

Multiculturalism

Daniel McCaffrey 1990

It seems just yesterday that multi-culturalism ruled our lives. The very seventies notion that there was no overarching culture of the country but rather that we were a polyglot collection of cultural tribes who needed the wise guidance of a culturally neutral government to find our way to harmony and contentment. Citizens happy in the assigned cultures that were so graciously allocated to us by the wise leaders of the state.

Multiculturalism fell into disuse for much the same reason as Marxism. It stopped having any relationship to the reality that the everyday citizen found in the streets of the country.

Instead of meeting people who were rigidly confined into their ethnically assigned cultural ghettos the ordinary kiwi instead met people from the culture of accountants, lawyers, business people mechanics. Who in the league team were focussed on the footy game, not the origins of the players.

Things more important than origins bound them together in the common things that people do in a day. And while each might go home to a different menu or pray to a different god each in their commingling reached the common bond they needed to work and live together in one overarching culture that they had created. They coped with cultural differences on their terms wherever they found it. In a modern world it had less dominance over their lives than the modern culture they all shared.

And further the younger New Zealand born offspring of different ethnicities spoke with kiwi accents and were fairly firmly kiwis. Proud of their antecedents no doubt but kiwis to the core.

In Australia it was the same. Whatever the latte socialists might think they were Australian and Greek and proud of both. Their children returning for a look at the old country found they were Australian. It was not possible for them to be otherwise. Like any second generation kiwi landing in the country of his parents finds that she or he is a foreigner. Not a total foreigner but a stranger none the less.

In Australia and New Zeland multiculturalism failed because some people themselves were multicultural. One chap, a presenter on television, when asked “what are ya”, of his mixed Solomon Island, Spanish and Scottish parentage answered proudly in broad Aussie, “I’m an Australian”.

The main stumbling block that faced the multiculturalists was how to deal with the majority “culture” the mainstream mob.

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If a country's population was just an aggregate of different and separate cultures plainly there was no such thing as a national culture that everyone could access and be a part of.

To admit this would just take the multi out of culture. Say that and the bureaucratic and political correct empires built on the concept could not be justified

In Australia the remnant cultural lot, the residue culture, left overs when all the minority cultures were allocated their slots were called the anglo-celts.

Seemingly there was no aussie culture per se, just the Greeks the Italians the Somalis and whatever equally lining up at the troughs of multicultural plenty.

Anglo-celticism never caught on. One simply never met anybody that would admit to being anglo-celtic. There were forms in the bureaucracy used it. But they were meaningless. Anglo-celticism was an artefact of the latte elite media and the chattering classes. A definition found in literature too rare to survive in the normal air of social intercourse.

Strangely the 450,000 New Zealanders wandering around Australia stunned no doubt by the style and mix of aussie culture writ large were assigned no cultural group at all. One must assume that it was taken for granted that they did not have any.

In New Zealand the official documents assigns with casual stupidity the term Europeans to the mainstream mob. A rather bizarre outcome since 90% would not be allowed to live in Europe permanently.

More and more young people fed up of answering faced with pakeha or European on official forms are writing in Kiwi or New Zealander. They know they are not Europeans.

It was also assumed that culture was something the state could take an interest in and manage and direct. You could infuse it like literacy. People could be made to learn a language. Never mind the decades of failure abroad where governments tried to stuff cultural artefacts like languages down the throats of an indifferent citizenry. Without the wise and beneficence guidance of the government in our ethnic affairs plainly we would fall to fighting among ourselves.

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The reality that every New Zealander lives with is that we are one of the friendliest people about. That we do get along with each other to a remarkable degree. Plainly we are not perfect. But over the last long number of years it has been a story of tolerance and decency.

The problem the architects of affirmative action and a minority defined society were trying to fix in truth were problems imported from Europe and America.

It was never true of New Zealand.

Unlike India, Northern Ireland, America, England or any number of places we get along as right as rain. What tourists talk about is true. We are a friendly bunch and the vast apparatus the government has put in place on the presumption that we were as riven with fractious animosity as the rest of the world is patent nonsense.

So New Zealanders will continue to take the piss out of one another, argue and squabble in the friendliest of terms as the animal “homo cosmopolitanus” has done for generations down the ages.

As the good book says all things must pass. And in the fullness of time the sad fractionated divisive squabbling model of the conflict society fostered by the PC culture of the 70's will fade away.

In time, when the next generations of our descendents of whatever ancestry are asked the question “what are ya mate” they will answer, “I'm a kiwi, mate, “I am a New Zealander”.

And those who land upon our shores with foreign accents and different ways will be welcome and their grandchildren will say the same about themselves, “I am a Kiwi”. And whatever Kiwi culture they choose to make, they will together mix and make it. Despite the powers that be.

The good news is that it is impossible for it to be otherwise.

And all the powers of the State cannot change that very human thing.

Ends