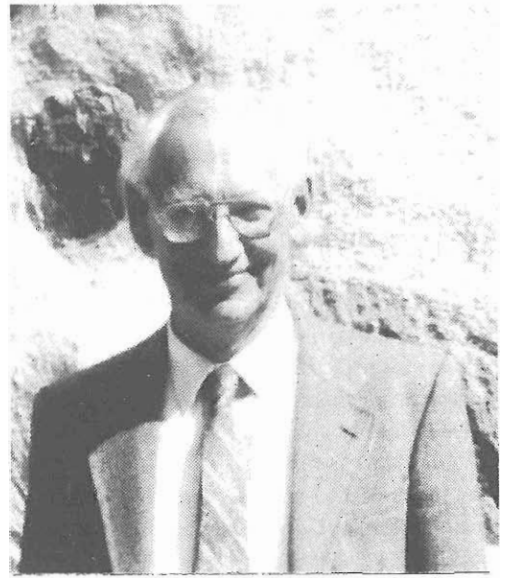Charles A. Price

Ethnic Pluralism

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Some say that since 1945 there has been a great upsurge of ethnic awareness and feeling, often quite peaceful but sometimes resulting in serious tension and conflict; over thirty million people have died in ethnic as distinct from international fighting.[1] Nor, the argument continues, is there any diminution of this upsurge, as witness both the challenge to older notions of 'national homogeneity' or 'assimilation' by newer political philosophies such as 'ethnic pluralism' or 'multiculturalism', and the growing volume of research and writing on ethnic matters.

There is much truth in such remarks. They seldom, however, point out that much of this upsurge and new philosophizing has been in western countries or that in other parts of the world ethnic pluralism has been practised for centuries with very little fuss or introspection. Consider the three most populous countries of the world: India with its tribals, Parsees or Sikhs but also with its major language divisions; China with its 55 or more official minority groups totalling over 60 million people; the U.S.S.R. with its numerous languages and cultures, ranging from Ukrainian in the west to Koryak some

5,000 miles to the east. Most of these ethnic groups are long settled in their respective geographical areas and though there is some serious friction - Sikhs in the Punjab, Tibetans in western China and some Muslim peoples in the U.S.S.R. - there is general stability and acceptance.

Partly this arises from the absence of those strong ethniconationalist forces which developed in the west, and partly from the existence of strong overriding systems: in India the caste system; in Russia an aggressive imperialist system now overladen with Soviet communism; in China a Confucian philosophy and scholar-administration now overladen with Chinese communism. The overriding systems and philosophies are regarded as primary and ethnic distinctions, cultures and languages as secondary; these, being less powerful and therefore less feared than in the west, are more tolerated. Likewise research and writing are less political in character and more ethnographic and antropological. Werstern scholars might sometime lift their often myopic eyes to these great eastern populations and learn from their very different ethnic experience and practice.[2]

In other parts of Asia the situation is somewhat mixed. In some countries the dominant ethnic population accepts ancient minority groups relatively equally, as in Laos or Thailand. In the Lebanon, however, six ancient Christian and Muslim minorities are in open conflict, as are the Kurds with other Muslim peoples in Iran and Iraq and the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. Even in Burma and Indonesia long-established ethnic groups have sometimes experienced very strained relationships. (In Malaysia matters are complicated by the relatively recent immigration of Chinese and Indian peoples; this is more akin to the situation in the New World where western notions of assimilation and multi-culturalism are more relevant).

In Africa there are many new countries witnessing open conflict between different populations, these often being thrown together by the numerous artificial boundaries left by the European imperial powers. The problem here is less one of a minority becoming assimilated to the dominant population than of an ethnic group presently in the ascendant monopolizing the organs of power in its own tribal interests. Western scholars often find it difficult to apply western concepts to such tribal societies, especially where non-tribal systems of government are new and fragile and where large numbers of ethnically different immigrants may, as in Ghana, be expelled at a moment's notice. Some very rewarding and exciting work, however, remains to be done in both Africa and Asia and a whole new dimension of understanding brought to bear on the analysis and assessment of ethnic pluralism.

In Europe matters are complicated by much stronger feelings and policies of nationalism, which in earlier centuries overrode many smaller ethnic languages and cultures. A few countries managed to adopt a nationalism that respected ethnic differences, as in Switzerland, the Netherlands and Finland. In other countries there are long periods of ethnic peace but also times of considerable tension, as between Flemings and Walloons in Belgium, Czechs and Slovaks in Czechoslovakia, and Croats and Serbs in Yugoslavia; here, of course, we are in the relatively new successor states to the pluralistic Hapsburg monarchy and ethnic relations are still being worked out. In Britain, France and Germany, however, nationalism overrode the Keltic and Slavic minorities and pushed even regional and dialectical differences into minor significance.

Two things have happened since World War II. First the large-scale immigration of European, African and west Asian peoples from the Mediterranean as guest-workers to western Europe, and the immigration of Caribbean and Asian peoples to Britain, has introduced novel and complex problems of ethnic and racial differences; Britain in particular is experiencing conflict between official policies of non-discrimination and popular unhappiness at the relatively sudden changes in basic ethnic composition. Numerous scholars and writers are at work but as many are part of the liberal-humanitarian movement, or the radical anti-racist wing, their opinions and utterances often leave the general public completely unmoved. Most writings, in fact, concentrate on the rights and plight of disadvantaged newcomers: relatively few examine or discuss the rights and fears of the old population experiencing drastic ethnic changes with little prior consultation.

The second phenomenon has arisen in part from this concentration on minority rights and cultures: it is the revival of much older minority groups that had almost vanished under national conformity. In Britain, for example, there has been a great Keltic revival, with the Welsh language and culture becoming officially recognized and appreciably stronger and with the extenct Cornish language emerging from its grave, not to live again in the homes of farmers, miners and fishermen, but as the second language of many educated families and a useful tool for business interests intent on attracting tourists. Further north, though Keltic has virtually died out in the Isle of

Man, it survives in north-western Scotland and has become considerably stronger in Ireland where it has been the first official language since independence. Even in France, which frowned upon regional languages for centuries, and still fails to collect adequate statistics of language-speakers, there is now a policy allowing children to learn their ethnic language in school; in addition to numbers of Basque, Catalan and Provencal schools there are a few thousand children learning Keltic in Britanny, with estimates of some hundreds of thousand adult speakers.

The outcome in terms of ethnic pluralism will obviously vary by country and region. But modern western European notions of nondiscrimination, of minority rights and ethnic-group freedom, are not only affecting policies towards immigrant peoples but also those towards ancient minority groups now pushing their way into the open. Some academic works exist on these ancient peoples, though much of the discussion and publicity revolve around folk-festivals and folk-lore rather than around minority rights; the great bulk of work, however, relates to the acute social problems of race discrimination against recent immigrants, or the rights of guest-workers who want to stay on permanently with their families.

Last but not least are the New World societies: the U.S.A., Canada, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand. Here there are ancient Indian, Aborigine and Polynesian minorities but they are mostly small, having comparatively low densities at the time of European invasion and settlement. In a sense these societies are products of the European demographic transition, those decades when mortality was falling faster than fertility and the ever-increasing population lifted its eyes to emptier lands or new-born industries in the Americas and Australasia. Latin America, with industry growing much more slowly than peasant and pastoral farming, went a rather different way from North America and Australasia with their comparatively rapid development into urban-industrial societies; by 1911 the urban popu-

lation was 60 per cent of the total Australian population, with 40 per cent living in capital cities.

Again, whereas European immigrants to Latin America were largely Mediterranean in origin those first settling in North America and Australasia were mainly northern Europeans, with a very large component of Anglo-Kelts (in Australia and New Zealand nearly 90 per cent). From the end of the nineteenth century onwards the streams changed somewhat, the "old migration" of northern Europeans being supplemented, and sometimes overtaken, by a "new migration" from southern and eastern Europe; this in itself produced problems of ethnic relations and national identity, giving rise to doctrines of assimilation and subsequently of integration and ethnic pluralism. Furthermore, these countries were all confronted with a large inflow of Chinese gold-diggers in the 1850's, out of which came restrictive immigration policies - first against the Chinese and then against other non-Europeans - which lasted until the mid 1960's; they were then replaced by humanitarian policies emphasizing civil rights and no discrimination, family reunion, refugees, and the rights of indigeneous natives. The old established European population resisted these changes surprisingly little but there are now signs of back-lash, for the most part quite moderate and mainly directed against Asian immigrants in Australia, Polynesian immigrants in New Zealand and Hispanic and Caribbean immigrants in North America.

Accompanying this, though, is a strengthening of ethnic-group awareness and feeling amongst the older population. There is now more interest in family history and genealogy, a sort of "Back to Roots" movement. Likewise there is pressure to collect census information on ethnic origins: though Canadian censuses have had some kind of origins question for decades this was first introduced in the U.S. census in 1980 and will first be in the Australian census in 1986; New Zealand seems content with its fairly detailed questions on racial origin. There is also more

stress on ethnic languages, cultures and schools. Even the Keltic revival has affected the New World: Cornish folk festivals in Australia; Keltic language and literary societies here and there with an occasional Keltic radio programme; historical works - archaeological and fictional - on the importance of Kelts in European and New World history;[3] efforts to show that the number of Keltic immigrants to the U.S.A. was considerably greater than hitherto thought;[4] and so on.

In terms of particular ethnic groups and pluralist controversies New Zealand is the simplest country of the four: a population over 90 per cent Anglo-Keltic in origin, limited immigration from continental Europe, very small intake from Asia and Africa, but with a substantial immigration of Polynesian islanders ethnically very akin to the indigeneous Maori inhabitants. There certainly are racial problems, especially in terms of the labour market, but to threat to the dominance of the Anglo-Keltic culture and English language. Apart from solid discussions about the place of Maori and other Polynesian communities there is little talk of ethnic pluralism or multi-culturalism.

The U.S.A. has a limited de facto multi-cultural policy but nothing very formal or official apart from strong statements about its nondiscriminatory immigration and civil-rights policies. There is, however, an intense awareness of ethnic diversity - of over 100 ethnic ancestries, over 80 mother tongues, more than a dozen major races and numerous religions. Ethnic historical societies abound and there are several major centres such as Minnesota's Immigration History Society or the Balch Institute in Philadelphia. There are also folk-lore and folk-festival organizations, notably in the old German areas of Pennsylvania. A major review of these various peoples and languages is in the **Harvard Encyclopaedia of American Ethnic Groups,** 1980.

Over the 80 years or more in which American scholars have been several major themes and emphases. At first, from the turn of the century, there was talk of "assimilation", either to the Anglo-Saxon majority (Anglo-Conformity) or else to a new American cultural mix or "melting pot"; the 1920's saw a move away from talk of rapid assimilation to a slower three generation process, wherein the second generation were a language and cultural bridge between the original immigrants and their assimilated grand-children. Later this become modified into a more pluralistic approach, some writers adopting Marcus Hansen's suggestion that, so far from becoming completely assimilated, many third generation Americans, feeling quite secure and well established, were reviving the culture and language of their ancestors, if not in daily use at least in terms of ethnic historical and folk societies. Later came talk of a triple religious melting pot (Protestant, Catholic, Jew), cross-cut by major race divisions - and now more talk of widespread pluralism. One recent term here is "integration", the drawing together of diverse peoples and traditions into an integrated society, united on basic issues but able permanently to retain ethnic languages and customs at less basic levels.

Despite this ethnic historical emphasis on the part of the older population the major policy and academic concerns are with urgent current problems. The indigeneous Amerindians, totalling 1.5 million, achieve prominence with their claims for ancestral lands and legal actions to secure ealier treaty rights. The 26.5 million Africans, mostly of slave descent, continue as a major racial problem while the 13.5 million Hispanics, many being recent border crossers from Mexico and beyond, create other problems, especially in the south-western and south-eastern states. The decision to help disadvantaged peoples here by affirmative action has enabled the U.S. Census to keep its race question (dropped in Australia and elsewhere as being too "racist") and to insert a special question on Hispanic origin; it has also kept earlier questions on birthplace and mother-tongue (now language of the home) but has dropped the question on

bithplace of parents in favour of one on ethnic ancestry. Policy-makers and academics, therefore, have much ethnic data to work with.

Despite this vast ethnic diversity there is a strong underlying unity in American society, arising partly from its origins in the War of Independence with Great Britain, partly from the bloody Civil War with its firm decision to maintain national unity, partly from the great value placed on American citizenship, and partly from the U.S. position as a major world power with a particular social philosophy and a special set of international interests. Though there is some concentration of ethnic populations in certain areas - Hispanics in the south-west, for example - there is no move to split the country on ethnic lines. Nor is there any solid challenge to English as the one official language, though the policy of some local government bodies to meet ethnic group requests for bilingual street signs, and have some public information and activities in a language other than English, has given rise to moves to have English declared the one official policy of the State.

Very different is the situation in Canada, primarily because the British North America Act of 1867 established two founding peoples and two offical languages: English and French. With French speakers dominating in the province of Quebec and English speakers predominant elsewhere there is a real possibility of spliting the country on ethnic lines should the two major ethnic populations find it impossible to work together.

Additionally, French and English have very different attitudes to ethnic pluralism. Historically French policy has been to assimilate dependent peoples to the French language and culture, even if that means giving them full French citizenship and counting them as part of metropolitan France; such a policy has little room for diversity of languages and cultures. The Quebecois have inherited this view and, on the whole, have resisted any policy which would allow non-French immigrants to Quebec to retain a

whole range of languages and schools. English speaking Canada, however, has gone through philosophies and policies much more akin to those of the U.S.A.: assimilation, then integration, then multi-culturalism. In fact, the term multi-culturalism was first used in Canada, some say by the federal government to out-manoeuvre the mono-cultural policy of Quebec.

Wathever the truth of this may be it is clear that Ontario province is the major centre for Canadian multi-cultural activities, with organizations such as the Multicultural History Society drawing federal and provincial funds to help finance its public relations work, its multi-cultural journal **Polyphony**, its series of ethnic histories jointly published with the Ontario Heritage Foundation, its Ethnocultural Voice series, and its various cultural conferences. Additionally there are numerous academics working on ethnic matters, mostly in the Ontario tradition rather than that of Quebec.

Australia is different again. Entering World War II with a population of barely seven million to defend a continent of nearly three million square miles (ie. a population density of less than 2.5 persons per square mile) the Australian people received a severe jolt from threat of invasion and decided, for reasons of defense and development, to embark upon a large-scale post war immigration programme of one per cent per annum. Though achievement was 0.92 per cent 1947-71, and 0.5 per cent or so 1971-84, the result was that by mid 1984 over 60 per cent of post-war population increase was due to new immigrants and their children born in Australia; which means that these immigrant elements now make up nearly 30 per cent of the total population.

As first Australia hoped to maintain its 90 per cent Anglo-Keltic ethnic composition but, when it become clear that the British Isles could no longer supply all the immigrants required, agreed to keep the migration programme going even if it meant a considerable increase in non-British stock. In fact, only 46 per cent of post-war immigration

has been Anglo-Keltic and the non Anglo-Keltic per cent in total population has risen from 10 per cent to 24 per cent: 7.6 per cent northern European, 4.2 eastern European, 8.0 southern European, 1.2 western Asian, 1.7 other Asian, 0.2 Other and 1.1 per cent Aborigine.

It is this very different ethnic mixture, plus strong humanitarian emphasis on civil rights and no discrimination, which has broken the old Anglo-Keltic supremacy, caused the federal government not only to remove all "British" privileges in immigration, voting rights and employment, but also to finance ethnic radio and T.V., subsidize ethnic schools, move towards a multi-cultural national language policy, and provide grant-in-aid social workeres for ethnic communities. Likewise state (provincial) governments have been encouraged to form Ethnic Affairs Councils, inquire into discriminatory practices, produce official lists of ethnic organizations and newspapers, and so on. All this has been accompanied by a "multi-cultural" philosophy, now adopted as official policy by federal and state governments and appealed to by ethnic groups who feel themselves disadvantaged. This last excludes the Aborigines who, regarding themselves as created in the Australian "Dreamtime" at least 35,000 years ago, adamantly refuse to be called either immigrants or ethnics.

There are numerous academic examinations of this new multi-cultural philosophy and its ethnic-group basis - these sometimes including the Aborigines whether they like it or not. The new Oxford history of Australia, for instance, devotes the whole of volume one to the Aborigines while the new Encyclopaedia of the Australian People, (commissioned for the Bicentennial celebrations of white settlement in 1788) devotes the whole of Part I to the Aborigines, keeping Part II for the European, Asian, Pacific Islander and other immigrant peoples. There are also political scientists examining ethnic political movements, sociologists investigating the nature and operation of diverse ethnic groups, linguists studying language shifts over time, and demographers examining the birth, death and marriage patterns of as many immigrant groups as appear in the official statistics.

It is these demographic studies which point to two weaknesses in much multi-cultural thinking. First, the old Anglo-Keltic population is still at least 76 per cent of the total population, and large elements of it are becoming restive at the steady break-down of "old Australia" and the continuance of a predominantly non-British immigration; they voiced their unhappiness during the "Blainey" debate in 1984 when Indo-Chinese refugee immigration began to approach 100,000, much of it concentrated in certain suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. It is not at all clear that present multi-cultural policies - which in many ways favour newer and smaller ethnic groups - will be able to continue without query or hindrance. Opposition is usually gentlemantly and discreet but is quite capable of influencing the administration of policy, if not the outward philosophy.

Second, the demographic study of marriage statistics shows that though Greeks, Italians, Lebanese and Vietnamese have in-marriage proportions of 80 to 60 per cent in the first generation (compared with 30 to 10 per cent for most other immigrant groups), in the second-generation the highest in-marriage proportions are well under 50 per cent; which means the total number of "pure" third-generation descendants will be relatively small and the pressure to retain ethnic-group exclusiveness and cultural distinctiveness correspondingly less. Ardent multi-culturalists have not thought this through very clearly; nor have they examined the underlying unity in Australian society to see how much it will tolerate further pluralistic philosophies and policies. It is clear, for instance, that because no ethnic groups is geographically concentrated - as are the French in Canada - there is no danger of splitting the continent on ethnic

lines.

This reference to Australian marriage patterns raises the general point, common to all New World ethnic situations, and to many others; that is, that ethnic group relations are not necessarily static but change quite dramatically over time. Ethnic resurgence could well be followed by ethnic decline, philosophies of ethnic pluralism gradually fade away as irrelevant. Doubtless there will always be an interest in origins and ancestry but maybe less active and belligerent than at present - more quiet genealogy and interest in personal rather than group origins. If so then new academic assessments will be needed, and greater efforts to examine the phenomenon of ethnic pluralism world-wide, not just in certain areas. That is the next, and most exiting, challenge for social scientists interested in the field.

Notes

1. N. Glazer and D. Moyniham, "Why Ethnicity", **Commentary**, 1975, 58: 33-39; W. Connor "The Politics of Ethnonationalism", **Journal of International Affairs**, 1973, 27: 1-21.
2. This point was made by Stephan Thernstrom, Editor of the **Harvard Encyclopaedia of American Ethnic Groups**, when talking to me in Harvard, March 1985.
3. eg. Morgan Llwelyn's, **The Horse Goddess**, Futura, London, 1983.
4. cf. the debate in the **William and Mary Quarterly,** started by F. and E.S. McDonald XXXVII (1980) and continued by T. Purvis and D. Akenson XLI (1984).