

# Committee on Community Relations

Immigration Advisory Council Committee on Community Relations - Interim Report, August 1974 Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 1975, pp 1-8.

## Interim Report - August 1974

### Committee chairman - W. M. Lippmann

#### *Introduction*

The Committee was conscious, in approaching its inquiry, that large scale migration to Australia had been operating continuously for more than a quarter of a century during which some three million migrants had settled here. In general this had been achieved to the advantage both of the migrants and the community and without generating undue tensions. The Committee recognised that the community at large had sought to welcome migrants and many organisations and communities had adopted positive policies to this end.

2. Nevertheless, it was evident that some areas of concern remain from earlier less enlightened attitudes and policies. The Committee's task was that of identifying these, analysing them in terms of their manifestations and suggesting actions that could lead to their elimination.

3. The outstanding impression gained by the Committee in its studies was an appreciation that greater sensitivity to factors arising from the diverse social and cultural backgrounds of Australia's population is called for in almost all levels of our community if we are to achieve harmonious understanding and national cohesion among all who are, or aspire to be, Australian citizens. This desirable goal of national cohesion cannot be achieved through the extension of patronage by one group to another in the community; it can be achieved,

as it has been in numerous instances, only through the community accepting newcomers in a spirit of understanding and recognition of their right to equality of treatment and opportunity.

4. The Committee heard evidence of quite widespread community insensitivity to migrants' special needs and problems and particularly to their need to retain more than a vestige of their former culture. The Committee believed it is important for the community to realise that all people have a need and a right to the security of belonging to a group whilst still retaining the right to individuality and to access to the world about them. For migrants to feel secure in their adopted country they need firstly to feel secure in their emotional attachment to the cultural values that influence their behaviour. These values, invariably and obviously, are those of their former homelands.

5. Ethnic groups, therefore, should be seen by all the community to be a vital, integral part of the total community structure. They have a duty to preserve their own cultural heritages; they have an important role to play in the integration of their members into the total community; and they do not deserve to be so often adversely reflected upon as a result of press reports that highlight a person's nationality in the reporting of incidents involving migrants. The Committee agreed with the Tasmanian Migrant Task Force Committee when it reported to the Minister:

'Ethnic groups should be one of the Government's greatest assets for the successful integration of migrants. Much of the migrant's attitude to his new Australian role in society can be determined in the familiar environment provided by his own countrymen already established here.'  
(Migrant Task Force - Tasmania, Report to the Minister, December 1973.)

The importance of Government participation, where required, in the maintenance and encouragement of strong, viable ethnic groups was well recognised by the Committee.

6. The Committee's primary role was to inquire into discrimination against migrants. It discovered that very little *de jure* discrimination existed although it heard considerable evidence of the existence of types of discrimination referred to as 'institutional' and 'attitudinal'. Where aspects of discrimination did appear in statutes they generally took the form of a differentiation between people who had British status and those who did not, rather than between Australian citizens and others. The Committee, recognising that migrants encounter special difficulties, hardships and disabilities at various stages of their adjustment to the Australian community, has recommended several remedial measures of 'positive discrimination', e.g. Recommendations 23, 38-41 and 43. It is hoped that these measures specially directed towards migrant groups will enable them to achieve a greater measure of equality of opportunity in society.

7. The Committee looked, also, at exploitation of migrants but whilst hearing many allegations, found it difficult to quantify the extent of exploitation that existed. It was able, however, to say that lack of familiarity with Australian life made newly-arrived, especially non-English speaking, migrants vulnerable to exploitation and easier prey than Australians or British migrants to sharp practice.

8. The third aspect of the Committee's study concerned migrants' use of community services. As an interim, general conclusion, whilst awaiting the results of its specially-commissioned 'Survey of Migrants' Use of Community Facilities and Resources', the Committee was able to say that migrants seemed not to make as full use as was desirable of available community services. Whether the major reason for this was a lack of knowledge of the services or that the services were not orientated to cater for migrants' special needs was not yet clear. What was clear to the

Committee was that lack of English language ability and the difficulty of retaining adherence to their former culture were the greatest disadvantages suffered by migrants. They were hampered, too, in their adaptation to Australian life by the severe shortage of skilled interpreters available in Government Departments providing services to the public.

9. Although employment problems had not been accented as being of significant importance, the Committee heard opinions that, in the pre-migration stage, migrants needed to be better advised about their employment prospects in Australia. It viewed with favour, therefore, the new migrant selection procedures that were introduced in January 1973 and which were geared to overcome difficulties that formerly existed. The Committee noted, also, the advances that were being made in the recognition of overseas-obtained professional and trade qualifications. In the field of employment it appeared to the Committee there were two areas that required urgent attention. They were the need that existed for further training and retraining facilities to be available and the need for continuing research into issues involving migrants in industry.

10. Research seemed to be urgently needed, too, into inter-generation problems of migrants and particularly into the situation of second generation migrants. The Committee referred to conflicts claimed to develop between migrant children and their parents as the ability of the children to communicate in their parents' language became lessened. The preparation for transition of some migrant children from school to work was also viewed with concern; the Committee noted the experience of certain European countries where multi-lingual literature on problems inherent in that transition and on career opportunities was prepared for the benefit of both children and their parents. The Committee intends to study these issues further, particularly issues involving migrants in industry, and its Final Report will include recommendations based on this further study.

11. The Committee intends, also, to study issues involved in a programme of community relations appropriate for Australia which would commence with a programme of community education.

## **Recommendations**

For convenience and ease of reference the recommendations have been classified into various categories. Reference to the Committee's thinking that prompted the recommendations is included in the brackets following each one.

### **Civic and Community Issues**

1. That discrimination in legislation between British and non-British people who are not Australian citizens should be eliminated as far as possible (para. 3.1.9.06).

2. That, except to the degree that reciprocity exists with other Commonwealth countries, British subjects should not have the right of franchise in Parliamentary elections without acquiring Australian citizenship but, to avoid withdrawing any existing privileges from British\* already resident in Australia, that the Australian citizenship criterion should operate from a future date to be established (para. 3.1.9.06).

(\*Refers to people having the status of a British subject defined by Section 7(i) of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948-1973* as: 'A person who, under this Act, is an Australian citizen or, by a law for the time being in force in a country to which this section applies, is a citizen of that country has, by virtue of his Australian citizenship or his citizenship of that country, as the case may be, the status of a British subject.')

3. That the right to vote in Local Government elections should not be linked to citizenship or nationality (para. 3.1.9.08).

4. That Jury legislation should be amended to exclude requiring jury service duty of British subjects who are not Australian citizens (para. 3.1.9.09).

5. That the Immigration Advisory Council's past recommendation to the Minister that candidates for Australian citizenship should not be required to formally and publicly renounce their former allegiance is endorsed (para. 3.1.8.01).

6. That the nationality criterion governing eligibility for permanent appointment to the Public Services should be reviewed (para. 3.2.2.02).

7. That nationality should not be a criterion governing the right of professionally qualified people to practise in the professions (para. 3.2.4.03).

8. That community leaders and professional people be encouraged to inform themselves to a far greater extent about the cultures and backgrounds of the ethnic people around them and especially of those among their clientele (para. 3.3.2.08).

9. That people in responsible positions should be conscious of the need to avoid making public statements about migrants or migrant groups which are inimical to the development of harmonious community relations (para. 3.3.2.07).

10. That migrant language and culture studies be introduced into training courses of those professions, particularly teaching, social work, medicine and law, that involve contact with the public (para. 3.3.2.08 and 5.3.1.03).

11. That training courses for Police should include training that will give Police officers some understanding of the different groups that make up the community and of the effects of prejudice and discrimination upon the minority groups of the community (para. 3.3.2.11).

12. That within the expanding framework of low cost or free legal aid, the needs of migrants be given adequate consideration (e.g. the Australian Legal Aid Review Committee Report, A.G.P.S. February 1974, is published only in English) (para. 3.3.5.04).

13. That migrants without an adequate knowledge of English should have an immediate and absolute right to a skilled interpreter of their choice in every interrogation by the Police and in all courts of law (paras. 3.3.5.03 and 3.3.5.05).
14. That concerted effort should be made by State Governments to protect people from possible exploitation in matters such as housing and accommodation and Hire Purchase and by all community advisory bodies in encouraging migrants to seek expert advice in such matters before committing themselves (para. 4.4.2.04).
15. That the Citizenship and Settlement Services of the Department of Immigration be given an identity separate from the control or 'police-like' functions of the Department (para. 5.2.2.01). (This recommendation was formulated before the announcement that the migrant welfare and education activities of the former Department of Immigration would be taken over by the Departments of Social Security and Education.)
16. That the operation of the Workers' Compensation Scheme should be examined with a view to streamlining procedures and that multi-lingual information should be available to migrants about their rights under Workers' Compensation legislation and about the procedures to be followed in claiming compensation (para. 5.2.4.01).
17. That second generation migrants be encouraged to undertake social work courses (para. 5.3.1.03).
18. That payments under the 'Grant-in-Aid' social worker scheme be made to the welfare agencies concerned without relating them to the employment of a particular social worker employed by them (para. 5.3.1.03).
19. That planning for community development should be undertaken with the co-operation and involvement of ethnic communities and that the opportunity be given for migrant and ethnic community representation on community welfare and planning projects (para. 5.3.1.03).
20. That Government support to voluntary agencies engaged in promoting understanding and tolerance between different community groups be increased (para. 5.3.2.01).
21. That Government encourage the formation and activity of strong, viable ethnic groups and their appropriate integration in the structure of community organisations (para. 5.3.2.02).
22. That existing migrant organisations and clubs be used to channel help and information to migrants (para. 5.3.2.02).

### Interpretation/Information

23. That interpreters be allowed to assist non-English speaking migrants in the driving licence testing situation in all States and that standard international road signs be adopted throughout Australia (paras. 3.4.02 and 3.4.03).
24. That official Government forms, especially those of the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service, be printed in the major migrant languages (para. 3.5.2.01).
25. That training institutions offer facilities for the training of skilled interpreters to form a cadre of professional interpreters available for employment in Government Departments, private enterprise, hospitals, courts, prisons and in the community generally (para. 3.5.2.01).
26. That the one-to-one 'home tutor' scheme of teaching English be extended to prisons and that a more adequate interpreting and translating service be available in prisons (para. 3.5.2.02).
27. That detailed information about available benefits and community services be prepared for use by organisations working with migrants and that a compendium of that information in migrant languages be provided to migrants on entry to Australia (paras. 3.5.4.01 and 5.2.3.01).

28. That official letters and documents of Local Government authorities and Government Departments offering services to the public, where considered appropriate, should be stamped in at least Greek, Italian, Serbo-Croat, Turkish, French, Spanish and Arabic, with the sentence 'if you need this translated, please tick language required and return to ...' (para. 3.5.4.01).

29. That provision be made for post-arrival counselling, particularly through the establishment of orientation courses, to inform migrants about the community in which they are going to live (para. 3.5.5.01).

30. That more multi-lingual information on legal transactions should be available and contracts should be duplicated in migrants' own languages or translated so that migrants understand them (para. 4.4.2.03).

31. That multi-lingual welfare officers should staff information centres to give migrants expert advice and help (para. 5.3.1.03).

### **Employment**

32. That retraining schemes and schemes to train migrants further in their own occupational fields to allow them to gain status commensurate with their personal capacity be developed (para. 3.2.5.05).

33. That the Arbitration Inspectorates of State Departments of Labour be vigilant in their factory inspections to ensure that under-age migrant children are not employed and that non-English speaking migrants are not exploited in employment (para. 4.3.02).

34. That the Commonwealth Employment Service introduce a job 'placement' instead of the job 'referral' service now offered and that more personal attention be given to migrants by the Service officers (para. 5.2.3.03).

### **Health and Welfare**

35. That an in-depth study be made of currently

appropriate conditions for age and invalid pensions, maintenance guarantees and portability aspects of pensions by the Department of Social Security in consultation with social workers familiar with the problems experienced by migrants in these matters (para. 3.3.6.2.02).

36. That members of different ethnic groups well versed in health and welfare services help medical personnel to understand the problems that migrants face in entering the health system and in seeking assistance (para. 3.3.6.4.02).

37. That unassisted migrants granted permanent residence and suffering tuberculosis should be eligible for the tuberculosis allowance without a qualifying period of residence in Australia (para. 3.3.6.4.04).

38. That multi-lingual literature on after-care aspects of specific diseases, such as of the heart, diabetes, etc., be prepared for use by migrants (para. 3.3.6.4.05).

### **Education**

39. That migrant children's ability be regularly tested in their own language to ensure that they are not kept in lower-stream classes through lack of opportunity afforded them to show their ability (para. 3.3.4.02).

40. That teachers should acquire, as part of their training, the expertise necessary to recognise, and cater for, the special educational needs of migrant children (para. 3.3.4.09).

### **Media**

41. That the Australian Broadcasting Control Board and the Australian Broadcasting Commission undertake studies in the field of broadcasting in languages other than English to determine the best means by which radio and television can contribute to the maintenance of ethnic languages and cultures (para. 3.3.3.08).

42. That the Australian Film Development Corporation should encourage the production

of films that inform Australians about one another, including films about the problems of migrants and their contribution to Australian life (para. 3.3.3.08).

43. That greater use of foreign languages and of programmes depicting migrant cultures be made in the media and that a more thorough use of the media be made to inform migrants about Australian life and to explain migrant culture to the community of which the migrants are now part (para. 3.3.3.08).

## Housing

44. That ethnic groups should be encouraged to introduce or extend co-operative housing schemes (para. 3.3.1.14).

## **Part 1** **Structure of inquiry**

### 1.1 Background of inquiry

1.1.01 At its 68th meeting on 19th March 1973, the Immigration Advisory Council considered a report by the former Department of Immigration on identified areas of discrimination against migrants and decided to appoint a Committee on Discrimination to enquire into them.

Subsequently, the then Minister for Immigration, the Hon. A. J. Grassby, M.H.R., decided that the Committee's role should be broadened to have it study also the exploitation of migrants and the extent to which migrants used available community services. Accordingly, on 17 April 1973, he announced that the Committee on Discrimination should become the Committee on Community Relations and its Terms of Reference should be:

1. Examine in detail community relations as they affect the integration of migrants, with particular emphasis on -

- (a) areas of discrimination
- (b) exploitation of migrants; and

(c) the extent to which migrants make use of community resources.

2. Identify sources of discrimination as they relate to -

- (a) legislative provisions;
- (b) administrative decisions;
- (c) prejudice on the part of individuals or organisations; and
- (d) general community attitudes.

3. Enquire into allegations of exploitation concerning in particular employment, housing, and commercial practices (including hire purchase).

4. Investigate the extent to which the use or non-use by migrants of community resources is affected by -

- (a) ignorance of available resources or communication problems;
- (b) differences between community resources in Australia and those of migrant source countries and migrants' attitudes to them;
- (c) structure and orientation of Australian community services;
- (d) cultural and social experiences of migrants;
- (e) other causes.

5. Consider matters referred by Task Forces.

6. Consult as necessary with representatives of ethnic groups, community agencies and organisations, Commonwealth, State and Local Governments and academic and other experts.

7. Report on the foregoing and suggest measures to remove or ameliorate undesirable attitudes or practices revealed by the inquiry.

1.1.02 Mr Grassby said he 'had taken urgent action to establish the Committee because he had discovered serious discriminations in both government and private service which were completely unacceptable against the concept of building a united family of the nation based on the equality of all citizens.

'The fact is that in Australia today all citizens are supposed to be equal, but I have found that in practice some are more equal than others.'

1.1.03 He continued, 'I have pledged myself to the removal of all remaining discrimination in the Australian community and I have decided that the best means of achieving this quickly in relation to migrants is to ask the Immigration Advisory Council, which advises the Government on all aspects of settlement and citizenship, to broaden the role of one of its committees, the recently formed Committee on Discrimination, to enable it to undertake this important assignment.

'As the Committee's terms of reference indicate, its inquiries will be detailed and wide-ranging and I feel confident that it will receive the fullest support from all sections of the community in helping to identify and remove discrimination, in pin-pointing areas of exploitation and in examining ways in which migrants might make fuller use of community services available.

'In the area of discrimination alone, my Department has recently documented some practices which I found it hard to believe could exist in Australia in the 'seventies.

'These include:

- the wide variation that exists between the Commonwealth and the States for
- appointment of non-citizens to the public service;
- advertisements of the kind which appeared in the "Situations Vacant" column of the Northern Territory News on 27 December

1972:

"Cleaners female required for evening shift, 5.00 pm. to 10.00 pm. Must be Australian or British subject."

- the situation of a Dutch-born member of the Citizen Military Forces who, because he was "not British-born", was transferred from the Royal Australian Signals to an Infantry unit, as a "security risk".
- the Commonwealth Government's stipulation, in relation to certain Northern Territory Leases Ordinances, that non-British subjects must obtain the Administrator's approval before they can secure an interest in land covered by these ordinances.

'These are just a few examples of the discrimination and prejudice about which I am so concerned.'