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Forgotten Immigrants and Australians

(1988 -)

Born 1 January, 1988, Adelaide South Australia Australia

Summary

The Forgotten Immigrants and Australians exhibition, held in the Old Parliament House, Adelaide in October 1988, showcased photographic images of immigrants from the late 1940's. Dzidra Knoch's, a woman of Latvian heritage, felt that it was important at this time to document the lives of immigrants who arrived in Australia directly after the end of the war. 'My reason,' she wrote, 'was that Australians are paying more attention to present day immigrants and appear to have forgotten the first non English speaking migrants who arrived in the late 1940s'.

Knochs' challenge was collating the material as at that time in Australia, immigrant workers had little time or resources to record their lives. Knochs consequently sourced what she believed to be essential information from the era, in order to provide a record to second and third generation immigrant families and other Australians. The final selection of 236 photographs depicted immigrants and Australians and their way of life in the late 1940's.

Details

Knoch's rationale for mounting the exhibition reflects a tension between members of older immigrant groups and those who benefited from the hard leg work the early post war migrants undertook. 'The entry into Australia was not as easy as it is now,' she said. 'We were tested, double tested physically and mentally and had to speak English. Nothing was printed here in any other language than English. We did not complain.'

In a thinly veiled reference to the rights based activism that was a feature of multicultural politics, policies and services after the Galbally review of Post-arrival migrant programs and services, she noted, 'immigrants in those days worked very hard, and often in two jobs. Numerous immigrants had university degrees which were not recognised here. In order to earn a living, doctors were employed in menial jobs such as cleaners in hospitals; artists as sugarcane cutters. We did not complain, did not start a strike and did not have equal rights discrimination and amendments etc. When we were called not so nice names we did not make a fuss about it and we did not call anyone racist. We could understand that foreigners in other countries must work hard to earn trust and admiration – not demand it. *We remembered how we felt when the country in which we were born was occupied by foreigners.*'

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