

Britain Fails to Debate Immigration Issues

An overcrowded island needs no new immigrants

by Ray Honeyford

Immigration is a subject which defies those rules of free speech we normally take for granted. Cant, hypocrisy and emotional blackmail confront anyone who seeks to expose the issues involved. I believe there are, broadly speaking, two reasons for this.

The Role of Race

First, immigration is associated with racial differences, and race is an entirely negative concept in the contemporary world. Some of the worst developments and atrocities in human history have been committed in the name of race: the Atlantic slave trade, racial segregation in the U.S.A., apartheid, and the unspeakable Holocaust — all these things are evidence of the wrong done by man to man in the name of race. And we are all smeared by the guilt these things have engendered: images, memories, and the expression of racial themes through art and literature serve to keep alive a general sense of disquiet and foreboding. So we prefer to turn away from any subject where race is involved; and where there should be informed discussion and debate about Britain's immigration problems there is a guilty, if unjustified, silence.

The Failure of Debate

Secondly, this unwonted intellectual climate has been ruthlessly exploited by those with an axe to grind about race: the sectarian Left, who perceive race conflict as a useful substitute for the defunct class struggle; the ideological boot boys of the anti-racist lobby; the self-interested apparatchiks of the race relations industry; a group

of sociologists who have built a career on the allegation that Britain is a society riddled with endemic racism; certain well-meaning, but confused and naive church groups; and an increasing number of cynical politicians out for the ethnic vote. These groups, lobbies and individuals have a very effective method of suppressing dissent — they label anyone who dares to challenge their view of things "racist." Now this term is immensely powerful in a negative way: quite apart from its highly derogatory historical connotations, it sounds like a cross between "rapist" and "fascist" — and no one wants to be associated with such appalling things. So fear serves to extinguish rational anxiety, and an atmosphere of bogus concord is established — not least on the subject of immigration, despite the fact that there is considerable public unease surrounding the issue.

Even, perhaps especially, people at the highest levels of public office are prisoners of the notion that immigration must not, under any circumstances, be openly discussed and the public's anxieties addressed. When *The Daily Telegraph* had the temerity to publish a lead article on the subject, it was instantly admonished by the chairman, no less, of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), who accused the paper of harboring "racist notions." (14.3.97.) And when Nicholas Budgen, M.P., asked the Prime Minister in the House of Commons if he was in favor of maintaining the primary-purpose rule (which prevents marriages of convenience being used as a device to obtain entry) he was met with an evasive, cowardly and insulting response — a response on which the leader of the opposition immediately congratulated the Prime Minister (March 12, 1997).

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I do not believe that anyone with genuine respect for free speech can possibly support the taboo which surrounds the discussion of immigration. Immigration has enormous significance for the future of this country, and it must be subject to the same open debate as any other matter of such public interest. So what is to be done? Ultimately, of course, the responsibility lies with the politicians, who have the power to enact appropriate legislation and to see it is enforced. But before that can happen parliament will need to feel the force of an informed public opinion. And that can only be created when the race-relations-industry philosophy is successfully challenged. The myths, contradictions and misrepresentations which are

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regularly retailed as race relations truth must be exposed to the public gaze.

For instance, we need to make clear that the allegation that this country is profoundly anti-immigrant — a key proposition of the race relations industry — is a serious distortion of the truth. Historically this country has had a world-wide reputation for taking in those who wanted refuge for genuine reasons; the seventeenth century Huguenots, the French emigre fleeing from the Revolution, the Jews escaping from persecution in imperial Russia, Ugandan Asians seeking protection from an African tyrant — all these things bear witness to this country's fundamental decency toward newcomers. Moreover, if this nation is as hostile to immigrants as we are told, why is it that people from every part of the globe, of every creed, race and class are desperate to come and live here? And, if it were, indeed, the case that we are

as unwelcoming as the lobby alleges, why is it that the self-same lobby constantly challenges the need for immigration control? Surely, if the lobby really cares about would-be immigrants, it would, if its allegations are true, be doing its level best to prevent any newcomers from ever setting foot in the place. The truth is that this country is tolerant to a fault, and bears little relation to anti-racist fictions.

Is More Diversity Always Better?

We also need to challenge the notion constantly propagated by the race relations agitators that continually expanding cultural diversity is an inevitable and valuable consequence of immigration. This particular myth has been readily and mindlessly accepted by many influential groups, including large parts of the media — particularly the BBC — the trade unions, the welfariate, and, of course, the whole of the race relations industry and its supporters in academe. This essential falsehood is all the more dangerous and seductive in that it contains a grain of truth. Given man-ageable numbers, immigrants can, over time, enrich the cultural landscape. After all, they bring new languages, new religions, new ideas about marriage and the family, new notions about art and morality, and new ways of thought generally. Some — though not all — of these may prove valuable. I would argue, for example, that British Jewry has had an enormously beneficial influence on the indigenous culture.

But this enriching process is by no means guaranteed. Apart from control of numbers there is the key question of just how far incoming cultures are compatible with the existing culture, and how many diverse cultures can be successfully integrated into an acceptable whole. There is probably a natural limit to the amount of human and cultural diversity with which any country can cope, while remaining a coherent nation with an independent identity. By no means are all countries characterized by diversity the better for it: Bosnia, Somalia, Nigeria, Canada, and, indeed, the USA — all serve to illustrate that, while enriching society in small doses, too much diversity can result in fragmentation and discord.

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conflict. Pressure from large minority groups, enthusiastically supported by the American equivalent of our race relations industry, and by a profoundly unwise judicial activism — these things have destroyed the “melting pot” philosophy that created and maintained the most successful immigrant nation in history. They replaced it with the “salad bowl” metaphor by means of which loyalty to the nation and indigenous culture takes second place to the interests and aims of the racial, ethnic or cultural sub-group.

Britain now has a cultural diversity unique in its history. There are currently about 200 different language groups settled in this country. We have at least a million Muslims living here; there are about forty journals produced by and in the interests of minority groups, many of them in immigrant languages. The degree of diversity in the schools is truly astonishing — one London borough is trying to cope with no fewer than 97 different nationalities. Our libraries are awash with non-English literature and our emergency services are multi-lingual.

Is it unreasonable to raise the question of just how far this development can go, before we see the experience of the USA replicated here? Indeed, we may already be some way down the American road. For many years now we have had an extremely active multicultural lobby which encourages immigrants and their descendants to insist that their mother culture be sustained and developed at public expense.

This same lobby also encourages newcomers not to develop loyalty to British culture and institutions, which they regard with something approaching contempt. Norman Tebbit is a former Conservative cabinet minister, well-known and highly respected for his right-wing views, who is now a member of the House of Lords. When he suggested some years ago that immigrants, who enjoy all the privileges of British citizenship, ought to be developing loyalty to this country, he was excoriated by the whole multi-cultural and anti-racist establishment, and made to appear like a low-browed racist.

Is Immigration Under Control?

The third myth which needs to be exploded is that immigration is under control. There is abundant evidence that there has been no really effective control for many years. A recent bogus asylum-seeker scandal is the tip of a considerable iceberg.

Legislative attempts to stem the flow have had very little success. For instance, a 1993 Act which was intended to solve the asylum problem has done nothing of the kind. In 1993 there were 22,370 asylum seekers; in 1994 there were 32,380; and, in 1995, 43,965. The 1996

Immigration Appeals and Asylum Act — fiercely resisted by the race relations industry and its supporters — is a positive step in the right direction in that it actually names countries whose citizens we will not accept for asylum purposes. The act has also speeded up procedures.

But there is so much in the way of corrupt and illegal practice associated with immigration that one can have little confidence that the law is being respected. (The latest in a long line of shocking revelations is that several thousand illegal immigrants are working in the Civil Service and as local authorities.) Nor should we forget that the pressure for the much-prized British right to settle here is not just confined to the so-called Third World. There is bound to be more immigration from the European Community, from Hong Kong — where 50,000 heads of family (about 250,000 people) have the right to settle here, and from South Africa — where there are 800,000 entitled to British citizenship.

Nor should we allow ourselves to believe we have some sort of obligation to immigrants just because we had an influx, post-war, when we were short of labor. What a nation needs in one period of its history is no guide to its requirements in other periods. Besides, the numbers involved in the late '40s were infinitesimal — about 10,000 at most. The number of people now entering Britain and remaining here is about 100,000 annually, which amounts to half a million every five years.

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But we need to do more than create a more honest and open intellectual climate by challenging the distortions, half truths and misrepresentations of the race relations industry. We need to raise a very simple but fundamental question: Does this country actually need immigrants? And the simple and blindingly obvious answer is, of course, no. Why? Because this country is a small, overcrowded island with a population density far higher than that of most of the countries from which we receive newcomers. Because we have at least two million people on the dole. Because we have a housing shortage. Because crime is massive and endemic, and can only be made worse by immigrant groups such as Chinese triads and Jamaican yardies. And because continued immigration generates race relations tensions we can well do without.

Above all, we should seek severe limits on immigration because that is what public opinion — including a large proportion of ethnic minority opinion — demands. If the politicians continue to listen to the race relations industry rather than to the voice of most ordinary people, then the much-vaunted multi-culturalism could create divisions the likes of which this country has never known. **TSC**