

[item 2]

## Promoting Community Cohesion

Speech given by Home Office Minister John Denham to the Industrial Society and the Runnymede Trust on Monday 18 March 2002 at 3 Carlton Gardens, London.

Early in 2002 Runnymede invited the then Minister for Public Order and Community Cohesion, John Denham, to set out his thoughts on how to begin the task of promoting community cohesion.

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I'd like to start by thanking the Runnymede Trust and the Industrial Society for organising this conference today. It is very useful to bring people together to discuss issues around community cohesion and arising from the events of last summer. I don't think any of us are pretending that we have all of the analysis or all of the answers to what are complex questions, and some new things that have been put on the agenda for policy-making in this country. So it is very useful to have an event in which people do come together to share their ideas about the nature of these issues and what the answers could and should be. My officials and I look forward to drawing on the conclusions of this event to inform what we do in the future.

### **The Analysis**

The issues are obviously complex. There are no simple, single answers and it is a good thing that we have had such a wide range of speakers. I just want, in the time that I have got, to talk about some of the things that Government has been doing around community cohesion. There is no doubt that what happened in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, and of course in other places like Stoke and in Leeds, was a tragedy for the communities involved, and clearly there were other places in which things might have happened. And we have to respond positively. We can't just say we hope that these things don't happen again.

And I think that at the end of last year various people were able to pull together a wealth of analysis and insight into what was going on. There were obviously the major reports: from Ted Cante and his group; from David Ritchie and Tony Clarke on Burnley; and prior to that of course we had Herman Ouseley's work on Bradford. And I chaired the group of Ministers that pulled together the report on what the Government was intending to do that was published at the same time as those reports.

I do think, if you read them collectively, you get a very good idea of what their strengths and weaknesses might be. They have a remarkable amount of consistency in analysis and in policy recommendations. They propose a very consistent series of challenges to the way that things have been done in the past and I think we have to have at least the aspiration that they mark a turning-point in some key areas of social policy, and that people hopefully, in 5 years' time, will be able to look back and say that that was the time people started trying to do some things differently from the way they had been done before.

What are they telling us? I think they are telling us one thing that is very important: whilst the drive for equality is vital for positive race and community relations, it can't operate in a

vacuum or be achieved in a vacuum. It needs more than just a drive for a policy to ensure that we are a cohesive society that shares common values and in which everybody feels that they have a full stake, and in which everybody feels that they are a full citizen. And one of the key conclusions is that we have to have the opportunity for debate and discussion to enable that vision of a future society to take place. I am in no doubt that the solutions to the problems that were revealed by the disturbances last summer lie in the hands of local people themselves. In local communities, towns and cities, people must find the ways of overcoming the suspicions and misunderstandings that were highlighted by all the reports. At the end of the day it is local people who are going to have to work out and implement a different and more positive vision for where they live. And I do accept that Government has a role and an important one in revitalising communities and in building community cohesion, through our support for regeneration, through national policies and programmes on housing, education, policing and the youth service, and through the support we can give to local leaders who now find even bigger responsibilities on their shoulders.

### **The Emerging Community Cohesion Agenda**

What are some of the key features now on the community cohesion agenda? As I have just said, I think the events of the summer bring a new context to the work to which we are already committed on race equality. They tell us we have to go beyond a narrow commitment to race equality if we are going to generate truly cohesive communities. Of course, and there should be absolutely no room for doubt here, we must ensure that equality exists in the delivery of every public service, in housing, education, health or employment. And the newly passed Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) is going to push the promotion of equality in public services and is going to reinforce the work towards good community relations. We must, absolutely, continue to tackle and challenge racist behaviour and discrimination and, of course, as part of that work we have to question why it is that often black and ethnic minority people who experience poor housing have poor achievement at school and high levels of unemployment. But I do think that nothing is more dangerous than giving the impression that this is a process driven by statistics rather than a process that is for people. That all the efforts are targeted at those communities that are most statistically deprived to the exclusion of other communities, particularly the white community or those parts of the white community that suffer similar levels of deprivation. Or an approach that ignores the significant differences within and between different minority communities as well as the majority community. Now I am not saying this is what happens at the moment, but the perception of that being the case is not something we can ignore.

Ted Cante's report and indeed the others were full of instances of local people of all communities who felt they were being done down to the benefit of someone else. Even regeneration itself, which has to be the key to raising living standards and opportunity, has become in some places the source of conflict, misunderstanding and jealousy. So when we are approaching towns and communities as fragmented as those that were involved last summer, when different communities live lives as separate as some of those who spoke to Ted Cante last summer, something more is needed than what we have done in the past. And of course regeneration is essential: all of the disturbances took place in or near wards that are in the 1% most deprived in the country.

### **The Need for Debate**

We cannot assume that regeneration itself will be enough. We have to get people themselves involved. When you have got fragmented communities, when you have got people leading separate lives, all sorts of misunderstandings grow up. People assume that communities have values and aspirations that are fundamentally different without understanding or knowing

what they are or even if this is true. People assume that people live the way they do from choice not from other pressures, and as long as people are not actually talking to each other, those misconceptions are going to persist. Without the ability to discuss or debate we are not going to generate a common vision of how our towns and cities should develop. Without discussion and debate we are not going to be able to articulate common British values and have the confidence that our respect for diversity and our opposition to racism is founded on clear common principles. And without a positive effort to promote contact and discussion and debate within and between communities, we will not be able to ensure that all voices are heard, the voices of deprived white communities as well as those of minority communities, the voices of young people as well as those of their parents and grandparents, the voices of women as well as the voices of men.

My reason for stressing this today is that such debates and discussions won't just happen, nor can we rely on a process of regeneration, for example, for that debate and discussion to take place. To bring it about is going to take local leadership of great vision and quality, certainly yes from the political leadership of all mainstream parties, but also from the leadership of faith groups, of voluntary organisations, of public sector institutions and from the business community. And the type of discussion and debate that needs to take place will not all be in one place, in one meeting or at one event, it needs to take place across the activities of different organisations, with every organisation asking what it can do to take these issues forward. And when we as Ministers at the end of last year called for community cohesion plans, that is really what we had in mind. Not a new plan drafted by some benighted local council official who has been locked away in a cupboard for a few months to draw up the latest plan, but an attempt to challenge each local organisation to identify what it can do.

### **Progress with and by Government**

As I have set the scene, let me talk very briefly about the things that Government has done over the last few months to take these issues forward. I think we have begun work. We are working with partners in local government and inside and outside government. Some of the things we have done have been quite simple but well received. We have tried to channel funds into activities that will promote opportunities for young people from different communities involved in activities together. We want to repeat the activities we undertook last year this summer; we have more time to do it in a targeted way and in a way that more directly promotes community cohesion. We will also in the short term put some money into Bradford, Oldham and Burnley and a number of other towns for activities over the Easter holidays.

We are making available to local communities and authorities what we call community facilitators – people who have some skills in brokering discussion and debate between people from different communities, whether that is amongst young people or the wider community. So there is some resource going into local areas that can help generate the kind of local discussion that I have been talking about already. We are setting up community support teams particularly at the moment to help Bradford, Burnley and Oldham but in due course with other local authorities to develop the local capacity to lead on community cohesion issues. Essentially, though I probably painted a rather negative picture earlier, the reality is that not every town or city that has faced these issues in the past has failed. Many places have been successful whether in policing, housing policy or whatever. So we want to make available people with considerable expertise who are able to work in those areas that are facing these challenges overtly for the first time to help them be successful in delivering policy change.

We are trying to back up these early initiatives by the way that we are working in Government. The Ministerial Group that I chaired continues to meet and it is now supported by a dedicated unit based in the Home Office with links to all the major Government departments, so that we are coordinating community cohesion activities across Government.

And we have asked Ted Cante to work with a group of people to continue to advise us and Government departments and local authorities and others in the development of work around community cohesion. We want as a group of Ministers to work with Ted and his colleagues in a new or unconventional way for Whitehall. They will be working with us very closely indeed and if we see the need, or they advise us, to concentrate on regeneration policy or youth policy or elements of education policy, we will have a team with external expertise able not just to advise us as Ministers but to work with our officials and with those people out there in the field who have to ability to make change happen. And having worked very positively with Ted and his team when they were producing the Cante report we will look forward to continuing that relationship in the future. And as I mentioned earlier, we are working particularly with the authorities that had most difficulties last summer but will, in due course, work this way with others to help them develop local community cohesion plans, to help them shape a set of priorities for each of their own communities.

### **Towards Solutions**

Ministers have visited regularly – some people say too much; some say you can't have too much of a good thing – but between us we have visited the towns that have had the disturbances and other parts of the country with similar characteristics. I think there is a real willingness to learn the lessons of the past and engage with the type of agenda I have set out. I don't think that any of us are under any illusions. Some of these problems have taken many years to become entrenched, to become manifest in local communities, and they are not going to be solved overnight. But I think the commitment that is now developing to break down the barriers to achievement, to participation to overcoming those separate lives and fragmented communities is a very real one.

I am delighted to have been here this afternoon to share some thoughts on the way we are approaching things but I end by saying what I said at the beginning. None of us thinks or assumes that we have all of the answers readily to hand to all the issues that we are now confronting. It is very much a process where we are trying to identify what has worked in different parts of the country and what has failed. So I am not here as the fount of exclusive knowledge on how to tackle these things but as someone who is interested in your own discussions and your own debates so that we can continue to draw on them in the way that we do. Thank you.

Home Office, Press Office.

**18/03/02**

Following this conference, Runnymede staged an international conference in May 2002, in conjunction with the London School of Economics, to explore the theoretical underpinnings of community cohesion. The proceedings of this conference are available from: