

A PROPOSAL FOR ETHNIC BROADCASTING IN AUSTRALIA

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At this conference I am representing the Australian Department of Labor and Immigration; but I am speaking as chairman of the Sub-Committee on Ethnic Broadcasting which was established by the former Minister for Immigration as part of the New South Wales Migrant Task Force. I should emphasise that the interest of the sub-committee is not confined to N.S.W. alone. The sub-committee is concerned to see ethnic broadcasting established throughout Australia. All of the members represent ethnic communities and all have had some connection with the media, either as broadcasters or as journalists. The terms of reference of the sub-committees are to review the facilities available for bi-lingual programs in Australia and to advise on the better use of radio to advance the integration of migrants in the Australian community.

The sub-committee had its origin in a decision taken by Radio 2 GB in January last year to drop its nightly services of foreign language broadcasting. This station had, for 15 years, provided nearly 17 hours a week of programs in Italian, Greek, Lebanese, Maltese and Yugoslav. It devoted by far the greatest amount of time of any Australian radio station, either commercial or national, to ethnic broadcasting.

*German
Spanish*

I should point out that 2CH was not the only station to drop ethnic broadcasting. 2 WL Wollongong - serving an area where about 46 per cent of the population are migrants - also dropped out and so did others. By the end of 1973, only 19 of Australia's 118 commercial radio stations were known to be broadcasting regularly in foreign languages compared with 24 in 1972. Total weekly broadcasting time was just over 36 hours. Six languages were broadcast. Most stations featured Italian, Greek or German.

Now, please don't think that what I am saying is intended as criticism of commercial broadcasters. Members of the sub-committee are well aware of the intense competition for audiences against which commercial broadcasters have to plan their programs. We know that most commercial stations are reluctant even to sell air time for foreign language broadcasts. They fear that audiences not interested in these programs will switch to other stations and not return, leading to a permanent loss in ratings and a consequent loss of advertising revenue.

Similarly, the sub-committee also recognises the problems faced by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. It has to provide a diverse range of programs to satisfy Australian audiences, including minority groups. These demands are such that the ABC cannot spare time on existing frequencies to meet the considerable needs of ethnic groups. It is doubtful that even with additional

frequencies on AM or FM it could satisfactorily cater for the needs of ethnic groups.

The sub-committee has talked with representatives of both the commercial broadcasters and the Australian Broadcasting Commission and it has reached the conclusion that the only way in which ethnic groups could expect to have a radio voice would be through the establishment of newly available frequencies - preferably the AM frequencies - of broadcasting stations devoted solely to ethnic broadcasting.

But before describing the broadcasting needs of ethnic groups and the ideas which the sub-committee proposes for ethnic broadcasting, let me first outline our general concept of public broadcasting in Australia.

Perhaps it would be easier to describe what public broadcasting should not be; and the first thing to be said is that it should not run on the principle that can be summed up in the phrase, "Can you hear me, mother?". That should not be dismissed as something unlikely to happen. It already has: on television, if not on radio. Several weeks ago there was a program from Melbourne involving, as it happens, Italians living in Australia. Because the program concerned an ethnic group, I had particular cause to watch it otherwise I can assure you I should have switched to another station long before the program limped to its miserable,

anti-climactic end. I feel certain that most other viewers did just that. They would not have wished to watch a spectacle in which, whenever the cameras turned on the audience, the audience waved furiously/at what they fondly imagined were the viewers; nor would they have wanted to be the victims for too long of what could only be described as the haranguing style of the compere or link man.

I am not criticising the program because it lacked sophistication in presentation so much as the fact that it was just plain dull. It was merely an excuse for the participants to exercise their egos and to let off steam. No doubt they thought they were having their say; but they forgot that to communicate effectively you need an audience; and to have/the privilege of intruding into the homes of the millions of strangers who make up a television or radio audience, the need to be entertaining or interesting must surely be paramount.

So, what am I trying to say about public broadcasting in Australia? Simply this: whether the medium is radio or television, whether the subject is the social and cultural life of the ancient Persians or the work of the Society for the Preservation of Chowder Eating and Hand Walking - whatever it is - public broadcasting should observe the disciplines of professional broadcasting. It should offer the opportunity

for minorities to express themselves or to communicate with others with similar interests; but this ought to be done within the framework of highly professional presentation and a concern to interest the audience.

This suggests a training program in broadcasting techniques as many people required for ethnic broadcasting will not have had the experience. They will have to learn the basic techniques of production, presentation, announcing, interviewing, radio writing and so on. It should not be difficult to devise a crash course. The British did it during the last war to train armed services personnel to run army broadcasting stations. I am not a very good example of the result; but look what Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Spike Milligan did for radio techniques! There are also many other accomplished, if not so famous, broadcasters who began their careers after a few weeks basic radio training.

The concept of public broadcasting also suggests that the means of broadcasting, the stations and transmitters, should be publicly owned. One suggestion is that stations might be owned by special interest groups, such as a group representing ethnic communities, in partnership with a government authority; but, as a general principle and a starting point for the adventure of public broadcasting, government ownership of the facilities would seem to be the most equitable arrangement to ensure that the interests of minority groups are protected and served. Ownership of stations

at Federal, State and local levels would offer a range of facilities suitable to a variety of interests. For instance, local ratepayers, parents and citizens' associations and local historical societies could be more appropriately accommodated on a low-powered station, owned or controlled by a local authority and designed to serve a municipality, than on a station which might be run by a State or Federal authority to serve an entire metropolitan area and possibly a national audience.

Now to the question whether the needs of ethnic communities would be met by sharing a multi-purpose station or whether an entire station devoted to ethnic broadcasting would be necessary. First, let me establish why we should have ethnic broadcasting at all.

Twenty-two years ago, when the principles relating to the use of foreign languages in broadcasting were discussed, the Department of Immigration was in agreement with other authorities that English should be the predominant language and that migrants should be encouraged to learn the language as soon as possible, rather than form non-English speaking communities. On this basis, it was agreed that foreign language broadcasting on commercial stations should, as a general rule, be restricted to not more than 2½ per cent of a station's weekly hours of transmission; and that was the situation until the beginning of this year when restrictions were lifted.

This change......./7..

This change in policy was, of course, related to a considerable change in attitudes concerning the usefulness of ethnic languages in the integration of migrants, and also to a marked change in the composition of the Australian population. Since 1952, the overseas-born population has increased from about 14 per cent to more than 20 per cent. If children with one or more migrant parents are added, the result is a ratio of between one in three and one in four of the population being either a migrant or the child of a migrant. This is a higher proportion than was ever reached in the history of migration to the United States. Now, while about half of these settlers would have come from English-speaking countries, the remainder have come from some 60 countries, and European languages are now spoken by hundreds of thousands of Australians, particularly in areas where ethnic groups have become established.

As I indicated earlier, things came to a head when Radio 2 CH dropped foreign language programs. In response to representations from ethnic groups, the then Minister for Immigration wrote to the Minister for the Media that he was most anxious to assist in the continuation of bi-lingual programs. At the same time, the Department asked the Australian Broadcasting Control Board to review restrictions on foreign language broadcasts on the following grounds:

- 1) that multi-lingual.../8..

i) that multi-lingual programs would assist the early settlement of newcomers by providing a cultural bridge between their birthplaces and Australia;

ii) that they would assist the integration into the community of settlers with limited English by providing opportunities to communicate important aspects of life in Australia in their own languages;

iii) that multi-lingual programs would help make the community aware of the cultural and social backgrounds of the various ethnic groups;

iv) that the restrictions were, in any case, superfluous since the economics of commercial broadcasting appeared to limit the hours most stations could profitably devote to multi-lingual broadcasts;

v) that lifting of restrictions, on the other hand, might just encourage one of the several stations in a metropolitan area to tape new markets by providing a multi-lingual service throughout its transmission time; and

vi) that removal of restrictions might encourage interested groups to seek licences to establish radio stations offering a special service to ethnic groups on existing or new frequencies.

When the Board's restrictions on foreign language broadcasting were lifted at the beginning of this year, nobody exactly rushed forward to provide an ethnic broadcasting service; but the Minister for the Media, Senator McClelland, offered an answer when, in his announcement that the restrictions had been lifted, he said: "Ultimately, I believe the introduction of new forms of broadcasting stations could provide the best solution to the problems involved".

Action began at the inquiry into FM broadcasting when the sub-committee told the Commissioners that the opening of new frequencies on the FM band offered an obvious opportunity to establish radio stations devoted to ethnic broadcasting. Of course, at the time we were not aware officially of the possibility of additional AM channels becoming available. Nevertheless, the point that AM would be equally suitable, if time and air space were available, was made. We talked in terms of fairly small range stations; but I think that to limit the range of stations to cover certain areas of the cities would be a mistake because ethnic communities tend to move over the years from one part of a city to another. The stations would have to cover a whole metropolitan area. In Sydney, it might be necessary to have a wider range because there are large communities of newcomers living in Liverpool and farther out. This might also apply to Melbourne.

In cities like.../10..

In cities like Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Darwin and Canberra, shorter range stations would be suitable.

Now, about audiences: what is not realised, I think, is that in most of our major cities something like one in ten of the people speak a European language other than English. For these people, born in the continental countries of Europe, there are at present limited or almost no facilities for programs and news and cultural entertainments broadcast in their own languages. -

The potential audience in Sydney, according to the 1971 census, is 295,000 out of an overall population of 2.8 million. These are people whose birthplace was a country of Europe other than the British Isles. The largest groups within the Sydney area are the Italians, the Greeks and the Yugoslavs. Melbourne has an even bigger potential audience, 374,000 out of a population of 2½ million. Again, the biggest groups are Italian, Greek and Yugoslav.

Out of Adelaide's population of 842,000, 96,000 are from continental Europe. The biggest groups, are from Italy, Greece and Hungary. In Perth, there are 64,000 people from Europe out of a population of 700,000. The largest group is again Italian.

Those are just.../11..

Those are just some examples of capital cities. Among provincial centres which should be served by an ethnic broadcasting station is Wollongong. Of its 164,000 population, 17,000 were born in continental Europe.

What sort of station would we expect to have? I think it would be one which would devote itself solely to broadcasting to satisfy ethnic community needs. In the United States this is not at all unusual; and, overall, America has more than six hours of foreign language broadcasting a week for each million of population compared with less than three hours in Australia. America has 67 stations that broadcast in French; 51 in German; 66 in Italian and 92 in Polish. The 396 stations which broadcast foreign-language segments cover just about everything from Gaelic to Eskimo. There are 11 stations which broadcast in American Indian languages. Where are our aboriginal broadcasters?

Among the interesting problems which will arise from the introduction of ethnic broadcasting stations in Australia will be the forms of management, financing and the way in which programs can be scheduled to satisfy the wishes of all ethnic groups. Let's look at the last problem first: the scheduling of program time. In fact, the problem is not as daunting as it might appear.

*Summary
250,000
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about
good*

Although there are people from more than 60 countries living in Australia who, between them, speak about 26 languages, no more than half of these languages would need to be featured regularly in ethnic radio. These would be the languages of the predominant ethnic groups and the ethnic groups with the greatest need for communication in a language other than English. I am thinking of the Italians, Greeks, Turks, Lebanese, Maltese, people from Yugoslavia - where two or three languages might be required; Serbo-Croat, Macedonian and Slovenian - and the Finns. Add German, Dutch and Spanish, and we have covered the greatest number of settlers in Australia. Of course, there should be occasional programs in other languages.

Imagine a ^{Radio} station broadcasting for a total of 122 hours a week spread over seven days. Up to 77 hours of this broadcasting would be in what might reasonably be considered peak listening time - that is from 6 am to 9 am, Monday to Friday, and from 6 pm to midnight on those days, plus all day Saturday, from 8 am to midnight, and all day Sunday, from 8 am to midnight. Now, even if we were required to broadcast in 26 languages it would be possible to devote three hours a week of peak listening time, as I have defined it, to each language. That would provide six half-hour programs a week....13

programs a week in each language. Carefully rostered, these programs could be broadcast at times through the day suitable for most listeners.

However, as I have said, it seems likely that we should not have to broadcast more than half that number of languages regularly, nor should we necessarily have to allocate exactly equal time to all groups. Allocation of time could be governed by three factors: need of the ethnic group based on its size; need of the group in terms of its difficulty in communicating - for example, the Finns and Turks who face a greater problem learning or understanding another language than many others - and thirdly, there would be the ability of groups to obtain commercial sponsorship of programs.

Perhaps this would be a good point at which to look at how ethnic stations might be managed. The sub-committee sees the broadcasting facilities - studios, equipment and transmitters - being provided by government and the licences being held by a statutory authority called an ethnic broadcasting commission or some such name. To insure the rights and protect the interests of the various ethnic groups, the commissioner would establish committees, not unlike the sub-committee of which I am chairman, in centres where ethnic broadcasting stations are to be established. These committees would determine the allocation of broadcasting time among groups and the scheduling of...../14

scheduling of air time to ensure that all groups had a fair go at peak listening times. The committee would also consider finance and have broad control of program standards. The statutory authority would appoint station managers to be responsible for the day to day running of the stations and to control staff announcers and technicians. The station managers would also be chairmen of the committees representing the ethnic groups, a job requiring the diplomacy of a Henry Kissinger. In fact, Henry Kissinger would be the ideal man. Not only does he have the diplomacy; he's even alleged to have some knowledge of electronics.

Although we have suggested that the stations should be publicly owned, we believe that a high proportion of the running costs of stations and the cost of programs should be covered by commercial advertising. To finance and produce programs, each interested ethnic group could form a company. These companies might be described as program contractors. They would contract to produce programs, persuade advertisers to buy time or sponsor the programs, and contribute some revenue to the ethnic broadcasting commission. The larger ethnic groups, such as the Italian and Greek communities, ought to be able to attract considerable advertising revenue. The smaller groups might not. To ensure that they would not be disadvantaged by this, their programs might need to be subsidised by the government (either directly or indirectly, the indirect form being paid government advertising in a range of languages.

It is felt that the greater part of general advertising revenue would be attracted during the 77 hours of what we have defined as peak listening time. This leaves a period of 45 hours, between 9 am and 6 pm, spread over five week days, which could be usefully allocated to programs, many of them Government-produced, aimed at migrant housewives. English lessons could be a feature of these late morning and afternoon sessions, as well as news of particular interest to women, international music and possibly lessons in ethnic languages designed for children of migrants as well as Australians interested in languages. There could, in this late morning and afternoon period, be scope for talk-back programs in a range of languages. The Telephone Interpreter Service, established by the Department of Immigration, has demonstrated the need for an inquiry point for people whose knowledge of English makes it difficult for them to obtain satisfactory answers to questions they wish to ask about their problems and about aspects of the life in Australia. Talk-back programs could help. Indeed, the late morning and afternoon session could become a potent force in the integration of migrants into the Australian community, helping to make their settlement happier, to ease their problems and to relieve the loneliness brought by being isolated through lack of knowledge of English.

The late morning and afternoon session might not be commercially viable, but there could still be scope

for commercial...../16

for commercial advertising of products of interest to housewives. Ethnic clubs and individuals might also wish to advertise social events.

I have not devoted much time to discussing program content during peak hours; but it is fairly obvious that news from the countries from which settlers have come, news about happenings in ethnic communities throughout Australia and Australian news -- particularly items affecting migrants -- would be a major feature of the broadcasts of all ethnic groups. We would hope that the stations would broadcast drama, national music and sport as well as cultural programs. We would hope that they would feature local artists and locally made records produced by the infant ethnic record industry.

What we would not want would be the abuse of the facility to pursue arguments and feuds. It would be unrealistic not to face the fact that there are differences within communities; it would be foolish not to take steps to ensure that ethnic radio is kept free of this sort of thing. Therefore, it is proposed that news scripts would be fully translated into English before broadcast; that commercials would have to be submitted in English; that non-topical programs would be recorded in advance -- which, incidentally, would also allow the best use to be made of studio space and equipment -- and that all transmissions would be recorded for monitoring by the Australian Broadcasting Control Board in the case of a dispute.

Finally, let me summarise the main points of our proposal. First, our concept of public broadcasting: the stations and equipment should be publicly owned and controlled by a statutory body; program standards should be high; production should be professional. Second, to the question whether we could share a multi-purpose station or whether we should need an entire station, the answer is that in centres where there are large ethnic populations entire stations broadcasting 122 hours a week would be essential to cater for all groups. Third, the proposed funding arrangements: we see advertising as an important source of revenue to cover program production costs and to contribute towards the running costs of the stations; but, to protect the interests of the smaller ethnic groups, there should be some direct or indirect government subsidy to pay for their programs. A subsidy might also be necessary to support the important late morning and afternoon programs which might not attract sufficient advertising. Fourth, technical equipment: this, presumably, would be provided in a publicly owned station; the larger program contractors would no doubt hire recording studios for their more ambitious programs. Fifth, type and hours of service: seven days a week of broadcasting in a range of languages covering news, features, drama, sport, music, English lessons and problem solving talk-back sessions. Sixth, and last, we would see the licences for the stations being held by an ethnic broadcasting commission or some such statutory body.

That, Mr Chairman...../18

That, Mr Chairman, is our proposal for an ethnic broadcasting service in Australia. Much will need to be done to set it up. We shall have to rely on the generosity of governments to make it possible; but, if nothing is done we shall be depriving at least one in five of the people of this country of a voice with which to communicate among themselves, find their way in our community, maintain their rich traditions and cultures, sing their songs and perhaps even praise those who helped to make their dreams of an ethnic broadcasting service come true.

1 July 1974