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**THE POLITICS OF THE ORIGINS OF MULTICULTURALISM: LOBBYING AND THE
POWER OF INFLUENCE**

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explain the political processes of how multiculturalism became a basis for ethnic affairs policy. The material was derived from the first comprehensive account of the origins of Australian multiculturalism: M. Lopez, The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2000.

Mark Lopez, The politics of the origins of multiculturalism: lobbying and the power of influence

The rewards go to those who have clout, who know their way around the corridors, who understand how the system works, where the pressure points are, or to those who are experienced in networking and lobbying (Emy and Hughes, *Australian Politics*, 1991, p. 532).¹

Emy and Hughes's assessment of what brings success in governmental policy-making accurately describes the decisive political processes that led to the emergence of multiculturalism as an ideology to shape ethnic affairs policy, an ideology that has had profound implications for the meaning and substance of the Australian identity. In every event that saw the progress of multiculturalism in the public policy realm, lobbying was the decisive factor and in each of these events virtually the same people were involved. Multiculturalism represents one of the greatest lobbying success stories in Australian political history. Although lobbying produced the desired results, the multiculturalists during the early 1970s were in a situation where there were virtually no other viable tactical options available to them.

The ideology of multiculturalism was developed between 1966 and 1975 by a small number of academics, social workers and activists initially located on the fringe of the political arena of migrant settlement and welfare, a political arena that itself was not large, despite the fact that these issues affected the lives of so many. The definers of multiculturalism were also the principal actors in the struggle to advance their beliefs and make them government policy. Although enthusiastic and determined, the multiculturalists were also assisted by various socioeconomic and political trends that influenced the development of multiculturalism and provided advantageous circumstances for its progress. These included the greater ethnic and cultural diversification of the population due to the post-war poly-ethnic immigration,² the persistence of several migrant welfare problems requiring additional government attention,³ the emergence of more elaborate ethnic communities that reduced the extent and pace of migrant assimilation,⁴ and the prosperity of the economy allowing for an expansion of the public sector.⁵ Despite being advantageous, these trends were not sufficient to ensure success. Furthermore, the contemporary situation also presented challenges that made lobbying the only tactical option likely to bring policy change.

Public opinion presented a formidable obstacle to the multiculturalists. The contemporary opinion polls suggest that about 90 per cent of Australians were opposed to multicultural ideas at the time they emerged. In 1971, the Melbourne Family Survey of 2,652 married women found that 90 per cent of respondents thought that immigrants should try a lot harder to become absorbed into the Australian way of life.⁶ A similar question put to the parents at Brunswick Girls' High School in 1973, then the location of experiments in multicultural and bilingual education, found that 91 per cent of Australian respondents agreed that migrants should become like Australians.⁷ Meanwhile, opinion polls on immigration found widespread disapproval of the source countries that contributed the most to ethnic and cultural diversity. An Age Poll of July 1971 produced close to a majority for severely restricting Italian and Greek migrants, with only three to four per cent believing that the government should recruit them.⁸ Nevertheless, the Melbourne Family Survey identified a ray of hope for the multiculturalists. Two small potential constituencies for multiculturalism were evident; some ethnic communities (Southern Europeans in particular) and tertiary-educated professionals were more likely to exhibit favourable responses to multicultural ideas than the general population.⁹

On the one hand, post-war poly-ethnic immigration could be seen as having produced a small potential constituency for multiculturalism among some ethnic communities, but on the other hand, nothing resembling an ethnic social movement emerged to carry the multiculturalists into political office. The minutes and journal entries of leading multiculturalists during the early 1970s exhibit their frustration with the fact that the concerns of most non-English-speaking background migrants and members of ethnic communities remained narrowly focused on the interests of fellow nationals – notably their welfare, homeland affairs, and the internal politics of their respective communities.¹⁰ The ethnic community leaders' increasingly frequent and vocal demands for change had an ethnocentric focus, remaining parallel

to rather than becoming part of the multiculturalists' demands. In addition, research in Adelaide by the multiculturalist academic, Jean Martin, published in 1972, had found that most ethnic groups resented being treated as if they shared a common voice and interests with other ethnic groups,¹¹ a far cry from the pan-ethnic consciousness essential to the multicultural perspective. In addition, the Department of Immigration's National Groups Survey had, by 1971, identified over one hundred ethnic groups and over a thousand ethnic organisations,¹² but only a tiny fraction of the leaders of these ethnic organisations became involved in the campaigns, commenced in mid-1972, to push for the government's adoption of multiculturalism, and many of the principal multiculturalists were Anglo-Australians. Leading multiculturalists, conscious of the need to bring more ethnic leaders into the fold, had striven to change this situation,¹³ which only began to improve by 1975. During the decisive events of the early 1970s the overwhelming majority of ethnic groups and their leaders played no direct role in the progress of multiculturalism.

But there was another significant potential source of community support. Like other Western democracies, Australia experienced a rapid rise of the New Left and counter-culture that achieved prominence in the bitter polarising debates over the Vietnam War and conscription. These developments, evident in academia and university campuses, were compounded by trends in popular culture that included political lyrics in popular and rock music promoting left-wing values, as well as a vogue in Hollywood for films promoting racial tolerance. The influences of these cultural, intellectual, academic and ideological trends were widespread, but they had a particularly profound effect on the values of a generation of tertiary students, especially those in arts and humanities faculties. These trends contributed to making certain ideas fashionable, especially among the tertiary-educated of the 1960s, ideas that would establish a more advantageous political climate for the progress of multiculturalism, creating a constituency in the status group of tertiary-educated professionals.¹⁴

These trends also influenced the approach of most of the multiculturalists to politics. Multiculturalist and ethnic group activism emerged in a historical context in which forms of interest group politics, including increased activism or militancy, were considered normal democratic practice or 'progressive' by sections of the political and academic left. The rise of the New Left and counter-culture encompassed peace movements (for nuclear disarmament, and against the Vietnam War and conscription), burgeoning student activism, and corresponding trends within the clergy, seminaries and theological colleges advocating theological political activism on behalf of the poor and minorities. In addition, a plethora of interest groups emerged, including consumer protection and residents' action groups, as well as the women's, gay rights, and environmentalist movements. The influence of some of these interest groups and social movements of the 1960s on the majority of those individuals involved in multiculturalism was profound. Many of them experienced direct association with, or derived inspiration from, these groups and movements. James Jupp, Arthur Faulkner and Des Storer were involved in the activities of the student left. Arthur Faulkner, Alan Matheson and Giovanni Sgro were involved with the anti-Vietnam War movement. Alan Matheson and Brian Howe were influenced by radical leftist trends in theology.¹⁵ These trends helped to establish a political context: the increased salience of interest group politics, political activism and lobbying; and this context influenced many of the multiculturalists' approach to achieving political change.

The decisive shift towards multiculturalism in public policy occurred during the first Whitlam Labor Government (December 1972 to May 1974), even though there was no preconceived or planned introduction of multiculturalism and it was not part of the Labor Party platform.¹⁶ Multiculturalism became accepted as a basis of ethnic affairs policy during this period largely as a result of the successes of the multiculturalists as lobbyists. The appeal of the merits of multiculturalism was never sufficient in itself to ensure its acceptance as public policy; it was necessary for the multiculturalists to vigorously and strenuously promote it, often in the face of indifference or sometimes stiff opposition from those who supported other approaches.

Despite widespread mistaken popular perceptions, the Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, did not come to office interested in introducing multiculturalism,¹⁷ and the initial attempts of multiculturalist lobbyists to win his support were unsuccessful, largely because he had his own concept, the 'family of the nation'. Resilient multiculturalists such as Jerzy Zubrzycki, Walter Lippmann, Alan Matheson and several others

capitalised on Grassby's expansion of the Department of Immigration's system of advisory committees and, through their lobbying and networking, substantially increased their representation. Consequently they were able to introduce multiculturalist ideas and values into the formal policy advisory process. This resulted in a shift in the ideological content of policy advice in the majority of government advisory reports received by the Minister for Immigration. The initial shift achieved in July 1973¹⁸ was consolidated in the content of subsequent reports.¹⁹ Later, during 1974 and 1975, it was virtually the same multiculturalists who achieved similar ideological shifts in the content of relevant government advisory reports for the portfolios of Social Security and Education.²⁰ Government reports provide the information that the relevant decision-makers use to comprehend, debate and make decisions about issues. This shift therefore constituted a significant change in the policy environment in favour of multiculturalism.

The multiculturalists achieved a major breakthrough on 11 August 1973 when the Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, delivered the policy speech *A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future*, in which a multicultural manifesto was presented as a basis for migrant settlement, welfare and social-cultural policy.²¹ Grassby during his first eight months in office had lacked a clear concept and direction. He was interested in a range of ideas, including several multicultural ideas, but his interest in promoting the 'family of the nation' seemed to have stood in the way of his offering official endorsement to multiculturalism. In addition, the senior officers of the Department had resisted the initial moves of the multiculturalists to introduce multiculturalism as a model, and they remained opposed. The breakthrough was achieved by the initiative of the Department's National Groups Officer, Jim Houston, a member of the multiculturalists' network.²² When Houston found himself given the responsibility to draft the Minister's address to the Cairnmillar Institute, he daringly capitalised on the opportunity and wrote a multicultural speech, requiring the Minister, on delivering the speech, to clarify his position as a multiculturalist position and become the first Minister for Immigration to officially endorse multiculturalism. Houston's bold move succeeded, and Grassby later became incorporated into the multiculturalist camp.

The multiculturalists' next breakthrough occurred on 14 December 1973, when the recently appointed Opposition Spokesman on Labour and Immigration, Malcolm Fraser, visited the Australian Greek Welfare Society on a fact-finding tour, his first visit to an ethnic welfare organisation as part of his attempt to learn this new portfolio. Fortunately, this was one of the few ethnic welfare organisations to have been founded and led by multiculturalists. At that meeting George Papadopoulos and Spiro Moraitis introduced a receptive Fraser to multiculturalism. Fraser adopted it as a model and, using his authority as the Opposition Spokesman, he introduced it into the Coalition platform for the May 1974 federal election;²³ the first inclusion of multiculturalism in the immigration policy of a major party. This development also established a degree of bipartisanship sufficient to protect this new ideology from the rigours of adversarial parliamentary politics. But Papadopoulos and Moraitis's accomplishment bore additional fruit. In March 1975 Fraser became leader of the Opposition and was elected Prime Minister on 13 December 1975. He had maintained contact with Papadopoulos and Moraitis as sources of policy advice and later appointed Petro Georgiou, another multiculturalist, to his Office as a policy adviser. These developments contributed to multiculturalism featuring in the migrant settlement and welfare policies of the Fraser Government.

The positive contact multiculturalist lobbyists had with the Labor Government's Minister for Social Security, Bill Hayden, resulted in his agreement to implement the Welfare Rights Officers Program, announced on 1 May 1974. Hayden's decision made him the first minister who appreciated multiculturalism to take practical steps towards the implementation of a policy proposal devised by multiculturalists to promote multiculturalism. This marked the beginning of a significant transition; it was the first step from the acceptance of the ideology and rhetoric of multiculturalism towards its implementation in public policy.²⁴

In June 1974 Prime Minister Whitlam decided to dismember the Department of Immigration. This inadvertently removed most multiculturalists from positions of influence in this Department's policy advisory system. Through their efforts to re-establish their influence, they found positions in other relevant departments, such as Social Security and Education, moves that resulted in the introduction or further penetration of multicultural ideas into these departments. The dismemberment of the Department of Immigration also precipitated efforts to establish the first pan-ethnic multiculturalist lobby organisation, the

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, an umbrella organisation that, along with the ethnic-language radio stations, helped to bring several more of the ethnocentric ethnic leaders into the multiculturalist camp.²⁵

In addition, there were several significant developments that contributed to the establishment of multiculturalism in public policy that did not originate in attempts to create a multicultural society, but were transformed by the multiculturalists' political activity. The Whitlam Government's attempt to set up an access radio station, for 'anti-establishment' voices, was transformed, through the involvement of multiculturalists, into the predominantly ethnic access station 3ZZ.²⁶ The ethnic-language stations 2EA and 3EA originated in an attempt to reverse the trend among commercial broadcasters to cut back their ethnic-language programs. The establishment of 2EA and 3EA became transformed into a multiculturalist enterprise as those originally involved, such as Grassby, became part of the multiculturalist milieu, and were later joined by others who conceptualized improvements to migrant welfare in terms of multiculturalism.²⁷ The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* originated in anti-racist campaigns that predated multiculturalism; there was minimal multiculturalist involvement in the bill. The intention of the legislation was the elimination of racism from Australian society.²⁸ But in the new context of the multicultural policy regime that was emerging, this Act could be seen as having established a legislative basis for the multicultural society.

By the end of 1975, the influence of multiculturalism was evident in five federal departments: Labour and Immigration, Social Security, Education, the Media, and the Attorney-General's Department. Despite their efforts from 1973, the multiculturalists' breakthrough in influencing the union movement was delayed until May 1976, when they established a Migrant Workers' Centre in the Victorian Trades Hall.²⁹ By this stage, the multiculturalists were no longer on the fringe of the relevant public policy arena but at its centre, having substantially displaced those with other approaches to migrant welfare. The events that led to the success of the multiculturalists in establishing multiculturalism as a basis for ethnic affairs policy during the early to mid-1970s presents an ideal case study of elite politics, lobbying and the power of influence.

There is very little to do with multiculturalism that has not excited controversy, and revelations about its history can be no different. Conclusions about the centrality of lobbying to the progress of multiculturalism in the public policy realm may arouse criticism from those negatively disposed to multiculturalism, yet those positively disposed should find satisfaction in the dictum: never have so many owed so much to so few.

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