

The Hon. C. J. HOGG (Melbourne North Province) - Mr President, I rise very conscious of the wealth of experience that has left this House with the retirement of my predecessor, the Honourable John Walton, a man who brought to his position, ability, responsiveness, very great courtesy, and an immense understanding of the working of the Parliament. I would like to acknowledge the assistance that he gave me and the many new members of the Government party, in helping us to understand something of the mysteries of this place.

Indeed, today, I find myself wondering how the average citizen of the province I represent, Melbourne North Province, would feel while observing the operations of this House. How any one, regardless of their first language, could readily understand the Bills, the rituals, the orders of the House, for I believe nothing could be less understandable than Parliamentary language. There is nothing more daunting or confusing than some of the paraphernalia that is seen around us here, and one must, with respect, be forced to wonder whether Parliamentary language and these forms are not retained to mystify ordinary people.

While in theory the democratic processes are taking place in this Chamber, the language used is sufficient to deter most people from involvement, to persuade them not to take an interest or to participate in the very limited ways which are available. Language offers freedom, and it offers power. Without being able to use language confidently, and competently, we are cut off from everything, we are cut off from our rights and the very decision-making processes which affect our own lives.

Australia, most people would say, is a multi-cultural society, but because so many adults, and indeed children, of immigrant origin have been unable to acquire adequate English, and with it social mobility and access to decision-making, in 1982 it must be seen as an unequal multi-cultural society. Despite the lip-service that people in this community have paid to the multicultural society, and the posturing that has been performed, it remains an unequal multicultural society.

We all know that Australia has never had a homogenous population. It is now more culturally and ethnically diverse than most other countries and, significantly, a recent United Nations population survey describes Australia as having the highest number of overseas born workers of any modern industrialized country, outside the Middle East.

I ask honourable members to consider some of the changes that have occurred since the large scale post-war immigration scheme began. Throughout the 1950s there was in this country an era of passive ignorance when it was assumed that migrants would assimilate, and would do it quickly; that their children would learn English from their friends, in the streets, or just pick it up in class. As for the adults, language services were virtually not available, and despite the fact that most people had come to Australia knowing they were going to spend a lifetime in this country, they were largely denied access to the language that would have given them some power in their own lives.

In the 1960s, teachers, social workers and some politicians began to speak of migrant groups having problems, but it was during the mid 1970s, that turbulent and creative time for change in this country, when the situation for ethnic communities generally began to improve; that groups started to become organized, insisting on the rights that should be theirs. In the field of education, the teacher unions began to shoulder the responsibilities that were properly theirs. One should pay tribute to the fact that during the 1960s, and even a few years earlier than that, there were groups of teachers and parents working trying to improve conditions in the schools to reflect the

composition of the community. By and large, they did that with very little Government support.

This Government accepts the notion of Australia as a multicultural society and it believes that we should be working towards not a oneness, but a unity; not a similarity, but a composite; not a melting pot, but a voluntary bond of people from dissimilar backgrounds sharing a common political and institutional structure.

The Government has a policy of real support for these aims, and understands that the schools have a historic role and responsibility to bear in their fulfilment.

The Government recognizes that English language proficiency is essential for everyone. It recognizes further that community languages, that is the languages spoken by large groups of people in this country, are an integral part of the fabric of our society. They should be preserved amongst ethnic groups, and access to their learning should be given to all Anglo-Australians.

For adults from non-English speaking backgrounds, the Government will improve services and provide greater assistance with English language learning. For children from non-English speaking backgrounds, born both here and abroad, we must be looking at valuing and building on their language background and experiences, and we must acknowledge the positive aspects of being actually and potentially bilingual.

For children from English-speaking backgrounds, the need is also great, for to be monolingual in today's world is a disadvantage indeed. We believe that all children should have the opportunity to be familiar with another language, and what better starting place than within their own community, using a language where they can communicate with their friends and their families.

Thus, this Government recognizes the pluralism of Australian society and rejects many of the tokenistic - too little, too late-measures of past Conservative Governments.

Schools are, we believe, the logical places for changes to begin. In 1976 Al Grassby said:

For the schoolroom and the playground form the first and sometimes only meeting place for Australian children of various backgrounds. Before going to school they have been divided in many cases by cultural, language, ethnic and class differences and these same differences may well keep them apart after they leave school, yet during their schools years, all Australian children must live together, however inadequate their understanding of each other may be. For this reason, Australian schools must be the first point of concern against discrimination and for the building and unity and amity in our society. In the new Australia, there is room for everyone's heritage.

Indeed, in 1982, I believe the Government will want to take this statement further and pursue the idea that through language programmes and multicultural awareness in schools, through equality of opportunity, language, ethnic and class barriers will be jolted and in many real ways society will change. The conservative establishment of this country and this State will certainly be altered.

Thus we say that the institutions of Australian society, especially the schools, need to take account of the cultural pluralism of the population. Children from non-English speaking backgrounds must be given greater access to English and to their own languages as a matter of right and to gain social and occupational mobility

for migrant groups as a whole. The policy of our Government is for bilingual programmes in appropriate schools, based on the very good Richmond-Collingwood model that was set up several years ago, far greater access to English as a second language and for the teaching of community languages which must be made available to all children.

The inbuilt inequalities of our education system, the lopsided access to our institutions, the lack of mobility in the job opportunities of the thousands who have come here, the fear, frustration and isolation of non-English speaking women who stay at home, and the very real problems that workers with limited English confront on the job and in the work place are all questions that the Government shall address.

The Victorian Government believes the responsibility of a Government to new settlers is clear. It is to help them become established and then ensure that all ethnic groups are able to retain and express their identity and their cultural diversity, if they so desire, without sacrificing their rights of equal access to the community resources.

This Government is committed to equality of opportunity, to progressive social change and participation of all its citizens. Thus, by the reforms that it will make and the policies that it will implement, the notion of an equal multicultural society will be transformed at long last from rhetoric to reality.