

12 December 2001 NZCA Submission

Contributed by Lachlan
Sunday, 22 July 2007

New Zealand Chinese Association submission to Government dated 12 December 2001

Â

You read it here first!

This is the "secret" New Zealand Chinese Association submission to Government dated 12 December 2001 by Professor K M Goh.

Although an early draft was circulated, the final draft of this submission was withheld from nearly everyone including the local Chinese Association branches and other Chinese organisations.

E-mail me with your thoughts.

FOREWORD

The Poll Tax was unjustly imposed on Chinese immigrants in New Zealand over a period of just over half a century from 1881 to 1944 under the Chinese Immigrants Act 1881 (payment waived 1934). The imposition of the Poll Tax was an integral part of the history of Chinese settlement in New Zealand. It is pertinent to the history of New Zealand and its identity.

The Poll Tax was only imposed on immigrants of Chinese ethnicity. As such the carrying out of such a policy was aimed at restricting immigrants who were Chinese from emigrating to New Zealand simply based on the fact that they were Chinese. No other ethnic group was required to overcome such a hurdle before entering New Zealand.

Despite such discriminating measures, the contributions which were made by the early Chinese immigrants and which have been made by their descendants to New Zealand society are very significant. However, the discrimination and unfair treatment of the early Chinese immigrants is still felt very deeply by the descendants of these immigrants (as distinct from New Zealand's more recent arrivals). Many history texts describe the unjust and racially motivated policies which were adopted by the Government in New Zealand in the history of this country. The imposition of a Poll Tax was one such measure which is well documented. Further, the New Zealand Chinese Association commissioned extensive research and publications in 1990 on the issue of the New Zealand Government's Poll Tax policy.

The New Zealand Chinese Association was formed in 1937 to represent all Chinese in New Zealand. The members of the New Zealand Chinese Association are predominantly direct descendants of the Chinese who were forced to pay the Poll Tax and therefore it is the principal Chinese organisation in New Zealand which has the interest and responsibility in redressing the injustices caused by it. It has always been an issue of concern that the Poll Tax issue has still not received the public recognition that it fairly deserves and this is especially the case following once the New Zealand Chinese Association commissioned research and detailed study on this. This question of the Poll Tax was raised with the Minister for Ethnic Affairs, Hon George Hawkins on 19 July 2001 followed by an informal meeting with the Minister in Auckland on 30 September, 2001. At this meeting, the Minister invited the Association to make submissions to him on the issue. The Association would like to thank the Minister for giving us this opportunity.

In this submission, we are providing a brief background of the Poll Tax, its impact on the New Zealand Chinese and the manner in which the Association and its members would like to see the problem resolved. The Association hopes that a meaningful and positive conclusion can be reached which will reflect favourably on all the parties involved and also on New Zealand as a whole.

Contents

Â

1.0 Background

2.0 What did the Chinese suffer?

3.0 Why the New Zealand Chinese Association

4.0 What has the New Zealand Chinese Association done on the issue?

5.0 Recommendations

Â Poll Tax in New Zealand

Â 1.0 Background

1.1 The first organised group of Chinese arrived in Otago as gold miners from Australia in 1866 at the invitation of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce.

1.2 Although they were welcome initially, European prejudice against the Chinese soon became publicly visible and in 1871 public demands to restrict Chinese immigration were made.

1.3 In 1881, racial prejudice became an official policy of the New Zealand Government when it enacted the Chinese Immigration Act 1881. This Act imposed a tax of Â£10 per person for every Chinese person entering New Zealand as well as permitting only one Chinese immigrant per 10 tons of cargo. In 1896, the Government increased the Poll Tax to Â£100 per person and one Chinese person per 200 tons of cargo.

1.4 The Poll Tax is unique. It was only levied on Chinese people and no others and it was the mainstay of official attempts to keep Chinese out of New Zealand. As such the Poll Tax legislation was discriminatory, unfair and unjust and it represents a dark chapter in New Zealand's history.

1.5 The Immigration Act of 1920 requiring all immigrants wishing to enter New Zealand to apply for an entry permit yet the Poll Tax requirement imposed on only Chinese was retained. It was not until 1934 that the payment of the tax was waived by the Minister of Customs. The tax was officially abolished in 1944 when the Chinese Immigration Act was repealed. However, for just over half a century, many of today's Chinese New Zealanders' descendants had been subjected to an official policy of racial discrimination.

1.6 Some of the records relating to the Poll Tax have been destroyed. According to research, the best estimate of the total tax paid over the years while the tax was in force is around Â£310,000. This is equivalent to at least \$28 million in today's terms.

Â 2.0 What did the Chinese suffer?

2.1 The Poll Tax singled out the Chinese as the sole race for discriminatory treatment. In the process, it caused much suffering to those Chinese people looking to start a new life in New Zealand and to contribute to this country. No other race had to overcome this hurdle to enter New Zealand's shores. There is no doubt that the Poll Tax is totally unjust, unfair and grossly discriminatory.

2.2 The Poll Tax made life for the Chinese at the time even more intolerable than it already was, by putting up economic and other barriers that forced the separation and breakdown of families and denied them contact with their culture and heritage. Considerable emotional stresses and losses were felt from the past to present-day Chinese generations.

2.3 Even though the Chinese went on to become highly productive contributors to the New Zealand society, both socially and economically and in addition being law-abiding citizens, the descendants of the original Chinese (mainly Cantonese speakers as distinct from the more recent arrivals, who are predominantly Mandarin speakers) still feel very deeply the injustices imposed by the Poll Tax.

2.4 These descendants have lost some of their heritage due to the break up of the original family unit, a situation which the more recent Chinese arrivals and other migrants did not have to suffer. The Poll Tax was a direct cause of this.

2.5 As the majority of the original Chinese migrants came from the Guangdong Province of China, the loss of the Cantonese language has been felt particularly by the descendants.

Â 3.0 Why the New Zealand Chinese Association?

3.1 The New Zealand Chinese Association was formed in 1937 to represent all Chinese in New Zealand. It is the oldest and the only national Chinese organisation in New Zealand. Currently, there are 12 branches of the Association throughout New Zealand in addition to the National Executive.

3.2 The Association has the representation of most of the descendants of New Zealand Chinese who had to pay the Poll Tax. It is the only organisation that can represent the majority views of those who were affected, directly or indirectly, by the Poll Tax. Due to this fact and the highly organised structure as well as its long history, the New Zealand Chinese Association can best understand and deal effectively with issues of recognition and redress on the Poll Tax issue by the New Zealand Government.

Â

4.0 What has the New Zealand Chinese Association done on the issue?

4.1 In the early 1990s, the New Zealand Chinese Association commissioned Mr Nigel Murphy to begin research on the Poll Tax in New Zealand. This resulted in Mr Murphy's seminal work on the subject and two publications commissioned by the Association, namely:

"The Poll-Tax in New Zealand: A Research Paper" published in 1994.

"A Guide To Laws and Policies Relating to the Chinese in New Zealand, 1871-1996" published in 1997.

4.2 Numerous meetings have been held by the Association and its branches to discuss the Poll Tax issue. In addition, members and delegates present at Annual Conferences debated and discussed the issue from 1995 to today.

4.3 Approaches were made recently to the New Zealand Government through the Minister for Ethnic Affairs, Hon George Hawkins, resulting in an informal meeting with the Minister in Auckland on 30 September 2001 to begin preliminary dialogues on the issue. At the meeting, the Minister invited the Association to make submissions to him before Christmas 2001. The Association consulted all branch members throughout New Zealand in November 2001 prior to presenting this submission.

Â

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 The New Zealand Chinese Association wishes to formally discuss the Poll Tax issue with the New Zealand Government with the aim of achieving the following outcomes:

- (a) To secure a public acknowledgment from the New Zealand Government that the Poll Tax was wrong and discriminatory against the New Zealand Chinese.
- (b) To obtain from the New Zealand Government a tangible recognition in the form of funds and resources to benefit the New Zealand Chinese, specifically for the purposes of restoring and maintaining the Chinese heritage, culture and language in New Zealand that were lost as a result of the Poll Tax policies. It is suggested that such funds and resources be granted to a foundation type structure with the control of, or significant influence from the New Zealand Chinese Association.
- (c) The New Zealand Chinese Association envisages that a significant proportion of the funds and resources will be applied to some of the current initiatives of the New Zealand Chinese Association for the maintenance of language, culture and heritage of the New Zealand Chinese. These include:
 - â€¢ Cantonese language classes and Chinese language schools.

â€¢ Annual Chinese Sports Tournament and Cultural Event.

â€¢ Scholarship awards for academic achievements and Chinese language.

â€¢ Cultural and sports exchanges with Chinese groups in Commonwealth countries.

â€¢ Heritage and cultural visits to China for young Chinese New Zealanders (especially to their ancestral villages).

â€¢ Promotion of the understanding and awareness of Chinese culture, heritage and language in the wider New Zealand community by publications, public lectures, forums, roadshows, museum exhibits and displays of New Zealand Chinese history, heritage and culture.

(d) The New Zealand Chinese Association does not wish to seek individual compensations for and on behalf of those who paid the Poll Tax or their descendants. In its role as a national organisation representing New Zealand Chinese, the Association aims to achieve the above outcomes for the benefits of not only all New Zealand Chinese but also for the wider New Zealand community as a whole.

(e) The New Zealand Chinese Association wishes to thank the New Zealand Government for considering our submission and it looks forward to working with the Government to achieve a favourable and positive result to resolve the Poll Tax issue.

Â