

'WHITHER MULTICULTURALISM?'

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Madam Chair, ladies and gentlemen,

In accepting your kind invitation to deliver this 10th Annual Lalor Address, I have pondered on the role and significance of leaders like Peter Lalor in historic events such as the Eureka Stockade. Without subscribing to a great man theory of history, it is undeniable that the ideals, vision, sense of mission and leadership of persons like Peter Lalor have played a vital role in shaping and influencing the passage of history.

It is said that Lalor was 'a digger's leader who fought with courage, determination and passion for the truth as he saw it' - what is more, his loyalties were to principle rather than individuals. As one who endorses these sentiments and ideals, I believe, as Noam Chomsky I once said, that the responsibility of intellectuals in our type of societies is to speak the truth - more particularly to discover through diligent and honest inquiry the truth, however pleasant or unpleasant this may be. It is in this same spirit that I humbly embark on this exploration of an ideal which has been actively pursued for over a decade in Australian society.

We have allowed multiculturalism of a cautious, muddled and hopeful kind to develop since the early 1970s. It has become part and parcel of the ruling rhetoric and may still be a part of bipartisan consensus. It was 'cautious' because multiculturalism never pressed the ruling class, the top echelons of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment; nor did it put at risk the security and complacency of 'middle Australia'. It was born

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'muddled' because its assumptions, goals and rationale were never spelt out clearly. Witness, for example, the unwillingness of the multicultural 'New Testament' - the Galbally Report - to define multiculturalism, and the tendency of governments to articulate the principles of multicultural social policy in Blue, Green and White Papers! Perhaps there was good reason for this reluctance as public exposure may have revealed some of the real difficulties and dilemmas inherent in the concept of multiculturalism, especially as it is translated into social policy. And lastly, it was 'hopeful' and still remains so because it is seen as being innovative, humane, enriching and consistent with liberal-democratic values.

But, alas, all this may now be changing with the advent of establishment 'high priests' like Blainey who explicitly advocate a return to the doctrines and policies of a bygone era. It is surely time for some sanity and balanced thinking; we urgently need to take stock; it is time for another hard look at the concept of multiculturalism. Hence, in answering the title of my address 'Whither Multiculturalism?', I will endeavour to think aloud and ponder questions that have been asked or need to be asked about multiculturalism as a social concept. If my reflections may sometimes seem heretical, Madam Chair, I seek refuge in the privilege of this occasion and invoke the spirit of Peter Lalor and his colleagues at Eureka Stockade to challenge orthodoxy and subject to scrutiny some of the assumptions of multiculturalism.

It is needless for me to remind this cosmopolitan and varied audience that we live in a markedly heterogeneous society whose social and cultural diversity as an immigrant country is only surpassed by one or two other countries. However, the concept of multiculturalism, more often than not, refers not to this demographic

reality, but to normative prescriptive assertions about ways in which we as a society should be organised to respond to this social diversity and, in particular, to help newcomers establish themselves in society and be received by their new hosts. It is usually employed as a social concept which serves as a 'marshalling ideology' for providing effective and worthwhile social policies and regulating social relationships, especially between migrants and hosts.

The main thesis of this address is to argue that the orthodox philosophy and rationale of multiculturalism which is, in fact, a shorthand for 'cultural pluralism', may be ill suited to the emerging needs of Australian society. My remarks serve to call into question the thrust and validity of widely prevalent models of multiculturalism and also serve to raise doubts about the value and utility of multicultural social policies for its beneficiaries, consumers, and members of the wider society. In offering this critique I do not wish to throw out the baby with the bath water. On the contrary, I wish to reassert and reaffirm the intrinsic merits of the concept provided it is interpreted differently. I also wish to indicate desirable changes in emphasis and direction of multiculturalism and its attendant public policies, such that they can become more explicit and properly attuned to the needs of the emerging society, particularly migrants and ethnic minorities.

Multiculturalism is a relatively recent phenomenon - barely ten years old. It is basically an ideology of migrant settlement which now extends to the whole of society. In earlier years this policy was strictly assimilationist and rigidly paternalistic in that alien immigrants had, in the interests of a stable, cohesive and healthy society, to shed their cultural identity and merge fully into the mores of Australian society which was mainly

a question of 'anglo-conformity'. Although the rigidity of this orthodoxy was gradually relaxed in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of the recognition of the clearly dysfunctional aspects of hard line assimilationist policy, there was no real change in attitude in government circles nor the public at a large. It is of passing interest to note that Blainey has recently called for a return to the old policy of assimilation with the proviso that 'we should be a little more tolerant'!<sup>2</sup>

However, by 1972 the incoming Labor Government had enshrined a totally new concept of migrant settlement by discarding the language and philosophy of assimilationism and embarking on an exciting new course, from which I believe there is no return.

Let me on this occasion humbly salute and pay tribute to the vision, dedication and evangelical zeal of a great Australian, Al Grassby, who fought and continues to fight at great personal cost, injustice, prejudice and discrimination. I had the great honour and privilege in those heady days of change, reform and excitement to work with Al in the pursuit of a fair and just Australia for all Australians. I reaffirm with pride and conviction the basic principles for which we stood and fought for in those days. I wish to argue this evening that we may have lost our way somewhat in the myriad pathways we have traversed since the days of Grassby, through Galbally and now, alas, Blainey beckoning us back again to clogged alleyways of yesteryear. Perhaps we can go forward by looking backward!

The reasons for this dramatic shift in policy from assimilation to multiculturalism, especially the willingness of the 'dominant groups' in society to accept these changes are, I believe, still clouded in mystery. What did emerge and prevail in the Grassby era was a doctrine of cultural pluralism, expressed as

multiculturalism. According to the new concept of a multicultural society, largely borrowed from Canada, the host society permitted, and even encouraged (via Al's 'family of nations'), members of migrant groups to cultivate cultural differences - differences in ways of thinking, acting and feeling about common social objects - and to have mutual respect, tolerance and understanding amongst each other for 'cultural difference'.

'Ethnicity' became a key element of the emerging multicultural society. This concept denotes a 'sense of peoplehood', a feeling of belonging and sharing in a common culture, language, way of life, nationality or religion. What it does is to differentiate a collectivity by its possession of shared values, physical and cultural diacritica (songs, religious icons, etc), as well as a common ancestry and geographical origin. By whatever physical or cultural attributes we demarcate ethnic boundaries, ethnicity is maintained through a process of self-ascription and ascription by others. It is essentially a subjective process of status identification whose salience and value varies from individual to individual.

However, when ethnicity becomes an 'organisational strategy', i.e., as a recognisable ethnic group or collectivity, it tends to satisfy two major objectives. One relates to the expressive dimension and highlights the need, actual or symbolic, for group continuity and belonging on the part of its members. The other concerns the satisfaction of instrumental needs for economic, political and social power, in particular, social environments. This distinction between expressive and instrumental dimensions of ethnicity is, I believe, extremely valuable and significant in understanding the evolution of multiculturalism and appraising its fate in contemporary Australian society. Multicultural policies will be



fashioned largely on how these two facets of ethnicity and ethnic groups are viewed by consumers and policy makers and, in particular, the relative importance attached to the concerns and issues that underlie these two facets of ethnicity or cultural difference.

Australian multiculturalism has for a variety of largely political reasons which I do not propose to elaborate here, espoused a 'culturalist' view of multiculturalism with emphasis on the 'expressive' dimensions of ethnicity. In short, this was an 'ethnic identity' model of multiculturalism, highlighting the need for cultural enhancement, maintenance and what I would call broadly an 'equality of respect' approach to multiculturalism. As I have argued elsewhere<sup>3</sup>, the standard bearer of this model of multiculturalism, a cultural pluralism predominantly concerned with 'ethnicity' in its expressive dimensions as a cultural phenomenon, is represented by the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs. It has, as observed in the Cass Report<sup>4</sup> in its review of the work of the Institute, pursued a policy of pluralism which highlights a 'life styles' view of multiculturalism - strengthening in the process the reality of the ethnic dimension in Australian social and cultural life.

Wittingly or unwittingly, this kind of multiculturalism has not only argued for a primordialist view of ethnicity as something which has intrinsic vitality regardless of context but also, unfortunately, elevated one element of culture, language, as the main pillar of multiculturalism, so that multiculturalism is often narrowly and, I believe, falsely equated with multilingualism. The logic of the argument which, according to some authorities, dating back to Herder<sup>5</sup>, is that 'language expresses the collective experience of the groups'.

Without buying into the pros and cons of this complex and vexed issue, all one needs to say is that Australian multiculturalism has, over the past few years, especially in its manifestations during the Galbally/Fraser era, inflated the role of language as a 'cultural maker' to the relative exclusion of other facets of ethnicity such as religion or family networks. Perhaps the release of the Senate Report on a National Language Policy may provide us with a clearer and more balanced appraisal of the place of language in a multicultural society.

This 'culturalist' interpretation of ethnicity needs to be recognised and clearly understood as a first generation response. New settlers sought social support, self-respect and dignity by identifying positively with their cultural heritage. As such it is perfectly defensible and functional; it deserves to be applauded as a worthy policy strategy for alleviating the sense of alienation, rejection and cultural exploitation felt by culturally different newcomers.

Superimposed on this strand of multicultural thinking was the plea for unity and social cohesion which emerged especially from the influential writings of Professor Zubryzcki. Thus, a characteristic element of 'cultural pluralism' throughout the last decade has been the insistence on unity and social cohesion, while allowing for diversity. Social cohesion, it was argued, had to be safeguarded at all costs by a universal acknowledgement and acceptance of the commonalities of the political system such as language, the legal system and political structures. Hence, the extent of variation permitted was invariably constrained by these common factors. For this reason one might say that an element of partial 'assimilationism' inevitably resides in cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, because all migrants are expected to learn to function effectively in the common and universal aspects of society.

These enshrine 'core' social and political values whose meaning and validity lies buried in the culture and history of the dominant groups in society. Put differently, this means that in specified and significant ways the dominant groups will continue to exert pressures for 'assimilation' of this sort. Personally, I do not think there is any politically realistic model of multiculturalism that can avoid this. If for no other reason, such incorporation of newcomers is in the long-term interests of their 'life chances'.

The critical issue here, of course, is the need to distinguish 'cultural' from 'structural' pluralism. To subscribe to any form of structural or social pluralism is to concede the right of cultural or other groups in society to develop separate structures or modes of functioning. Clearly in its extreme form such a point of view carries the risk of a segmented society and the potential for conflict and division. Despite this caution, there are numerous instances of the development of 'ethnic structures' at the primary group level of social organisations, especially in the 'private domain' of social existence. They are evident mostly in the efforts of ethnic groups to maintain their separate customs, languages, religions and diets. Additionally, of course, extensive lobbies exist today in the public domain campaigning for 'ethnic media', 'ethnic schools' and ethnically based welfare structures. But this is quite a different issue to the maintenance of ethnic structure, e.g. take ethnic churches, all of which are in the private arena. Consequently, scholars such as Ian Burnley<sup>6</sup> pose the question as to whether it is possible to maintain separate customs, languages, and media and not develop a kind of structural pluralism.

For some time the issue of cultural versus structural pluralism is not easily resolved because the integrity of ethnicity and viability of ethnic groups depend on the existence of 'ethnic structures'. The exact nature of these 'structures' remains unclear. For example, do we permit ethnic specific structures in the delivery of social services, including education? And, if they are funded fully or subsidised by the state, what are the justificatory arguments for such a departure from the accepted principles of a nation-state? Surprisingly, in the absence of clearly enunciated and well-argued policies, we have permitted, albeit reluctantly, ethnic structures to exist more in the private domain than in the public arena. The issue is simply one of the tension that resides in the juxtaposition of private and public interests within these ethnic structures in some versions of cultural pluralism. Thus it is argued that the private interest of ethnicity, e.g., language maintenance, cannot be mounted at public expense if it is at variance with the conventions determined by the dominant majority of groups.

For these reasons alone, one of the urgent issues that multiculturalism of the 1980s must be prepared to face is how much structural pluralism Australian society is willing to maintain and legitimise in its pursuit of cultural pluralism. For example, do we accept ethnic education or media structures being maintained at public cost? And if so, on what grounds is such an allocation of resources to be justified? The arguments for and against particularism and universalism in matters of public policy such as the media still remain with us. It is hoped that this question will be answered clearly and unambiguously in the forthcoming Special Broadcasting Service Review. We need to move away from the rhetoric of multiculturalism and spell out realistically what such a policy entails in real terms, as costs and benefits.

Critics of this kind of multiculturalism and multicultural policies, drawn from within and outside the multicultural movement, from the left and right, express disquiet for a variety of reasons. Some argue that the greater accommodation afforded by society for the expression of cultural lifestyles, evident in periodic 'celebrations of ethnicity', may simply be another manifestation of 'privatisation' of social behaviour, and merely reflects the greater tolerance evident for varying life styles, not just ethnic behaviour. Accordingly, these critics argue that the so-called tolerance of ethnicity has done little to change the hegemony and cultural dominance of dominant groups in society.

Others argue that these views are also flawed from a policy perspective to the extent that ethnic groups are dissimilar in several respects, for example, they vary in size, relationship to the economic system, and also in intensity of affective tie. Further, each group does not represent a cultural whole. There is evidence of considerable fragmentation between 'traditionalists', i.e., those for whom ethnic identity is central, and 'transitionalists' for whom the importance of ethnic identity is situationally determined. Indeed, second generation immigrants who are prone to see themselves as 'transitionals' or ethnic marginals may be said to have a greater measure of what Herbert Gans<sup>7</sup> calls 'symbolic ethnicity', that is, a nostalgic allegiance to the old-world culture and a love for and pride in a tradition without necessarily belonging to an ethnic group. When this occurs it is usually a voluntary private matter not necessarily linked with ethnic group membership. 'It can be donned or discarded as preference dictates', say Roberts and Clifton.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of a theory of cultural pluralism one is also compelled to ask what rights ethnic groups enjoy by virtue of their ethnicity? Hence, they question whether they have collective rights relating to the maintenance of their culture. Interestingly, the existence of such particularistic collective rights is a matter of controversy. For one thing, it is important to determine whether these cultural rights belong to individual members or collectively to the group.<sup>9</sup> It is, at best, an untested and unexamined assumption of social and political theory which warrants urgent scrutiny because of the entitlement to benefits claimed on the basis of such rights. Barbara Falk (in an, as yet, unpublished paper) points out that the distinction in political theory between rights sans phrase, or rights which are unqualified and rights prima facie, referring to those which may conflict with other rights, may be central to this issue of cultural rights of ethnic groups and their claims on the state. In any event, what multiculturalism and cultural pluralism clearly assert is the guarantee that the state will not interfere in the legitimate cultural activities of these groups.

The question as to whether the state should take positive measures to protect ethnic cultures is an entirely different issue on which there is no agreement among legal scholars who interpret Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which is clearly addressed to the issue of cultural diversity.

A related and equally contentious issue is the status of the doctrine of relativism which is tacitly, if not explicitly, evoked to justify some aspects of cultural pluralism. It is sometimes erroneously argued by advocates of cultural pluralism that, by applying the touchstone of 'relativism', all values may be regarded as being equally important. This is a misguided view which, as E. Gellner<sup>10</sup> rightly observes, fails to recognise that there

are endless varieties of relativism. The most quoted variety is that of 'sociological relativism' which merely states that 'convictions vary with the milieux in which they occur'. However, it is normative or moral relativism which insists that something which occurs in a milieu is rightly so even in the absence of universal criteria.

Without engaging in a debate about the deeply complex ethical and moral issues involved, all we need to point out is that the acceptance of cultural diversity cannot be taken to mean the blanket endorsement of all values. We need with any doctrine of cultural pluralism to determine the boundaries of acceptance and rejection by agreeing on the shared values which are inherent in a particular nation-state. For surely, the promotion of shared values is the basis of the nation-state. As Lord Acton<sup>11</sup> observed the real challenge of 'unity in diversity' is to reconcile sectional interests and demands with those of the centralised state by granting a degree of tolerance and autonomy to its constituents, be they national groups or cultural communities. What we need to recognise in relation to the pursuit of cultural pluralism is the problematic nature of the modern nation-state with its pressures towards uniformity and centralisation and the insistence on common sentiments, values and a common cultural and political community. Yet, as a Canadian writer, Joel Novek<sup>12</sup>, has rightly pointed out, looking back to Lord Acton's lesson that 'the effort to force everyone to live the same way can be far more divisive than the acceptance of whatever differences do exist'. This only serves to underline the persistent paradox of cultural pluralism - the need to reconcile the centripetal tendencies of the nation-state with the centrifugal forces of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism.

But a more telling and forceful criticism is that multicultural policies and programs which stress the freedom to choose life styles - a romantic version of pluralism centred around promoting emotional security, self-identity and self-esteem - confuse two related but distinct aspects of social functioning and social relations. Herein lies the crucial significance of distinguishing between what some writers in Australia and Canada have aptly termed 'life styles' and 'life chances'.

Given the increasing commitment of public funds to this kind of multiculturalism - a commitment which, in some cases, has increased more than three fold over the past five years - we are led us to ask who has benefitted most from the allocation of social resources. There is no doubt that some pressing social and welfare needs of ethnic minorities have been met by public funds. At the same time, some sections, especially the ethnic petit bourgeois elite, have gained at the expense of their wider community by government subsidisation of their activities and co-option into the power system.

Similarly, Moodley<sup>13</sup> shows that in the Canadian scene too it is the 'professional ethnic cultural entrepreneurs, and a coterie of academics' who have benefitted most from multiculturalism and 'the big business of culture'.

The retreat via multiculturalism and ethnicity into the private domain of social functioning with an overarching emphasis on the right to choose one's 'life style', may be partially beneficial but overall at the expense of pursuing the issues of one's 'life chances' in the public domain for the vast majority of members of ethnic minorities. As a result, issues which in the long run must focus on the struggle for equality, fairness and



justice have tended to be ignored. Consequently, multiculturalism as it has been practised so far is to some a 'red herring' which diverts attention from the real issues of inequality, deprivation and discrimination in the public domain.

It is in this context that one is forced to consider the instrumental needs of ethnic groups and begins to generate an alternative model of ethnic groups as minority groups.<sup>14</sup> In this context, it is worth reminding ourselves that the late Jean Martin<sup>15</sup>, a pioneer in the study of multiculturalism, whose brilliant insights still ring true and warrant reiteration, argued forcibly that a key feature of an ethnic group was its 'minority status'. In other words, they are groups which are singled out for differential and perjorative treatment by the majority on the grounds of their 'ethnicity' based on their physical or cultural attributes. As a result, they tend in varying degrees to be stigmatised, oppressed and discriminated as regards their fundamental rights. Therefore, as status-devalued groups, their ethnicity has to be seen as being more instrumental than expressive. It is in this way that we come to view ethnic groups acting as 'interest groups' cutting across ethnic affiliations, operating in the public domain and endeavouring to cater to the needs of those who feel disprivileged and relegated to a subordinate position in society.

In brief, what is being advocated is that a 'minority group rights' approach to multiculturalism must begin to see multiculturalism not as an end in itself but as an ideology for change. As one Canadian writer put it vividly, 'cultural adherence becomes a vehicle for mobilisation and a voice for expressing grievances'<sup>16</sup>. Such a 'social structural' approach to multiculturalism must therefore address itself to issues of unequal power relations, access, equity and participation and as a matter

of priority, by focusing on the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity in seeking to understand, remove or ameliorate disadvantages afflicting ethnic minorities. One thing, however, stands out: the nature and causes of ethnic inequality, deprivation, exploitation and disadvantage have to be viewed as 'structural inequalities' which affect ethnic minorities disproportionately. While we may entertain different views about the exact nature and extent of these disadvantages, there is no doubt that a large proportion of 'migrants' suffer economic and social disadvantages and that these are directly related to their position in a segmented labour market.

Here in essence lies the sharp difference between these two competing versions of multiculturalism which have evolved over the last two decades. One version, the 'ethnic identity model' characteristic of Galbally and the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, abounds in a narrowly 'cultural' view of multiculturalism and sees the continued preservation of ethnic cultures, the maintenance of ethnic identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, as its primary policy goals. The fact of 'ethnicity', in particular, as a primordial sentiment, as a sense of affective belonging, dominates this point of view. 'Expressive' multicultural policies - such as those pertaining to the ethnic media and multilingual educational programs form the bulk of multicultural social policies.

The alternative which we have termed the 'minority group rights model' adopts a decidedly more 'structural' and 'political' approach. It views ethnic groups as ethnic minorities and emphasises the instrumental aspects of ethnicity while not denying the continued existence of something akin to 'symbolic ethnicity'. This model of multiculturalism is dominated by the need to articulate the social, economic and political aspirations and interests of



members of ethnic groups, in particular, their desire for material gratification, and this includes their fullest participation in society via access to political power and its attendant rewards and benefits.

The goal of multicultural policy in this approach is one of uplifting migrants, easing their adjustment, and giving them equal access to the services of society. To this end it will need to pursue policies for migrant workers, welfare rights and enhancing educational opportunities and, importantly, combating racism and discrimination. In short, according to this approach, the rationale for multiculturalism is not one of preserving heritage and safeguarding ethnic honour, but more a question of 'the instrumental and pragmatic justification of diversity' by highlighting issues of equality and social justice.

We need to remember as Weale<sup>17</sup>, has observed, that we are dealing not just with 'procedural equality' but also 'substantive equality'. Equality of treatment, the right to standard treatment, or the notion of equal chances for those with equal qualifications of the sort guaranteed by law. Herein lies the crucial role of legislation in multicultural policies. But more difficult to achieve is, of course, 'substantive equality', the equality of distribution - or the claim for fair shares and rewards. In satisfying the claims of ethnic minorities for equality we need to bear in mind these two related but distinct aspects of equality and consider carefully the need to evolve policy strategies and programs relevant to both.

The choice between these alternative models, or a mixed version of multiculturalism, is not just a matter of ideology but one dictated by changed circumstances and constantly changing needs of ethnic minorities themselves. I believe that the 'ethnic identity model' we have

professed so far in the name of cultural pluralism is not merely flawed conceptually but has outlived its attractiveness as a characteristic 'first generation adaptation strategy'. There are several factors pertaining to the contemporary and emerging social reality, which would appear to favour the adoption of a 'minority groups rights' model of multiculturalism. For our purposes it will suffice to identify three such considerations which are particularly significant.

Let us turn to look briefly at each of these factors in turn and consider ways in which a socially responsive and meaningful model of multiculturalism would be developed for the 1980s and thereafter. The implicit argument here is that a 'minority groups rights model' of multiculturalism best fits these changed circumstances and new needs than one based on an 'ethnic identity model'.

First, and perhaps the most fundamental and overriding determinant in the future of any form of multiculturalism is the effects of generational differences. Sadly, much of our thinking still continues to be cast in the mould of the first generation newcomer syndrome. Simple inspection of the demographic evidence shows that communities are today dominated by second and third, and even fourth, generation Australians (not migrants) whose needs and aspirations, from what little data we have, are markedly different to those of their parents and grandparents.

What is more startling, according to one of Australia's foremost demographers, Charles Pricel<sup>18</sup>, is that the rapid break up of ethnic communities as a result of the second generation marrying outside their own communities may give us even descriptively more of a 'mixed' cultural society than a multicultural society. Consequently, we increasingly have to contend with a

society where people inherit in themselves many different cultures and mix the cultural elements in their own way. In this way 'ethnic' boundaries will become a great deal less rigid and the survival of the ethnic group will be profoundly affected.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the effect of these conditions will vary a great deal from one group to another. If then, this is the new emerging social reality, it makes the conventional 'ethnic identity model' of multiculturalism and its counterpart social policies anachronistic, non-functional and irrelevant.

Indeed, the undeniable conclusion is that the increasing proportion of second and third generation Australians descended from migrants may hold the key to the future of multiculturalism. If their reference group lies outside ethnic groups, we will need to respond to their needs and aspirations differently. Ethnicity may have quite a different meaning for them while still retaining their ethnic minority status. In short, the concerns of this group are likely to be more in the public domain than a preoccupation with private 'life styles'. Hence, we need to look to the political and economic arena for clues as to their real interests. I suspect that these will be centred on participation and, in particular, mobility strivings - the chance to compete equally and fairly in society.

A second major consideration, therefore, is the critical issue of the changing relationship of migrants and their offspring - be they of the second or third generation - to the economy. Ongoing structural changes in the economy, in particular, de-industrialisation, the growth of the service sector and persistence of high unemployment rates, are bound to have far-reaching consequences for ethnic minorities as regards their 'life chances'. Already they shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden of the economic ills of society evident clearly in unemployment rates and the incidence of poverty.

The worsening economic position of ethnic minorities, and the nature and extent of the inequalities they suffer may, for political and ideological reasons, tend to be distorted, concealed or deliberately suppressed by vested interests. To cite one example: a kind of ideological distortion is evident in some recent studies of social mobility where an attempt has been made to show that post World War II migrants and their offspring may not be unduly disadvantaged because there is some evidence indicating lower class ethnically upward mobility. Evidence of instances of individual mobility as documented in these studies is most welcome, but these data do not substantiate changes in class position. They are status changes and occupational or income shifts which often indicate horizontal rather than vertical mobility. It is misleading to suggest that the data in this area substantiates an extensive degree of lower class upward mobility, particularly in relation to ethnic minorities.

There is a great lacunae of data on this issue. Indeed, the very reluctance to keep hard data relating to ethnic minorities on the part of public authorities is part of the strategy to soft-peddle or ignore the facts of ethnic inequality. Whatever the methodological imperfections and inadequacies of this new evidence on social mobility, what is in dispute are not the facts but the interpretations offered. In short, the systematic point, as Jencks<sup>20</sup> reminds us in his classic American study, is that mobility is not equality.

The 'culturalist' approach to multiculturalism has marginalised ethnic groups and trivialised their social position. By locating the so called 'migrant problems' within the 'realm of communicative and cultural dissonance'<sup>21</sup> this kind of pluralism regrettably serves to obfuscate the problem of ethnic inequalities and

suppress the relation of class and ethnicity which is in itself a difficult one to disentangle. Furthermore, the 'culturalist' explanation does little to break down labour market segmentation and the inequalities that it sustains through ethnic stratification.

It is extremely significant that it is the second and third generation - now actively in the labour market - who experience the greatest difficulty and hardship. For them, despite a decade of multiculturalism, anglo conformity and dominance has only marginally declined. Were these strains and inequalities, especially those relating to denial of promotional opportunities, to continue unabated, as a result of the attitude of the dominant groups and the economic crisis, it is likely to contain the potential of social conflict. This could easily be set alight as 'ethnic conflict' or failing that, bitter resentment and anger at the rejection by the entrenched dominant groups of their right to share power.

It is only through interest-based alliances of ethnic minority groups that preventive measures can be taken to remove or reduce inequalities affecting ethnic minorities. There is an urgent need for an organisation strategy to claim the categorical rights of ethnic minorities. These represent collective demands for compensation for violations of human rights, in the past, because of social categorisation, such as race, gender or ethnicity.

These strategies, whether directed at individual members or the ethnic groups, are certainly controversial, as we know in the case of gender inequalities. Nevertheless, they are based on the rationale that because ethnic minorities suffer disproportionate disadvantage,

they should receive priority and in special cases, 'unequal treatment', as a means of reducing their inequalities and preventing their further deterioration.

Contrary to conventional wisdom which decrees that the social conflict and disruption implicit in the existence of pervasive inequalities is a threat to social cohesion, it may well be that the redress of inequality is a more effective way of ensuring social cohesion. Given the importance attached in some influential quarters to social cohesion, as it relates to multiculturalism, it is worthwhile quoting in full a perceptive Canadian writer<sup>22</sup> who argues that:

Inequality is the basic issue affecting cohesion not conflict; without conflict, inequality can never affect institutional legitimacy because individuals may be alienated by the feeling that economic institutes are relatively inaccessible to them. Conflict may be important in generating social cohesion when it is successfully managed.

To a lesser extent, a further consideration which is likely to have a great bearing on the future of multiculturalism and its social policies refers to the social, economic and political problems created by 'non-white' migrants. Irrespective of the rhetoric of racism, this phenomenon warrants urgent and careful analysis. The 'old' model of multiculturalism may not be as effective in dealing with the integration of non-white migrants. It should not be forgotten that we are now, more so than before, dealing with 'visible minorities' who may need different strategies of social and cultural adaptation. We note with alarm that racism and discrimination against these groups, in particular, is becoming endemic. By virtue of the social attitudes expressed towards these groups they feel their minority status more acutely than other ethnic minorities,



with the exception of Aboriginal people. We must not underestimate the 'hidden costs' of racism and discrimination for society as a whole. Hence the need for a purposeful strategy to combat racism and prejudice.

All these considerations, taken jointly or singly, would indicate that the time is ripe for experimenting with a different model of multiculturalism from the one practised so far. What is needed is a social reform strategy which can engage in the pursuit of corporate ethnic goals, in particular, to eradicate the cultural and structural basis of ethnic minority oppression, discrimination and neglect. This was indeed the philosophy and rationale underlying the Report of the Cass Committee<sup>23</sup> of which I had the privilege to be a member. This Report, reviewing the experience of multiculturalism as practised over the last decade or so, concluded that multiculturalism was not just a matter of tolerance and goodwill or unity and social cohesion. All these are essential elements as prerequisites but in themselves are of little value in the development of a multicultural society. Hence the Report argues forcibly that:

Unless a society accepts the claims and rights of all migrant and ethnic minorities for a fair share of resources and rewards in society, it will remain flawed and not truly multicultural. A multicultural society is an achievable goal only if we are prepared to take appropriate measures to safeguard and guarantee the well being of all ethnic communities in Australia.

Multiculturalism, originally prompted by the desire to give legitimacy to cultural diversity of expression and provide mutual tolerance and respect to newcomers, has lately become more preoccupied with questions of ethnic identity, social cohesion, unity and

the need to package multiculturalism as an ideology for all Australians. Nowhere is this process more apparent than in the education sphere where we have moved from the hard reality of issues relating to migrant education to the vague and ill-defined objectives of multicultural education.

In transforming this rich and challenging ideal of great potential to a mere political slogan, it may have become diluted in meaning and confused about the larger purposes and goals it was intended to achieve. We urgently need to examine the real needs of those whom multiculturalism was intended to serve - ethnic minorities of all generations. Sadly, the fate of large segments of migrant and ethnic communities whose relatively adverse socio-economic circumstances are compounded by the crippling effects of cultural alienation finds scant acknowledgement in multiculturalism for all Australians.

The central task facing the development of a meaningful and effective concept of multiculturalism as a social ideal of the future is to address itself to the vital issue of unequal power relations. We need to increase the participation of ethnic minorities in the public domain by making social institutions more permeable in all walks of life and thereby enhancing their 'life chances'. In particular, we need to ensure that the commanding heights of the society, the bastions of power and influence, must become more accessible to members of ethnic minorities, especially young Australians, hyphenated or otherwise, who must not get left behind or be sacrificed on the altar of progress. The agenda of a truly multicultural society in the 1980s and 1990s must be firmly entrenched in the needs and aspirations of ethnic minorities, especially second and third generation Australians, who seek not just equality of respect, but

equality of treatment and social justice. To this end, we need a brand new model of multiculturalism - not just old wine in new bottles.

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