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ETHNIC TELEVISION & THE THREE WISE MONKEYS

Within a year it is likely that a fifth television channel will be operating in Sydney and Melbourne.

A Federal Government commitment to establish ethnic television, the formation of the **Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)**, the recent **Galbally** report on migrant services, together with radical new proposals for community television from **Open Channel** in Melbourne could all point towards the chance of a challenging experiment in television broadcasting.

However, how much real thought has gone into the proposals so far?

In this special report, **Access Video** looks at the latest recommendations on establishing ethnic and community television.

"... while of course the ethnic component of the new service would be quite crucial, it will not be the only component of a new service. One has not promised an ethnic station but an ethnic television service, and it may well be that there are other interests which need more television time and space and which can be catered for in this sector..."

**Tony Staley, Minister for Post and Telecommunications —
Broadband, ABC Radio, 21/3/78.**

The LNCP Government has accepted the recommendations of the Report of the Review of Post-arrival Programs and Services for Migrants.¹

Included in these recommendations are proposals for ethnic radio and television.

The Review recommends "that the extension of ethnic radio be phased over the next three years to cover all capital cities and provincial centres with large numbers of migrants. The Sydney and Melbourne services should also be upgraded to provide wider coverage in these centres."

As for television, the Review recommends the establishment of a pilot ethnic station over three years and comments:

"We understand that this is technically feasible and that it could be operating within twelve months by making use as far as possible of existing facilities for transmission, presentation, production and administration.

We understand that if a pilot scheme were established in, say, Sydney, it

would be relatively inexpensive to relay the programs to Melbourne so that both cities could be served.

We see SBS as being the appropriate body to operate ethnic television both in the pilot stages and when it comes into full operation.

We understand that our proposal would involve sums in the order of \$0.6 m capital expenditure and \$4.3 m annual operating costs without taking into account of commercial involvement. A full-scale station might cost as much as \$20m.

We are strongly in favour of some commercial participation in the later stages of the pilot project so that interested parties can assess its potential benefits and the best form for any commercial involvement in permanent services.

We recommend the NEBAC,² consulting the Department of Post and Telecommunications on technical issues as appropriate, undertake public consultations on the basis of this pilot station to find out what migrants and the com-

munity in general think about the format, content and administration of ethnic television.

Even though ethnic television will naturally involve the production and broadcasting of programs of interest to specific groups of migrants, the aim should be to present such programs so as to attract a multilingual audience, and the community generally.

We believe development should be phased over the next three years."

The meaning of these recommendations will not be fully understood and realised until they are implemented. Nonetheless, they do represent an acceptance and guarantee for ethnic radio and television. While it might not be the kind of radio and television that many in the ethnic community want, it is something when prior to 1975 there was nothing. As with the case of public broadcasting, the present government has approved a Labor Government initiative.

The report is silent regarding the establishment, history and closure of

3ZZ. This silence is not only discreet and civilised but also profoundly disturbing. That 3ZZ could be ignored in a discussion of ethnic radio is an attempt to rewrite history as if the station had never existed.

Whatever the motivation of the authors of the report, the consequence of their omission is to seriously distort the history of ethnic radio. Of course, it could be argued that the report is not a history of ethnic radio. Technically, they are aided and abetted in this falsification by the distinction that has been made between ethnic radio 3EA and 2EA and multilingual access radio 3ZZ. Technically, then, 3ZZ was not an ethnic radio station. But the difference between an ethnic radio station and a radio station dominated by ethnic groups becomes a marginal and quibbling technical issue for the sake of avoiding unpleasant realities. The organisation, nature and thrust of 3ZZ and 3EA were significantly different to indicate significantly different assumptions about ethnic programming.

In discussing 3EA and 2EA, the report comments that surveys conducted in August 1975 amongst the Greek, Turkish and Italian communities "found exceptional success in reaching a wide audience". In the context of the existence of 3ZZ at the time, this comment is mischievous.

The audience surveys did indicate that a higher proportion of all ethnic people listened to 3EA rather than 3ZZ. The surveys indicated that of the few who gave a preference, most preferred 3EA to 3ZZ. But, then, the surveys also showed that people listened to either station for different reasons, eg:

3ZZ	3EA
More radical	Less radical
Less conservative	More conservative



More talks	Less talks
Less music	More music

It is a pity that there cannot be an ethnic television that is both radical and conservative by the sharing of a frequency. But, then, a more radical 3ZZ and a less radical 3EA was apparently an intolerable choice!

The report has this disarming comment: "Ethnic communities and individual migrants must have the opportunity to participate in the development and operation of ethnic radio." Somewhat disarming, when the majority of Melbourne's ethnic community leaders originally favoured an independent Ethnic Commission and not a government controlled Special Broadcasting Service. Quite obviously, however, the views of the ethnic community differ on the desirable nature of community involvement in ethnic radio and television. Presumably also the ethnic community is as realistic and pragmatic as the rest of the community, and what it wants and what it says it wants may not be the same thing.

Perhaps it is useful to canvass the

participatory rhetoric used by the report in discussing ethnic involvement in "the development and operation" of ethnic radio and television.

With radio, "opportunity to participate" is provided through advisory councils, "wishes of migrants" can be "taken fully into account" through surveys, and there will also be "general consultations with the ethnic communities".

With television, "there will be widespread consultation with ethnic communities and other interested parties" and the NEBAC will "undertake public consultations".

Thus participation is defined as consultation, and consultation involves consultants consulting. Needless to say there are different views of participative

At 3ZZ people were able to make their own programmes without significant interference by staff, ethnic groups were responsible for their own programmes and eventually programme makers participated in policy making. The 3ZZ staff called this participation

power sharing. There is no power sharing with 3EA and 2EA. There will be no power sharing with ethnic television. Admittedly, however, not everyone wants to share power — irrespective of whether they are a have or a have not.

Of course, domesticated ethnic television is an improvement on no ethnic television. But even to say this suggests there is an alternative to domesticated television when, in fact, an alternative has not been conceived, and to admit this is to admit that criticism is cheap. Regardless, for ethnic groups ethnic television is a Hobson's choice. A pity that the report chose to follow the three wise monkeys. In the end we all lose from its blindness, deafness and dumbness.

David Griffiths

Footnotes

1. *Migrant Services and Programs*, AGPS, Canberra, 1978.
2. National Ethnic Broadcasting Advisory Council.

Tony Bonnici

I talked to Tony Bonnici, Melbourne barrister, Chairman of the Victorian Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) media committee and veteran of the struggle with the government and bureaucracy for an equitable ethnic broadcasting policy.

3ZZ and SBS

The ill fated 3ZZ "was serving a magnificent purpose" and the ECC strenuously fought its closure. The station was attacked by some for its divisive and unsettling influence on the community. To Bonnici this was "hogwash . . . in fact it was cohesive, producing some-

thing of value for the community". No complaints about the station were received by the ABC — only a few letters to the Minister which Bonnici discounts as "worthless pieces of paper". Such accusations are not made in a public forum, nor are they designed to promote public discussion of the issues.

While the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (McKellar) was appointing the members of his National Ethnic Broadcasting Advisory Committee (NEBAC) without consultation with ethnic communities, cabinet was quietly considering the Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) legislation. Previously ethnic communities had elected programming committees to produce and supervise the production of programs for broadcast. They were directly responsible to their respective communities and had to face annual election.

SBS is a bureaucracy directly responsible to the Minister of Post and Communications with strict guidelines on programming. The most contentious of these revolves around the issue of political censorship. Political and social issues are just not on. Any specific programming idea of a political nature needs a clearance from Canberra. Says Bonnici, "We have nothing to do with the whole shebang."

Ethnic broadcasting is the only area of broadcasting in Australia that is overtly and directly under the control of political censorship. Far from creating a situation of ethnic integration into a poly-cultural Australian society, this policy further identifies the substantial ethnic communities as another series of ghetto cultures. "I see ethnic community problems in the Australian context . . . getting a better deal for ethnic communities as members of the Australian society." On the other

hand, it is only natural for ethnic broadcasting to include news from overseas.

The ECC's suggestion to McKellar that representatives to NEBAC and SEBAC (the State body) be elected by the respective ethnic communities was "dismissed out of hand".

The recent Galbally Report on Migrant Services among other things touched on ethnic broadcasting. The report group sought no consultation with the ECC. "This is from a Liberal government that alleges to believe in the least amount of government interference as possible — yet when it comes to ethnic affairs . . ." Bonnici smiles and nods, ". . . you know."

Since taking over Ethnic Affairs, McKellar has bitten off migrant services, Margaret Guilfoyle's Social Security portfolio and has several fingers in ethnic broadcasting. "He is the Prime Minister of ethnic Australia."

The Galbally report has called for a pilot program of experimental ethnic television broadcasting over the next three years developing perhaps into a partly commercial operation. For Bonnici "it will not be ethnic TV but TV showing ethnic films". As to a commercial operation, "profitability could mean two things; one, money in the pocket or, two, the development of an Australian society. Galbally is misguided when he talks about some commercial broadcasting. Our view is that it must be funded by government because ethnic communities have had very little return from what they have contributed in direct taxation. They have worked hard and are contributing to the national purse, but when the budget is announced they haven't got any slice of that cake.

"The migrant who is working on the factory floor is fooled by the govern-