First Biennial Meeting of AIMA – Opening Address

The Minister For Immigration And Ethnic Affairs, The Hon Ian MacPhee.

**Opening Address
The Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs**

Melbourne, 30 November 1981.

I have been very interested for many years in pluralist societies and multiculturalism. I have been fortunate in being able to pursue this interest in practical situations by living for several years in both Papua New Guinea and the United States and by travelling extensively. I also had the advantage of being introduced to some fine research studies in the course of that experience. Consequently the last two years of case work in this portfolio has been relevant to my background and has greatly sharpened my understanding of Australia in a social and cultural sense.

I have met many of you in my travels around Australia and have been enlightened by experiences I have had when participating in community activities. I have benefited from the advice of several of you and am also most grateful for the stimulation which the director of the Institute Petro Georgiou has provided and for the opportunities which I have had for discussion with him and his highly imaginative and enthusiastic staff. The Institute is well served by its director and staff as I am sure you will all discover during the course of this conference.

I would however like to pay an especial tribute to Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki. Professor Zubrzycki was, so far as I am aware, the pioneer of multiculturalism in Australia. He did, for example, present a most memorable and provocative paper to the 1968 Citizenship Convention in Canberra.

The paper rejected assimilationist and integrationist philosophies and argued in favour of cultural pluralism, stressing the beneficial consequences of the maintenance of minority cultures for the good of Australia. He observed that an inevitable consequence of the adoption of such a philosophy would be the introduction by government of programs designed to remove barriers to social and occupational mobility on the part of migrants whose foreign qualifications where not recognised; the introduction of special schemes to teach English to hundreds of thousands of migrant children whose progress was seriously handicapped, and the more ready acceptance of migrant groups as official spokesmen and partners in the progress towards a 'pluralist' Australia.

Professor Zubrzycki persisted with these sentiments and gradually defined their consequences more closely. His broad philosophy was adopted by Mr Grassby when he was the Minister for Immigration. Mr Grassby had a deep conviction that non-English speaking migrants had been denied equal opportunity with persons who spoke English before migrating to Australia or persons born in Australia. I believe that Mr Grassby performed a most important role in drawing attention to the disadvantages experienced by non-English speaking migrants and the effective discrimination which they sometimes encountered. I am bound to add however that the enthusiasm with which he pursued his cause, his personal flamboyance and his provocative presentation of the issues had a double edged effect: he created a greater awareness more quickly of areas of discrimination and disadvantage than a more reasoned approach would have achieved, but in the course of it he created some resistance to

change and a tendency towards an anglomorphic backlash. I mention this merely because I believe it to be a fact and not because I wish to introduce any jarring personality or political note into this opening speech. I believe it relevant to make that observation because the potential for a continuing anglomorphic backlash is considerable and this must be in the minds of governments and their advisers when they formulate and implement policies designed to assist the settlement of non-English speaking people. Such a reaction would not come from persons who have had close dealings with migrants from non-English speaking countries but it is surprising how large is the number of anglomorph Australians who have had negligible contact with non-anglomorphs. Their ignorance always represents a potential for bigotry and backlash if they fear that what they know and value is threatened by policies which appear to favour people who are aliens or, at least, unknown quantities.

The signs of disquiet were clear in 1974-75 but, in 1976, Mr Fraser and his government shared the basic concern which Mr Grassby felt but adopted the approach pioneered for so long by Professor Zubrzycki. A practical program of action was produced under what is now known as the Galbally Report. That report recommended a package of measures for on-arrival and post-arrival services to migrants and refugees and was virtually adopted by the government in its entirety. We are now in the final financial year of the triennial funding arrangements pursuant to the adoption of the Galbally Report and you will this afternoon be discussing the evaluation of that Report by the Institute so I will not deal with it any further in this paper. Suffice it to say that whatever changes might emerge as a result of the evaluation - that is, as a result of the last three years of practical experience - the Galbally Report will be seen to have been a major landmark in Australia's social history. One of its recommendations was of course the establishment of this Institute and I believe that as members of the Institute you will have an opportunity to participate in a most exciting chapter of our social development. I will say a

little more about your possible role towards the end of my speech.

Even while the Galbally Report was being prepared and implemented Professor Zubrzycki continued his highly significant work as Chairman of the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council and as a member of the Australian Population and Immigration Council. Those two councils have now been merged with the Australian Refugee Advisory Council to become the Australian Council for Population and Ethnic Affairs (ACPEA). I Chair that Council and Professor Zubrzycki chairs one of its task forces and is thus continuing his extremely valuable work. He like the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr Menadue, is a councillor of the Institute and each of them provides a bridge between the Institute and ACPEA. They are thereby able to ensure that the two streams of advice to me are co-ordinated and that duplication does not arise.

Professor Zubrzycki has presided over the preparation of two significant publications; I hope that each of you has read them and if not I very strongly commend them to you. Each of them is available from the Department. The first was entitled "Australia as a Multicultural Society" (published August 1977). And the second was called "Multiculturalism and its Implications for Immigration Policies" (published June 1979). Professor Zubrzycki's task force is currently preparing a third equally important document entitled "Multiculturalism and its Implications for Ethnic Affairs Policy". I hope that that document will be ready when the Galbally evaluation is complete and it is my intention to assess the recommendations of that evaluation against the philosophy and principles contained in the task force's discussion paper.

Meanwhile I wish to venture some personal observations about multiculturalism, I stress that these are personal. They are not particularly original but they do represent my observations based on the background of which I have spoken and my day-to-day contact with individual migrants and ethnic groups.

First, we possess a woefully inadequate understanding of the changes in attitudes, values and aspirations of our current society. This is clearly one of the reasons why the existence of the Institute is so important. The research which the Institute is doing and about which you will learn today - will provide the basis for better informed action by governments, the private sector and individuals.

One of the matters I would like the Institute to advise me upon is the relevance of statistics gathered on an ethnic basis. It would certainly be counter-productive to relate too many statistics to ethnicity because that would lead to competition between ethnic groups and over-emphasise ethnic identity, hence causing separatism and discord. At the same time, in order to determine whether people of different backgrounds do have equality of opportunity to participate in the major institutions of the society and receive equal access to its services, much more needs to be known about the settlement experience of persons from particular parts of the world. In gathering that information it might even be desirable to examine the cultural and regional differences which prevail in the country of origin. We have received three-quarters of a million people from Italy and we refer to them as Italians, Italo-Australians or Australians of Italians origin. In truth they would identify themselves as Australians who came from a particular part of Italy. That is true of a great many countries and the settlement success can vary not only with the individual but with that part of the country or the ethnic group from which the migrant came. Canada has gathered more information in its census than has the USA or Australia and I would be most favourably disposed to major reforms to our general gathering of statistics including those gained by our census.

Second, whatever its now perceived shortcomings, the large scale migration to Australia in the last 35 years has proceeded without public controversy. Individuals do admit now, however, to feeling various degrees of inferiority, intimidation, discrimination and inequality as a result of the demand of those already here that they conform with whatever was then asserted to be the Australian way of doing things.

In the course of conforming and following the assimilationist line the same people changed many of the Australian ways of doing things. Some lost more of their previous identity than they might have wished but they changed the Australian identity in the process.

As the process was so smooth and yet was rapidly evolutionary, why change it? Should we jeopardise that evolving Australian identity and its social cohesiveness by highlighting ethnic differences? In other words, should we now interfere with what Daniel Patrick Moynihan calls "benign neglect"?

Every new settler coming to this country must face the fact that there is a basis to our society which is English. Our language, our judicial system and our parliamentary institutions are all of English origin and are critical to the functioning of our society and provide the dominant and enduring features of it. These have been reinforced by the fact that the major portion of our migrant intake has come either from the UK of from countries which had similarly adopted those basic characteristics. It is for this reason that Dr Knopfelmacher has adopted the term 'Anglomorph' instead of 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'Anglo-Celtic' and I believe that he is correct in so doing.

It is because of the dominance of those factors that the necessity for non-Anglomorphic migrants to conform will persist. In adapting to those institutions they will however modify them. Australian English is already different from the English which is alleged to be spoken in the UK (although as Professor Higgins pointed out a long time ago there are differences in the structure of the English language in the UK as well as in the pronunciation of it). An Australian dictionary has now been produced as evidence of the development of our particular brand of English. Future dictionaries are bound to incorporate words like 'festa', 'yum cha' and a multitude of others which are in our daily

vocabulary, but which would not be used in the UK. The spirit and probably the administration of justice will also respond to changing social attitudes as a result of our ethnic mix and even our parliamentary institutions with their rigid constitutions will modify their practices and procedures in a way which will make them even more different than they now are from the actual practice in Westminster. Similarly Westminster will respond to the influences to which it is now directly subject in the European Community.

Clearly then there is already an identifiable Australian culture which has foundations which stem directly from England (not Britain), but which have already undergone great change as a response to migration and our environment. Almost from the outset of British settlement in Australia, non-Anglomorphic migration began. Many cultures were represented and the Germans and Chinese were particularly evident. These and other historical facts are still not known by a lot of our Anglomorphs. We should never forget the fact that we became a multicultural society in the mid-nineteenth century, not as a result of the last 35 years. Nor should we forget that the Australian environment helped to shape our national identity.

Size alone led us to adopt the American system of federalism and each of the transplanted cultures responded in various ways to the new environmental influences which those cultures experienced when exposed to Australia.

In my view this must be the starting point of any policy of multiculturalism. There is a core culture which itself is gradually evolving but which is identifiable and dominant. It would be wrong to see a policy of multiculturalism as changing that. We will maintain stability and harmony if those dominant features can continue to respond to the reasonable aspirations of new arrivals and their descendants and thereby give them equality of opportunity to participate fully in all political, social, legal and economic processes.

The debate should, therefore, focus on the facts which shed light on whether that equality exists and if not, how it might be achieved. Much of what you will discuss at this conference will be aimed at these matters. That, indeed, must be the raison d'etre for the Institute.

I have spoken of the dominance of that cultural core simply because I believe it is so well established as to be dominant. Nonetheless, I remember being ridiculed by a vocal section of a large audience when I said that in my opening address to the Second National Conference of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils last year. I have repeated it today for the benefit of some of those persons on the fringe of ethnic organisations who seem to have an exceedingly ill-defined concept of multiculturalism and who deride the English origins of the foundations of our society. Were it not for those fringe dwellers - often persons on Anglomorphic origin who seem ashamed of their ethnicity - the point would only need mentioning in order to place the role of ethnic groups and multicultural policies in perspective.

When taken in perspective, however, the dominant core culture to which people must adapt on arrival here can be seen as the beginnings of the shared values of our multicultural society. That is how Jerzy Smolicz has expressed it in several publications. Stemming directly from what Derek Volker has called our Lingua Anglica and our adoption of the common law and parliament of England, is the shared value of the freedom of the individual to pursue his or her private life. Many of those who came to Australia during the gold rush had failed to achieve that freedom at the 1848 barricades in Europe. They readily embraced English law and the Establishment in the Australian colonies of legislatures, trade unions: and a relatively free market economy. They also welcomed free, secular and compulsory education.

Once one begins to retrace our history we can spell out identifiable characteristics which in form and composition become Australian and which are seen to be accepted by all, regardless

or origin. Moreover, while the core might be thus termed dominant it is so because it is Australian - not because it was English.

Not surprisingly, Australians or Anglomorphic origin still predominate in positions of power and influence but they generally accept their obligations to exercise their power for the good of all Australians. A commitment to other shared values will enable Australians of non-Anglomorphic origin to share the exercise of power increasingly.

I believe that the most important of these has been identified clearly by both Jerzy Zubrzycki and Jerzy Smolicz. Essentially it requires a recognition of the right of each Australian to identify with a particular ethnic origin if they wish and to participate in the retention and transmission of those parts of that culture which matter of them. Cross cultural contact is imperative and enriching. Thus cooking, crafts, dancing, martial arts and language are open for all to undertake, regardless of ethnic origin.

It is the community acceptance of those shares values which constitutes multiculturalism. The core of those values was determined by historical accident, the arrival of the First Fleet. The demands of Anglomorphs that others totally assimilate have now been rejected by a most significant number of community and political leaders. I do not know any ethnic leader who is reluctant to embrace the core culture; it is the basic of our shared values. But all would insist on the acceptance of cultural diversity in all activities beyond the core. Again, they would argue for the right to preserve aspects of their own culture but would abhor the ghetto-like preservation of it and would wish to have interaction with other groups and with individuals.

In that way people can relate to each other as people. They begin with a core culture and feel the excitement of exploring ideas and traditions which are new to them. They acquire interests they never had before and become friends with people of whose backgrounds they were once quite ignorant. It is an experience which is enriching to the individual and to the nation. It is a prospect which is every bit as exciting as is our economic future.

And it will be made possible by the willingness of persons like yourselves to continue your leadership and to inspire others to participate and respond.

I believe that the development of a National Language Policy will be of particular importance for it is by learning a language that one can best absorb another's culture. Multilingualism will not only be important in terms of Australian's multicultural identity but also for our role in the world through cultural, sporting, trade and diplomatic contacts.

The two reports of the Institute regarding on-arrival and multicultural education are significant beginnings, as is the adoption by the Commonwealth Government of the Institute's recommendation of per capita grants to ethnic schools. That however is merely a beginning and Australians must demand of their education system that foreign languages be taught in primary schools and be available for all Australians, regardless of ethnic origin. When added to the teaching of English as a second language and to courses on multiculturalism, such programmes will greatly assist the upward mobility of children of non-English speaking migrants and as a result of their improved socio-economic position a greater level of ethnic intermarriage will result and will produce more social cohesion and a clearer national identity.

It is not my province to venture further into that field, but I am sure that the Institute will. In that regard I would commend to you the book by Dr Smolicz entitled "Culture and Education in a Plural Society" in which a most imaginative approach is taken to the curriculum development questions which face educators as a result of the increasing recognition of the multiculturalism of which I have spoken.

The cultural benefits to which I have eluded stem from social interaction and not from government interference. But the gains of

policies adopted pursuant to the Galbally report and those policies which I expect to see adopted following the Institute's evaluation of the report will be important catalysts for and facilitators of such interaction.

In that context cultural diversity is an asset, but we must never forget that an undue emphasis upon cultural differences can be destructive of the social cohesion which we have attained and which government policies and far sighted community leadership aim to consolidate and extend.

The fact remains, however, that the desirability of multiculturalism in the sense I have described is not yet understood widely enough for governments and others not to adopt specific programmes in order to redress disadvantage and to prevent the loss of those aspects of cultural identity which really matter to people.

Persons who deride such policies as vote-buying misunderstand both the objective and the voter. Max Harris said recently "Ethnic affairs are a political nonsense in which vast amounts of taxation money are expended by successive governments as plain old-fashioned vote-buying". Mr Harris is proud of the culture he inherited and is mindless of the loss of that of other persons. As Nathan Glazer has said "It is hard to mourn the loss of a lost culture when one does not possess or recall it". Mr Harris should also know that people vote on socio-economic bases.

The aim of multiculturalism ought to be, as Jerzy Smolicz has said, "to develop tolerance and acceptance of cultural differences within the political unified, yet culturally diversified, Australian state". That is a simple way of stating federal government policy.

In practice it means that all government and non-government institutions need to provide equality of access to all service, employment and leisure opportunities. I believe as a matter of principle that that ought to be achievable without positive discrimination in favour of any persons but if balance can not be redressed otherwise, temporary affirmative action can be justified - but only as a final resort. The case of Aborigines has been seen by most people to be a little different from that of other ethnic groups but I trust that it will not always be seen so.

Australia will be built in future by persons who accept the core culture and respect the right of others to retain or gain other cultural traditions. This is togetherness not separatism. The tributaries run alongside the mainstream, feed into it but retain some of their own flow. In this way we will be, as Glazer said of the USA, "A nation of immigrants but ... not a nation of ethnics."

Thus our immigration policy must reflect our domestic needs in that sense as well as in the labour market and family reunion sense. Having built a unique cultural identity by migration we must now have regard to the continuing evolution of it when we consider the settlement prospects of people who seek to migrate here. People will, therefore, not be accepted merely because they have reasonable levels of education and a knowledge of English. If their views are racist or otherwise extremist or fundamentalist I do not believe there is room for them here. As we develop our multicultural policies and identity more, we will refine our immigration policy along those lines.

In "Australia as a Multicultural Society" Professor Zubrzycki's task force followed accepted international sociological terminology by describing as "Ethnics" "the people who form the minority populations of non-Anglo Australian origin."

Not being a sociologist I would venture the view that the Scots, Irish and Welsh have been identifiable ethnic groups in Australia for years and that if English ethnic groups were formed their existence would throw into sharper focus the Australian identity which has already evolved.

I have not sought to reproduce points already made by others in Australia; though inevitably I will have covered some of the same ground.

Inevitably I would like to have said twice as much, but will keep other points for a later occasion.

It will be apparent from what I have said that I believe that the Institute as an independent statutory advisory body has an important role in making all Australians aware of the great benefits to them of an increased sharing of cultures and of the need to enable individuals to move freely from their original culture group to the mainstream culture and then to consciously identify with both. The Institute is well placed to help individuals bridge cultural gaps by recommending policies which can be adopted not merely by the federal government but by state governments and private organisations. The director has already assembled a most talented group from different ethnic backgrounds and different political outlooks and they are winning for the Institute important credibility with state government organisations as well as with those in the federal sphere and with ethnic organisations.

From my perspective one of the strengths of the Institute has been its awareness of the need to find out how the community at large see things. The scope of the consultation programme with respect to the present Galbally report evaluation is particularly extensive.

A direct link between the Institute and the community is also assured by the very act which brought the Institute into being. I refer of course to Section 10, which provides for your appointment as members of the Institute. The legislation deliberately created a structure which would be strong because it was made up of several elements, with distinct and complementary functions:

• The Council, responsible for the conduct and control of the affairs of the Institute;

• The Director, responsible for its management;

• and the members.

Your role as members is a non-executive one, and it is vital. In the Second Reading Speech of the Bill to establish the Institute my predecessor told parliament that the members would be "People experienced in multicultural matters drawn from a wide range of background and expertise". As I said when appointing you to membership of the Institute, your role is essentially to provide a two-way channel of communication.

I look to you firstly to serve as a source of knowledge for the Institute on community needs and perceptions. Though many of you have particular links, you have not been selected as delegates of sectional interests, ethnic groups or specific organisations. You are here in your personal capacity, reflecting a broad cross-section of Australian society, with knowledge, contacts, and sensitivities from which the Institute can derive considerable value in the fulfilment of its objectives. Secondly, you have much to give to the development of multicultural Australia through the people with whom you meet and work in your daily lives, stimulating their knowledge and awareness of what multiculturalism is about.

Your appointment as a member explicitly recognises what you have already contributed to the broad Australian community. Directly and indirectly you are the active builders of multiculturalism. I am sure that your efforts will be enhanced by the contact you will have with each other and with the Council and staff of the Institute over the next day or so. From the look of this afternoon's programme they certainly intend to tap into what you have to offer, so this gathering will be of mutual benefit.

I wish you well at your first biennial meeting, and welcome the contribution which you will make to the work of the Institute, and the future development of Australia's multicultural society. I look forward to meeting you personally at morning tea, lunch and dinner. I hope that my participation in this manner will assure you that I regard your appointment as members as an important event in the development of the Institute and of multiculturalism in Australia.

Mr Chairman, members of Council and members of the Australian Institute on Multicultural Affairs, it gives me great pleasure to open this inaugural biennial meeting of the members of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs.

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