

# Race equality – a prerequisite for the success of communities

Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, responds to the minister's presentation of the Government's strategy document

Reading the Guardian's write-up this morning of the government's strategy, which I thought properly acknowledged its significance, I was taken by the fact that this is a government crackdown across Whitehall, giving general oversight to the CRE for this process. This is quite a new thing for me.

At the moment I am reading a biography of one Joseph Stalin. There's a point at which Stalin introduces the five-year targets and he says to the commissars: 'There will be no deviation from targets'. As we know, Stalin had a particularly entertaining and direct way of making sure that people stuck to their targets.

I have not yet been given any such powers, but, on a serious note, it is time for us to change. We have to stop *talking* about change; we have to change. We know that race inequality persists in Britain today. It's evident right across the board. You heard some of the numbers from Fiona earlier on. It matters at the moment probably more than it has done for a generation because we are about to embark, indeed we are embarking, on a new wave of migration.

No matter what those people from Migration Watch and others say about immigration, we know that for the next two generations it will be an economic necessity for there to be migration into this country. And with migration will come difference. With migration will come new communities and with migration will come the challenge of putting equality into action and integration. That is why I think it is so important that there is a single government strategy that presses every part of government into the same set of objectives. Whatever people feel or believe about the process of immigration, it's here. We are going to have to deal with its consequences, social and economic, and that is what the process of dealing with race equality and integration is about.

And the very worst thing that we could do is not think about it in advance, and end up repeating exactly the same mistakes that we made with the post-war wave of migration: where we end up with some communities finding their way to some extent, but with others stuck in a generational cycle of under-achievement, disadvantage, discrimination and exclusion. That is why we need to address causes and realities of inequality right now.

And it's worth pointing out that this strategy, which brings together both community cohesion and racial equality, does that for a reason. Everybody wants tranquillity. Everybody wants integration. But everybody has to understand that nobody will integrate, nobody will sign up for social tranquillity if that means they are signing up for second-class citizenship. That is why race equality is a prerequisite for race integration and for the success of communities.

## A single strategy for diversity

So the aim of this strategy, it seems to me, is very straightforward. It is to lead us towards a Britain where our ethnic origin does not determine our destiny. We at the Commission for Racial Equality want to play our role in ensuring that this strategy is implemented, worked out; that it makes a reality and makes a difference over the months and years to come. We like the fact that there are two arms to this strategy, both the race equality and the community cohesion element. In essence, what we are talking about is building a society which is diverse, but in which we encourage and we use our diversity to create a single rainbow, rather than allowing that diversity, our differences, to fester into separate cultures and separate communities.

Naturally, government has to lead on this and the fact that the

government is now committing itself to a single strategy is important. What of course is more important is that it delivers on it, but I want to say a word on that in a moment.

I heard the questions that were asked about working with the voluntary sector and others, and I think it is absolutely essential that everybody understands this is not just going to be run from Whitehall. It cannot be successful if it is just run from Whitehall.

That's true in principle and it's also true in practice. Having now spent the best part of two years as a public servant I can tell you, though there are many distinguished public servants, many people with whom we work who do terrific things, I don't think that Whitehall is entirely up to making everything happen by itself yet. So we all need to play a part in this.

The question, I think, that it is reasonable to ask, or will be reasonable to ask once you've read the strategy document, is 'What's different?' Many of us who have been in and about this business for a long time will say 'OK, I've heard that before, we've said that before, we've wanted that before and nothing much has changed. What's new?' So let me say a few words about what I think is new here.

## What's new – four important things

I think that there are four important things about this strategy as proposed. Our friends at the Daily Mail haven't yet noticed them, and when they do, they will be disturbed; and from my point of view, that is good. I want them to be disturbed. Here are the four things that I think are different.

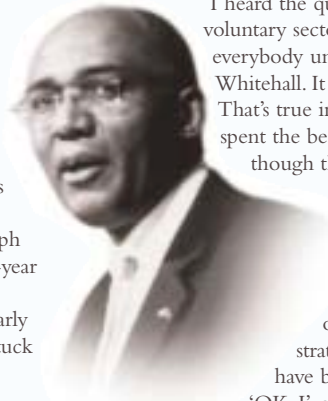
### *Race inequality doesn't just go away*

First of all this strategy says that race inequality is not just a variation of class or socio-economic inequality, it is related to class and it is related to social and economic inequality but it is not the same. And that means that nobody can say that what we need to do is just make sure everybody is a little less poor and everybody is in slightly better housing and there will be a sort of trickle-down effect and, you know, all the black and brown people will benefit from that. Not good enough. We know that isn't what happens.

Just from our point of view at the Commission for Racial Equality, we get the tip of the iceberg in terms of complaints, on discrimination and bad treatment. We get about 8,000 to 10,000 a year. The bulk of those complaints are not from factory workers. They are not from exploited workers in restaurants or in the retail sector. They are from doctors and university lecturers and other professionals. Now, you can say this is skewed because of who has the means to complain. But what this tells you about is the myth that if you get a degree and if you get a good job you will somehow be free from discrimination and injustice. So the important big idea here is it doesn't stop when we are all better off; and that's the first and critical element of this strategy.

### *It's what you do, not what you think*

The second is that inequality, racial inequality, is caused by discrimination, but not only by discrimination. Put another way, this is what I think we have always meant by the terms institutional racism or systemic racism. This strategy recognises that the problems that may be faced by ethnic minorities are not just about bad apples. They are not just about bad attitude. But they are about the way that we all work. And if we are going to change, then we have to change the way we work. That is the purpose of setting targets. Not to stop operating from the point that we, I think, for a generation have worked from, which is to say to everybody, you must be nicer. You must be nicer to the blacks and the Asians because that will make us all better people. Many of you have heard me say this before. I really don't care if you are better people. What I care about is that your behaviour should be better. That



it is fair and decent. And what you have in your heart is a secondary issue. It is for you and whoever your religious leader might be or your psychoanalyst. What I care about is that you do not shut me out of a job; you do not shut me out of a home; you do not shut me out of the democratic process. So that in the end what matters is what you do, not what you think.

### **Different groups have different needs**

The third difference that I see in this strategy, and this is a very important point that Fiona spoke about earlier this morning, is that we are for the first time across government recognising that different groups have different needs. For most of my time I've worked in the private sector, but I've been involved in the voluntary sector and so on, and when people talked about race they basically talked – even though the words might not have said this, but in their minds they were talking – about white people and people who were not white. Actually we now know that this is not good enough. We now know that if you look at education, you've got employment, you look at virtually every walk of life, the stratification and the differences are not just about white and not-white. Different groups, different communities may have very different needs, and indeed because we made that distinction we ignored the needs of certain communities of identity.

Obviously in the last 18 months or so we've begun to understand that Muslims are not just Asians and Asians are not just Muslims; though for many years, actually, if you listened even to the most enlightened people in the race relations field, these two were conflated. We know that in this country half of all Asians are not Muslims, and a third of Muslims are not Asians. So recognising the difference and the specificity of Muslim identity is absolutely critical, as is – and I was glad to hear this raised – the fact that if you get away from the white/non-white distinction we also begin to recognise the disadvantage suffered, for example, by gypsies and travellers. I think this is absolutely critical for what we actually do as opposed to what we say.

### **Changing practice – a platform for real change?**

The last point I want to make, which I think is probably the most profound and will make the most real difference, and I want to say a little bit about it because it is probably the least exciting, the least interesting, the least headline grabbing and the least susceptible to sloganising, but as I said to my colleagues at the CRE, if this is the only thing that we play a part in delivering while I am there it will be the one thing that I will say it was worth my having been there for. Fiona referred earlier on to the issue of targets and public service agreements. At the heart of this is a very simple point. We can be the police officer for this but in the end things will change not because we rush around brandishing a big stick or issuing press statements, but because every organisation, public and private, changes its own practice.

The way that the government is now giving leadership on this is, I think, very straightforward. Now that Whitehall is driven by targets government is recognising it has got to do something about those targets because that is what drives the money. That's what drives the energy. That's what gives civil servants who are dictating policies their loadstar. But the problem is, at the moment what we've done is we've said let's make things a little better for ethnic minorities. But that means that government has been able to hit its education targets on GCSEs year after year without significantly shifting the position of some ethnic minorities, particularly Pakistani heritage peoples, African-Caribbean boys, gypsies and travellers, and it can continue doing that for years and years and years. The big targets can be hit without moving the position for ethnic minorities at all. Ditto in health. We can hit the headline targets for chronic heart disease and so on without moving the position for mortality of infants in some south Asian communities one percentage point. Ditto employment and young black men, and ditto in housing and gypsies and travellers.

And that is why this arcane business of targets is very important, because what this strategy says is that the targets are no longer just about making things a little bit better for ethnic minorities. They are about something quite different. They are about making the experience and the access to services of ethnic minorities more like that of the majority community or the average. That is to say, we are not just

going to make things a little better for African-Caribbeans but we want African-Caribbeans to have the same as everybody else, and this is a very very profound difference. In the end what I hope it will lead to is pressure on the system to reform itself, not just to hand out sops and little programmes that say we are doing something for you.

This is the equivalent of the change in local authorities which has happened in some places but not others, where the local authority year after year does festivals, it has programmes and education and so on, but when you go into the town hall there is not a single director at senior level from an ethnic minority. We have to move from a situation where we are offering tokenism in response to disadvantage to where we are offering real change. The point about this strategy is that it's not going to do it, the words are not going to do it, by itself, but you have to start in the right place. We know where we want to go. We want to go into the place where in 20 years' time I'm not coming back to you and saying what many of us – and I know people around this hall – we've been having these conversations for most of my adult life and one of the things that comes up again and again and we all say to each other is 'it hasn't changed'. Well, we can't do that any more. We mustn't be in a position to do that any more.

What I hope, what I think this strategy does is give us a platform to start, and in 20 years to be in a place where we don't have to say to some of the young people represented here today, 'sorry, we thought about it but we didn't put the actions into practice and we're sorry actually, not much has changed'. That's what we've got to do, make it change. □

**Pat Younge**, Head of Programmes and Planning at BBC Sport and Runnymede trustee, introduced Paul Elliott as the speaker who launched session three of the proceedings.

**PY:** *The issues of cohesion, diversity and equality have been very much to the forefront in sport recently and have actually helped move sport from the back pages to the front pages of our newspapers: what happened to the England team in Spain; Ron Atkinson's outburst; what the Spanish coach has been saying about various black Premiership players; this has all been front-page news. I'm delighted that our next speaker has experience, not just in the UK but across Europe in the whole area of football, which is the UK's key national game.*

*Paul Elliott, MBE, is a former professional footballer whose career started in the late 1970s. He was an outstanding player and he now operates in the media as a summariser for Eurosport, Channel 4 and for radio and Italian television. Paul represents the Commission for Racial Equality, the Professional Footballers' Association, the Scottish Footballers' Association, the Charlton Charitable Trust, the Kick It Out campaign and Football Against Racism in Europe. So he has a wide range of experience in a number of countries.*

### **Paul Elliott began with:**

*I'd like to thank Pat, Runnymede and the Home Office for inviting me here today to say a few words about my experiences of race equality and the community cohesion agenda. I would like to express my support of the government's strategy and the positive outcomes it envisages in light of the current climate of inequality, intolerance and reduced life-chances for disadvantaged individuals within society.*

*The subject-matter of the strategy is very close to my heart, not only because of my identity in terms of colour and racial group, but because of my faith, age, class and gender.*

*For me, respect, opportunity, dignity and tolerance are key levers for me to begin addressing the complexity of my own identity and that of others. My professional career, as some of you may be aware, started in what is often termed 'the beautiful game' of football. The game, to some degree, reflects and mirrors the wider society in terms of its structures and lack of equality.*

*The late 1970s and early 1980s were certainly demanding, and I often found myself at the end of abuse directed at my colour or race, and feeling isolated from the game as a whole and the wider society which I thought I was part of.*

*Paul's speech – full of wry reflection, anecdotes and solid common sense – was a graphic depiction of the divisions in sport and how they can be overcome. It can be read in full on our website [www.runnymedetrust.org].*

