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ETHNIC AFFAIRS COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO
ALLEGED OVER-REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC CHILDREN
IN LOW-ACHIEVER CLASSES - INVITATION FOR SUBMISSIONS

The Ethnic Affairs Commission has invited submissions from the public to assist its inquiry into allegations that children from some non-English speaking backgrounds are over represented in "low-achiever" classes in New South Wales schools.

The investigation is being conducted with the full co-operation of the Department of Education.

The decision to hold the inquiry has followed claims over the past few years that there is an abnormal representation of children from some ethnic groups in classes where pupils with lower expectations of achievement than others are placed.

In order to understand why this might be the case, the Commission is seeking details on a range of practices within schools.

The Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission, Dott. Paolo Totaro, said the investigation, in the first instance, will look into the substance of these allegations. "If substantiated, a major part of the Commission's project will be to understand reasons and propose remedies".

The Commission has sought information from both parents and teachers relating to their experience, and knowledge of the situation.

Evidence suggests that many of the problems revolve around the English language difficulties that some children from non-English speaking backgrounds face. To take one obvious sequence of events: Sometimes pupils fall behind in their education because of inadequate facilities to help them learn or improve their English. In some situations teachers may mistakenly assume that the slow performance of such children is based on some basic lack of ability. Where this occurs, the child can be unfairly penalized. The resulting damage to educational prospects and eventual careers is enormous.

The Commission is therefore concerned to assess the availability and the role within schools of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers.

The Commission is also aware of claims that some teachers with unsympathetic, even racist attitudes, actively discriminate against children of non-English speaking backgrounds.

These teachers assume that such children will do badly at school and so actively discourage them. This creates a vicious circle, with the children doing badly because of the teacher's lack of encouragement.

The inquiry will also investigate the role of counsellors and guidance officers within schools to see whether they are effective in identifying learning difficulties in the early stages.

To assist it to understand the experience of children of non-English speaking background in schools the Ethnic Affairs Commission has requested the Department of Education for statistics on the relative numbers of children of different ethnic backgrounds, including Aborigines, across the range of grades in all classes. In addition, the Commission has requested information relating to placement and assessment practices.

The investigation will also seek the assistance of teachers and researchers of the Catholic and independent schools.

Those interested in providing information should contact:

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NEW ECC CHAIRMAN

The Ethnic Affairs Commission would like to congratulate Mr George Wojak for his appointment as Chairman of the Ethnic Communities Council of N.S.W.

Mr Wojak replaces Mr Jim Samios who was Chairman of the ECC for three years.

Mr Carl Harbaum is the new Senior Vice-Chairman.

The Commission has invited Mr Wojak, Mr Harbaum and members of the new Executive to meet and discuss work plans for 1983.

EAC TO REVIEW ITS GRANTS PROGRAMME

The Grants Programme of the Ethnic Affairs Commission has now been in operation for 5 years. The Commission believes it is time to review its functioning and where necessary recommend appropriate policy changes. Before advertising the 1982/83 Grants Programme, such a review will be undertaken and appropriate recommendations submitted to the Premier.

The aim of the Commission's Grants Programme is to support projects undertaken by organizations to assist in the integration of ethnic minorities. Until this year, the Commission was the only State instrumentality which directly assisted ethnic community based welfare programmes. In fact, more than 96% of the Commission's welfare grants funds are directed to assisting agencies to pay the salaries of bilingual welfare and information officers. The remainder of the welfare funds are provided to assist with the publication of multilingual information material.

While the Commission has a clear set of priorities by which organizations to be funded are chosen, the eligibility criteria are reasonably flexible to allow acceptance of applications from ethnic organizations not yet sufficiently developed to gain funding from mainstream bodies (such as the Department of Youth and Community Services). The Commission's Grants Programme is advertised widely each year through the English language and ethnic press.

A Grants Allocation Advisory Committee considers all applications and makes recommendations to the Commission.

CALL TO MAKE INCITEMENT TO RACIAL HATRED UNLAWFUL

Over 100 participants at a recent Race Relations Consultation meeting endorsed a proposed amendment to the 1977 N.S.W. Anti-Discrimination Act, to make incitement to racial hatred unlawful.

The day-long meeting was jointly sponsored by the Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Anti-Discrimination Board, and the N.S.W. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.

It was held to find ways to prevent racial tensions developing within society.

Participants included community leaders, heads of Government departments, church representatives, educationalists and journalists.

The proposed amendment to the Act will make it unlawful to incite violence, hatred or contempt or to publish material calculated to incite violence, hatred or contempt of another person on grounds of race.

Under the Anti-Discrimination Act, there is no provision for redress to victims of incitement to racial hatred.

A key factor in the proposed amendment is also the provision of safeguards for the freedom of speech. The law is intended to cover incitement in all public places, public transport, educational establishments, and the workplace.

Many complaints received by the Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Anti-Discrimination Board, and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs concern the distribution of racist propaganda, and acts in public that perpetuate racism.

In a paper to the meeting, the former President of the Anti-Discrimination Board, Mr Paul Stein, Q.C., said that education alone would not help eradicate race hatred.

"The law can often provide a very effective means of education. The law does influence behaviour not only because of the consequences of its breach, but also by establishing a scale of values which progressively become part of the social consciousness."

The meeting was officially opened by Mr Paul Landa, Minister for Energy and Water Resources. Mr Landa said that the Government and he (personally) were totally committed to combating racism. "We welcome any recommendations that come out of this Consultation," he said.

Papers were also presented by Jim Houston, Executive Secretary, Churches Commission on Community Relations and Bob Hunt on behalf of Ms Pat O'Shane, Secretary, N.S.W. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.

The Race Relations Consultation meeting was first in a series planned for this year.

PUBLIC FORUM ON NEIGHBOURHOOD DISPUTES

As part of a regular programme of establishing contact with the wider community, the Chairman and four Commissioners attended a Public Forum on Neighbourhood Disputes at Mt Druitt.

The Forum, organized by the Mt Druitt Multicultural Centre, was held to discuss neighbourhood disputes.

Welfare agencies in the area have reported cases of harassment of families of non-English speaking background. This ranged from verbal abuse and physical assault to damage to property.

Much of Mt Druitt comes under the Blacktown Council. About 35% of the population of Blacktown is of non-English speaking background.

The Forum was held with local agencies, government officials and community representatives.

According to cases presented at the Forum, incidents seem, in the main, to occur as a result of harassment by local youths. Over 58,000 children aged under 14 live in the Blacktown district, constituting almost a third of the population.

In quite a few cases, it seems, small incidents between children are brought home to parents. If parents, for reasons which have to do with poverty and deprivations of all sorts, are unable to see such incidents in their proper perspective, feuds may follow - which at times take quite a toll in terms of ongoing tensions between neighbours. In some cases, life becomes impossible and people see no other solution but to move.

In other instances, harassment takes much nastier turns, with property vandalized and personal violence used - Police intervene when there are illegal acts committed - and reported. They have difficulty in acting as mediators in disputes for which there are no legal remedies.

A Chamber Magistrate, Mr Ian Forsythe, confirmed that the most common disputes arose as a result of conflicts between children. "However, because many people live in Housing Commission homes, the option to move is often not easy."

He suggested the establishment of a community justice centre, which specialize in dealing with neighbourhood disputes. At the moment such cases have to be taken to Bankstown - an hour and a half drive away.

The Forum was also attended by the Mayor of Blacktown, Mr Jim Lynch and MP for Blacktown, Mr John Aquilina. Speakers included Commissioners and the President of the Mt Druitt Multi-cultural Centre, Mr Adil Nahmi.

POLISH TASK FORCE

The Ethnic Affairs Commission has established a Task Force to examine the needs of Polish refugees in N.S.W.

The nine-member Task Force is made up of researchers and social workers from the Polish community.

The first meeting of the Task Force was held on 20th September.

The establishment of the group will facilitate in-depth research into the specific needs of Polish refugees.

A substantial number of Polish refugees are settled in N.S.W. The arrival of more refugees in the past few years has changed the character and composition of the Polish community.

The Task Force will identify services offered by the Government and voluntary sector which do not cater for the changed needs of the most recent arrivals.

It will also collect information about the experiences of Polish refugees to provide a basis for further planning.

It is estimated that by the end of this year almost 15,000 Poles will have migrated to Australia since 1980. Of this number, nearly half will have settled in N.S.W.

The Commission has already taken action to assist the refugees, and there has also been a substantial increase in the number of Polish refugees helped by the Commission's Overseas Qualifications Unit.

Many are highly qualified, but have difficulty in obtaining recognition in their fields. A major problem has occurred over the unavailability of original work documents.

The Commission has also been increasingly involved in the translation of personal documents for Polish refugees to help in their settlement.

..... MEANWHILE

A full-time Polish Interpreter/Translator has joined the staff of the Ethnic Affairs Commission. Mrs Krystyna Pazdior will be based in the City Office.

Mrs Pazdior came to Australia last year from Gdansk, Poland, with her family.

She holds an MA in English from Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland.

Mrs Pazdior worked for five years as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in Gdansk. She also gained experience as an interpreter during her time in Poland.

Mrs Pazdior has worked closely with Sydney's Polish refugees. She was a part-time teacher with the community-based education programme, Outreach, and also worked with the Polish Welfare and Information Bureau.

For appointments contact:

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140 Phillip Street (First Floor),
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SEMINAR FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING WORKERS

A two-day seminar on an "Introductory Course on Unionism" for Spanish-speaking workers was organized by the Labor Council of N.S.W. for T.U.T.A. (Trade Union Trading Authority), with assistance of the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

The seminar was the first of its kind to be held by T.U.T.A. in a language other than English, with simultaneous translation facilities.

It was opened by the President of the ACTU, Mr Cliff Dolan, and conducted by Carlos Gonzalez, EAC Commissioner, and Ethnic Liaison Officer of the Labor Council.

The aim of the seminar was to introduce basic aspects of trade unionism to the immigrant workforce. Speakers covered three areas - trade unions, workers' compensation and occupational health.

The opening session of the seminar was addressed by Paolo Totaro.

Dott. Totaro said the seminar represented an important step in the implementation of the 1981 Policy Speech on Ethnic Affairs by the Premier, Mr Neville Wran. This stated that the Ethnic Affairs Commission would provide assistance to the Labor Council to improve and expand courses for T.U.T.A. relating to immigrants.

"Participation of workers of non-English speaking background in union life and decision-making is a difficult issue," Dott. Totaro said.

"Not much is known as to progress made in this area. We still rely on research of the early and mid seventies. But it is generally accepted that immigrant participation in union decision-making is to be improved.

"To achieve this immigrants must learn the rules of the game: how unions operate in Australia.

"Workers of non-English speaking background cannot obtain substantial, lasting improvements of working conditions outside the union movement - and for the union movement to become truly responsive to the needs of the non-English speaking worker, it is essential that such workers filter up through the ranks and learn how to make their voices heard."

EAC Commissioner, Mr Carlos Gonzalez, said despite the fact that 40% of the industrial workforce is made up of immigrants, their understanding of how unionism works in Australia was limited.

"There is, however, a myth that migrant workers do not join unions," Mr Gonzalez said.

"In fact, migrant workers are more highly unionized than Australian-born workers.

"Spanish-speaking workers, for instance, have a strong history of trade unionism in their country of origin."

Interpreting assistance was provided for the seminar by the Ethnic Affairs Commission, through one of its Spanish-speaking interpreters, Mr Manuel Pastor.

LEBANESE WORKING PARTY ON ACCIDENT COMPENSATION

A Lebanese Working Party has been formed by the Ethnic Affairs Commission to assist the Law Reform Commission in its inquiry into possible reforms of Accident Compensation legislation.

The Working Party was established to look at issues of specific concern to the Lebanese community, and document cases related to accident compensation for a submission to the Law Reform Commission.

At a meeting of the Working Party, the Chairman of the Law Reform Commission, Professor Ronald Sackville, said that submissions from ethnic communities would provide the inquiry with a detailed overview of how immigrants are affected by compensation claims. One of the points raised by the Law Reform Commission inquiry is whether N.S.W. should introduce a comprehensive no-fault scheme which would compensate all victims regardless of the cause of their injury.

The Working Party is collating suggestions and case histories of people who have sought accident compensation and other legal matters.

..... MEANWHILE

A Law Reform Commission pamphlet outlining important aspects of the Accident Compensation inquiry has been translated by the Ethnic Affairs Commission into Arabic, Spanish, Turkish, Italian, Greek and Serbian.

For details, contact: *Marcia Neave,*
Law Reform Commission.
Tel: 238 7213

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMME DIRECTORY

The Ethnic Affairs Commission has issued a comprehensive referral Directory which provides a guide to English language programmes available to new arrivals, and Australians of non-English speaking background.

The Directory is called "Where, When and How of Learning English." It has already proved invaluable to referral agencies and other groups which offer information about the availability of English classes.

The Directory details information about the kinds of courses offered, their duration, enrolment procedures, and who to contact.

Many community classes are offered, providing a range of opportunities - whatever the level of learning needs.

The Directory includes courses offered by major agencies such as Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES), and N.S.W. Department of Technical and Further Education (TAFE).

Courses available at specialist bodies such as the Institute of Languages at the University of N.S.W., the School of Modern Languages at Macquarie University, and the Language Study Centre at the University of Sydney are also covered.

Where, When and How of Learning English is distributed free.

For information contact: *Ethnic Affairs Commission,*
140 Phillip Street,
Sydney.
Tel: 231 7100

CAREER DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

One-day Career Development Workshops for immigrants are being held by TAFE's (Department of Technical and Further Education) Equal Employment Opportunity Unit. The first Workshop was held for TAFE employees in Sydney. This is the first time that TAFE has held Workshops specifically for employees of non-English speaking background.

The EEO Co-ordinator of TAFE, Ms Jane Schimeld, said: "The Workshops are aimed at helping participants prepare themselves for job interviews and plan a career in the public service." Two similar Workshops are planned for Newcastle and Wollongong.

For details contact: *Jane Schimeld,*
TAFE (EEO Co-ordinator)
Tel: 20982 X 9732

A.M.I.A. SEMINAR

A seminar to discuss the Evaluation of the Post Arrival Programs and Services by the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs was organized by the Ethnic Communities Council of N.S.W.

The one-day seminar was held so that an opportunity could be provided for various community groups to discuss and comment on the Report.

NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY CONFERENCE

Organized by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia. To be held from 22nd October to 24th October in Canberra.

Preliminary Conferences on National Language Policy were held in each State prior to the National Conference.

Recommendations from State and Territory Conferences have been compiled into a Discussion Paper for the National Conference.

For details contact: *Frances Milne 267 7255*
Conference Co-ordinator 239 3677

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