The purpose of the commission to be:
 - (a) To investigate all aspects of Australia's immigration policy, citizenship and welfare of ethnic citizens.
 - (b) To act as a research and policy

forming instrument of the migrant communities. The work of the commission to be published at least annually in a comprehensive, public report and from time to time through publications.

(c) To take responsibility for educating the wider Australian community towards an understanding and appreciation of different cultures, and to be responsible for the promotion of the various ethnic communities in their attempt to maintain their cultural identity.

B. Citizenship should be available to all Australian residents as a right upon request and after a minimum period of residence. Having been permitted to enter Australia, no person should be refused citizenship on account of past activities or of present attitudes or beliefs.

C. The government should investigate appropriate means whereby long term resident aliens can participate in the political life of Australia.

D. In particular State Government should amend section 73 (1) of the Local Government Act (preventing unnaturalised subjects from voting at local government elections) and section 52 (preventing unnaturalised subjects presenting as candidates) to permit migrant people to vote where they are otherwise qualified under the Act.

E. The Australian constitution should include a bill of rights providing protection for all people within Australia.

2. Education

We are clearly a multi-cultural community and our schools have a responsibility to help all children to develop their capacities to the full.

At present Education Departments have denied the special problems of schools with a high proportion of migrant children. In particular

the Federal Minister for Education (Mr. K. Beazley) has demonstrated that only 20% of children who need English tuition get enough of it, and that only 29% of the rooms used for migrant English classes were proper classrooms. (Australian April 6th. 1973).

An appropriate education system would be sensitive to the cultural diversity within the community. It could be a powerful instrument in breaking down cultural barriers. However education alone will be inadequate if there exists a wider social context where norms of discrimination are both widespread and institutionalised.

Recognising that substantial reforms in education policies are required, the following specific reforms are recommended:

- a) Teacher education should be developed which will enable all teachers to be more sensitive to and aware of different ethnic cultures and to help them to develop the necessary skills in teaching culturally and linguistically different children
- (b) (i) Curricula changes should be made to cope with cultural diversity particularly in social studies, history and geography courses (ii) Such courses should be designed to foster understanding of different ethnic traditions to take pride in membership of their race or ethnic group.
- (c) The languages and cultures of Australian citizens (eg. Greek, Italian, Turkish) should be normal parts of school curricula.
- (d) The Australian Broadcasting Commission should be encouraged to develop educational programmes to enable schools to provide such cultural studies.
- (e) A most urgent requirement is for specially trained migrant English

teachers, including provision of language laboratories and other teaching resources.

- (f) (i) Interpreter services should be available to schools where there is a proportion of non-English speaking pupils and parents. (ii) Material such as school notices and circulars should be printed in the parents' languages.
- (g) (i) Schools of mixed ethnic composition would benefit considerably by the employment of teachers from the ethnic community schools. (ii) Greater use could be made of teachers with overseas qualifications, if necessary providing further teacher training where qualifications are not fully adequate.
- (h) Liaison officers of ethnic origin should be appointed to work closely with families of migrant pupils to help them understand the school and to facilitate mutual understanding between the various ethnic groups.
- (i) Every encouragement must be given to individual schools to establish close co-operation with ethnic communities in their area.
- (j) The Education Department must embark on a policy to vigorously recruit teachers from the various ethnic communities and intensify efforts to recruit first generation immigrant students into teacher training.

3. Social Security

A. Housing

The Henderson study has demonstrated that all groups of recent migrants have a higher proportion of people in poverty than the population as a whole - Italian and Greek people faring worst.

Housing costs frequently impose severe difficulties on low income earners. Henderson's study showed that the percentage of migrants in poverty rises sharply after housing costs are allowed for.

The State Government should undertake to:

- (i) Make provision on a large scale of low interest loans to low income home buyers.
- (ii) Commission a thorough investigation into the conditions of householders who are renting privately. Attention to be paid to excessive rents, the "bond" system and the development of adequate safeguards to protect the rights of tenants.
- (iii) The government in its public housing programme should aim to provide a range of alternative types of houses and flats. In particular housing estates for low income people should not be built which provide housing and community facilities which are unacceptable by general community standards.
- (iv) Revise the procedures of the Housing Commission's housing standards section so that home owners will not be forced to make unwarranted repairs to homes after the houses have been passed at the time of purchase.

B. Pensions

The aim of social security policy should be to provide a guaranteed income for all persons living in Australia. Following from this the residence qualifications for pensions should be abolished and no-one should be denied a pension because he or she has not lived in Australia for a certain number of years.

C. Health

The Henderson, Harcourt and Harper study (People in Poverty) has shown that:

Many migrants find Australia's voluntary health system baffling and confusing.

Many recent migrants had no health insurance at all (75% of Italians and Greeks who had arrived since 1960 were uninsured; 98% of Greeks in the eighteen months prior to the study had no cover).

1. The following principles should guide reform of the health system:

- (a) The security of a free, adequate, universal and comprehensive health scheme is a basic right of every person in Australia regardless of his income, regardless of his citizenship and regardless of his length of residence in Australia.
- (b) Ultimately provision of health facilities is an obligation upon government.
- (c) Until an adequate system is implemented, health schemes should be allowed to continue only on the understanding that they take responsibility for the special problems of all sections of the community.

2. The following reforms should be implemented:

- (a) Explanatory information and application claims forms in all languages should be compulsory for all benefit schemes.
- (b) Health cover should be provided as a matter of course for all migrant people upon arrival to Australia and extended until such time as a person is securely established in a job. This provision should be regarded simply as one cost of the migration programme.
- (c) Trained interpreters should be available in all public hospitals and clinics and, where possible, to doctors in private practice.

- (d) Training of doctors, dentists, nurses and social workers should include education in the social situations of migrants and their cultural attitudes to medicine generally.
- (e) First generation migrant settlers should be given positive encouragement to undertake medical training.

D. General

Within the framework of the principles outlined under the citizenship, health and education sections, the following provisions should be made:

1. (i) All ethnic groups who so desire be provided with Grant-in-Aid social workers. (ii) Finance provided to cover the employment of necessary ancillary personnel by way of interpreters, office staff and facilities etc. (iii) Ethnic groups aided by government loan to establish centres in which they may meet and help new settlers.
2. (i) More day care centres preferably close to where mothers or fathers are working. (ii) Such centres developed to accommodate the norms of different ethnic groups. (iii) Migrant women to be employed at child minding centres where a high percentage of children are of migrant origin.
3. Trained interpreter services and facilities provided in all public hospitals, courts, schools, prisons, government departments, factories and workplaces.
4. Greater use made of ethnic press for disseminating information about Australian services and for public notices.

4. Industrial

A. Qualifications

- (i) State and Federal Governments should continue their investigations into the problem of recognition of overseas qualifications.
- (ii) As a general principle it should be accepted that overseas qualifications of equivalent standard to Australian, whether trade or professional, should be recognised and that where problems arise, suitable testing procedures be adopted together with retraining programmes designed to overcome what gap might exist.
- (iii) No trade, industry or profession should be permitted to adopt arbitrary and discriminatory rulings on overseas qualifications.
- (iv) Where migrant people are employed in professional or trade occupations without recognition of their qualifications, they should receive equal pay with qualified men and women.

B. (i) Provide adequate courses in English for all migrants, skilled, unskilled and professional, on arrival to Australia. (ii) Such classes should either be intensive over a suitable period and wages paid for that period, or continuous over a longer period and conducted during working hours.

C. Trade unions and associations are urged to encourage participation of migrant workers in industrial issues. Unions should provide translations of documents, articles and notices, employ appropriate ethnic organisers and attempt to obtain significant representation at all levels of union activity.

D. Wages must be adjusted to ensure that everyone is able to enjoy a standard of living

relative to prevailing community standards.
Further, working men and women and their families must be safeguarded from the consequences of unemployment, sickness, incapacity and redundancy.