

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 16 August 2001

A general election will soon be upon us in [Australia](#). From all indications, it would be a very close fight between the two major [parties](#), Liberal and Labour. As usual, ethnic communities like us can expect to see some high-powered politicians of all shades dropping in to see us at shopping malls, community centres and social gatherings.

Already mailing campaigns have started in some electorates with MPs and their opponents asking voters for their opinions on what major policies they would like to see implemented by their respective parties. It would be nice to believe that these offers are made in all seriousness. At the same time, we who have been misled time and time again by politicians in our home countries by similar pronouncements, should be forgiven if we take all these with a grain of salt. For who can forget the grand [visions](#) we once harboured of rice from the moon and guaranteed eight pounds of grains for every person?

At the same time, we should appreciate that these encounters provide us with a unique opportunity to make our voices heard on a number of issues which face us as migrants in this country. Instead of wining, [dining](#) and agreeing with everything they tell us on these occasions, we should use these opportunities to pin down the promises politicians may make.

No doubt there is a warm, inner glow when a senior politician and a white one at that, tells you a story of how they found nirvana through a visit to your homeland many, many years ago. But is that enlightenment reflected in the policies of their parties?

Using the convenient excuse of economic globalization, it seems to us that both major parties are gradually relinquishing the principles of good government. Political parties should not only tell us how they will achieve a Budget surplus but also how our [taxes](#) are used to look after the needy, the disadvantaged and the disabled.

They must have the courage and the vision to spell out how we can strengthen the multicultural structure of this country, not create divisions among us. They must spell out for us the policies they will implement to make us proud to be Australians. They must tell us how they are going to make this country honour its indigenous people and value their culture, how we, the migrants from so many countries can identify and live in peace and harmony with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

Above all, the politicians must tell us how much they value the contribution migrants like us have made to make this country what it is today and how they hope to make it better. We do not need finger pointing at the Opposition, we require leadership from those who come to ask for our vote.

This is a free and democratic country and we have the right to ask this of our leaders. There is no need for us to bow our heads and pay homage to others simply because of their colour, status and class. Hopefully, we have left such subservient attitudes behind us.

Which is a hell of a lot more than we can say for those we have left behind in Sri Lanka.