A Community of Communities and Citizens

Cohesion and Justice in the Future of Britain

This leaflet summarises the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, published in autumn 2000. The Commission was established by the Runnymede Trust.
Introduction

The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain was set up by the Runnymede Trust, an independent think-tank devoted to the cause of promoting racial justice in Britain. Its remit was to analyse the current state of multi-ethnic Britain and to propose ways of countering racial discrimination and disadvantage and making Britain a confident and vibrant multicultural society at ease with its rich diversity. It had 23 members, drawn from a range of community backgrounds and walks of life.

The Commission’s report* is informed by several fundamental beliefs. First, all individuals have equal worth irrespective of their colour, gender, ethnicity, religion, age or sexual orientation. They have equal claims to the opportunities they need in order to realise their potential and contribute to collective well-being.

Second, citizens are not only individuals but also members of particular religious, ethnic, cultural and regional communities. These are open and fluid as well as relatively stable. Britain is both a community of communities and a community of citizens — both a multicultural and a liberal society.

Third, since citizens have different needs, equal treatment of them requires full account to be taken of their differences. Equality must be defined in a culturally sensitive way and applied in a discriminating but not discriminatory manner.

Fourth, every society needs to be cohesive as well as respectful of diversity, and must find ways of nurturing diversity while fostering a common sense of belonging and a shared identity among its members.

Fifth, although every society needs a broadly shared body of values, of which human rights are an important part, there is a risk of defining these so narrowly that their further development is ruled out, or that legitimate ways of life are suppressed. While affirming such essential procedural values as tolerance, mutual respect, dialogue and peaceful resolution of differences, and such basic ethical norms as respect for human dignity, equal worth of all, equal opportunity for self-development and equal life chances, society must also respect deep moral differences and find ways of resolving inescapable conflicts.

Lastly, racism, understood either as division of mankind into fixed, closed and unalterable groups or as systematic domination of some groups by others, is an empirically false, logically incoherent and morally unacceptable doctrine. Racism is a subtle and complex phenomenon. It may be based on colour and physical features or on culture, nationality and way of life; it may affirm equality of human worth but implicitly deny this by insisting on the superiority of a particular culture; it may admit equality up to a point but impose a glass ceiling higher up.

Whatever its subtle disguises and forms, racism is deeply divisive, intolerant of differences, a source of much human suffering and inimical to the common sense of belonging lying at the basis of every stable society. It can have no place in a decent society.

We approach the current state of multi-ethnic Britain against the background of these and related beliefs. We believe that it is both possible and vitally necessary to create a society in which all its citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their respective talents, lead fulfilling lives, accept their fair share of collective responsibility, and help create a collective life in which the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and common sense of belonging go hand in hand with love of diversity.

Every generation owes its successors a duty to bequeath them a better country than it inherited. The report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain offers one way of discharging that great historical obligation.

Bhikhu Parekh, Chair of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain.

* The Future of Multi Ethnic Britain, Profile Books 2000
The Turning Point – six tasks in the years ahead

Identities and communities in transition
Stories are true or false not only about the past but also about the present. The customary mental picture of Britain as a 95/5 society – where 95 per cent are thought to belong to one vast majority since they are white and five per cent to various minorities since they are not – is not an accurate one. Homogeneity in the so-called majority is a myth, not a true story. So is the idea that ‘minorities’ have more in common with each other than they do with people in the so-called majority.

All communities are changing and all are complex, with internal diversity and disagreements. Neither ‘minority’ communities nor ‘majority’ communities are static. They change in response to their own internal dynamics and also as a result of the interactions which they have with each other.

England, Scotland and Wales are at a turning point in their history. They could become narrow and inward-looking, with rifts and divisions between themselves and amongst their regions and communities. Or Britain could develop as an outward-looking community at ease with its internal diversities. To do so, it needs to engage in six overarching tasks in the years ahead. The tasks affect everyone, and every community, organisation, institution and neighbourhood. They are as follows:

- To rethink the national story and national identity
- To recognise that all communities are changing
- To hold a balance between cohesion, difference and equality
- To address and remove all forms of racism
- To reduce economic inequalities
- To build a pluralist human rights culture

Rethinking the national story and national identity
‘Nations and peoples,’ writes the novelist Ben Okri, ‘are largely the stories they tell themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will live their histories for future flowerings.’

Many of the currently dominant stories in Britain need to be rethought, for they omit large sections of the population. Britain is a recent creation, not ancient, and colonialism and empire were integral to its making. Therefore virtually all current citizens are part of a single story – though their ancestors, of course, engaged with it in a range of different ways. The Windrush did not dock in 1948 in a culturally homogeneous country, nor in a foreign country. The journey was an internal one, from one part of a single system to another.

Nor did the Windrush dock in a country that was politically and ideologically united. On the contrary, it came to a land riven by debates and disputes which pre-dated its arrival by many decades. Similarly, Africans, Bangladeshis, Indians, Irish, Pakistanis and many others came to a country that was already culturally and ideologically diverse, with a range of different self-understandings and stories.

People in Britain have many differences. But they inhabit the same space and share the same future. All have a role in the collective project of fashioning Britain as an outward-looking, generous, inclusive society – a community of communities and citizens.

Cohesion, equality and difference
The present government has stated that it is committed to creating One Nation, a country where ‘every colour is a good colour ... every member of every part of society is able to fulfil their potential ... racism is unacceptable and countered ... everyone is treated according to their needs and rights ... everyone recognises their responsibilities ... racial diversity is Celebrated.’

Such a statement invites several searching questions. What values and loyalties must be shared by communities and individuals in One Nation? How should disputes and incombable values between different communities be handled? How is a balance to be struck between the need to treat people equally, the need to treat people differently, and the need to maintain shared values and social cohesion?

The fundamental need is to treat people equally and to treat them with due respect for difference; to treasure the rights and freedoms of individuals and to cherish belonging, cohesion and solidarity. Neither equality nor respect for difference is a sufficient value in its own right. They must be held together, mutually challenging and supportive.

Similarly, neither personal liberty nor social cohesion is sufficient on its own. They too must be held together, qualifying and challenging each other; yet also mutually informing and enriching.
Dealing with racisms

In other European Union countries it is customary to use the phrase 'racism, xenophobia and antisemitism' as a way of summarising the issues to be addressed. The phrase is cumbersome and is unlikely to be widely used in Britain. It is, however, helpful, for it stresses that hostility which uses skin colour and physical appearance as markers of supposed difference does not represent the whole picture. There is also hostility using markers connected with culture, language and religion. The plural term 'racisms' is sometimes used to highlight such complexity. There are always two strands, physical and cultural, but these intertwine in different ways at different times, and in different places.

Racisms exist in all countries and cultures. In Britain, anti-Black racism is different, in its history, dynamics and effects, from anti-Asian racism. Both are different from anti-Irish racism, a form of racism which has played a significant role in the formation of Britain over the centuries. Antisemitism and anti-Gypsy racism. In recent years there has been a resurgence of anti-Muslim racism, also often known as Islamophobia.

Distinctions must be drawn between the racism of individuals and the racism of institutions, and between institutional racism and violent racism. All kinds of racism must be addressed. Also anti-racism, therefore, must have a range of priorities and strategies.

Reducing economic inequalities

In Britain more than in most other European countries there has been a rise over the last 20 years in material inequality — a higher proportion of people have lower than average incomes, are affected by poor housing and by lack of amenities and facilities, and suffer from poor health. The problems are compounded by lack of political influence. Within this overall picture, African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities are disproportionately affected.

In absolute figures, as distinct from proportions, far more white people are affected by inequality than others. For this reason as for others, efforts to reduce inequality must be concerned with the whole population, not with some communities only. They must not, however, be colour-blind or culture-blind, or blind to the racist violence and harassment which occur primarily in areas of social deprivation.

Three main approaches to combating social exclusion and inequality must be combined: (a) improving physical infrastructure, (b) using welfare-based measures and (c) pursing labour market strategies to improve underlying economic potential and performance. A single-pronged attack will not work.

All measures to combat social exclusion must take into account the fact that different communities are affected by inequality in different ways — colour-blind and culture-blind approaches do not and will not work.

A pluralist human rights culture

Racial justice is a quintessential human rights issue. The new Human Rights Act has great potential for bringing about a cultural shift, and for providing new grounds on which the victims of racism can challenge the infringement of their rights.

Human rights principles provide an ethical code for how individuals should treat each other, and the ground rules for negotiating conflicting rights in a multi-cultural society. They must, accordingly be centre-stage in all discussions and negotiations in multi-ethnic Britain, not left to lawyers and the courts. They are a language everyone must learn to speak and use.

The language of human rights does not belong to any particular group, creed or culture, but on the contrary is universal. However, it is essential to recognise the rights that people have as members of religious, cultural and linguistic groups for example the right to express cultural identity, and to transmit language and culture to the next generation. Human rights must be interpreted and applied in a culturally sensitive manner, and may sometimes entail different responses in different individual cases, depending on community background.

Terminology

Much current terminology is dated and misleading, yet cannot be wholly dropped. It can, however, be partially revised. The report sees Britain as a community of communities, and therefore seldom uses the terms 'majority' or 'minority'. It never uses the term 'ethnic' as a synonym for non-white or not Western.

It uses the term 'race equality and cultural diversity', sometimes shortened to 'race and diversity', to refer to its overall area of concern.

It refers to 'rascist violence' not racial violence.

It uses the term 'Britain' to refer to Great Britain, that is, to England, Scotland and Wales. Its recommendations are directed as appropriate to the administrations at Cardiff, Holywood and Westminster.
Points for Immediate Action

The report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain contains around 130 recommendations. Most of these are addressed to government at Cardiff, Holyrood and Westminster, or else to regional and local authorities. All, however, have implications for institutions and organisations, and many have immediate practical relevance for individuals. Each is discussed and explained in the full report in relation to the six overall tasks summarised overleaf. A selection of the report’s recommendations is provided below.

Coordination by central government
- Formal declaration that the UK is a multicultural society.
- A single Equality Act, supplemented by regulations and regularly updated codes of practice on specific subjects. Both the Act and its supporting documentation to be written in plain language.
- Structures and systems to ensure that all government departments treat race and diversity issues as having high priority, and that they are accountable to each other.
- Inspections of government departments, similar to inspections of local authorities and police authorities, to evaluate their progress on race equality and cultural diversity issues and to establish key issues for improvement.

Criminal justice system
- Declarations on good policing practice in a multi-ethnic society to be drafted and agreed in every town or city.
- Independent audit of progress in implementing the recommendations in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report.
- Independent investigations of every death in custody. Legal aid for families during such investigations and full disclosure to families of all evidence and documents.
- Thematic inspections of race issues in prisons, similar to the inspections already made of the probation service.
- Qualitative research on perceptions of fairness in the criminal justice system, with particular regard to race and diversity issues.
- An independent body to investigate complaints against the police.
- A Judicial Appointments Commission to oversee all appointments and promotions within the magistracy and the higher judiciary, and to Queen’s Counsel, to ensure the judiciary is more diverse in terms of community background.
- Requirement that all candidates for senior posts in the police service should have taken an accredited training module on issues of race equality and cultural diversity.

Education
- National working parties to examine and evaluate the impact of inspection systems on schools and local authorities, with particular reference to race equality and cultural diversity issues.
- Forums in which government officials, academics, practitioners and representatives of non-governmental organisations can jointly review developments in education which have an impact on issues of race equality and cultural diversity.
- Institutions of higher education to review and improve their arrangements for ensuring that potential students from Asian and black communities apply for a wide range of courses.
- Education for citizenship to include human rights principles, skills of deliberation, advocacy and campaigning, open-mindedness and tolerance of difference, knowledge of global interdependence, understanding of equality legislation and opposition to racist beliefs and behaviour.
- Guidance on how each curriculum subject, at all age-levels, should have an international and multicultural dimension.
- Targets for reducing nationally the numbers of exclusions experienced by pupils of particular community backgrounds.
- Work financed by the Ethnic Minority and Travelers Achievement Grant (EMTAG) to be independently evaluated.
- Substantial programme of certificated training for specialists in teaching English as an Additional Language.

Arts, media and sport
- National cultural policies which pay particular attention to issues of cultural inclusion and identity.
- Contracts and franchises to depend on the production of plans (a) to increase Asian and black staff at all levels and grades; (b) to commission more work from Asian and black producers; and (c) to ensure that a proportion of programmes tackle issues of race equality and cultural diversity.
- Every major arts organisation to commission an independent audit of its programmes, output, employment profile, representation of wider society and financial investment, with particular regard to race and diversity issues.

For further discussion of the report visit the Commission’s web pages on the Runnymede Trust’s website: www.runnymedetrust.org.uk
Every newspaper to publish, both in its pages and on its website, a breakdown of its staff by gender, ethnicity and seniority. The breakdowns to be regularly updated and accompanied by statements of the paper’s plans to increase the employment of Asian and black staff.

Broadcasters and franchise-holders required to provide statistics broken down by ethnicity and gender in relation to grades and categories such as producers, editor and camera operator, and by management level.

Further pooling of experience from the range of anti-racist projects recently implemented by football clubs, and lessons for other major sports to be learned.

All sports organisations to draw up and publish plans to increase the numbers of Asian and black people as managers, administrators, coaches and officials.

Health

- Support for the anti-racist programmes set up by the Council of Heads of Medical Schools.
- Substantial improvements in record-keeping and monitoring by ethnicity.
- Targets for the provision of interpreting services.
- Training for all health professionals in cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Thorough review and overhaul of the consultant mentoring system to ensure that issues of equity and diversity are central to its operation, and targets to be set for Asian and black membership of the councils of all Royal Colleges.

Employment

- A statutory duty on all employers to create and implement equity employment plans.
- All organisations delivering New Deal programmes required to demonstrate that they are contributing positively to employment equity.
- Research on the contributions of Asian and black firms to UK gross national product and UK trade balances.
- Monitoring by ethnicity of lending decisions by financial institutions.
- Targets at national council and local council levels of the Small Business Service, in order to increase the take-up of support by Asian and black small businesses.

Immigration and asylum

- Appeal rights relating to deportation to be fully restored.
- Remove the exemption in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act permitting discrimination on grounds of ethnic or national origin.
- The government to encourage and lead a positive debate on asylum and immigration, both through its own publicity mechanisms and by commissioning research.
- Support for asylum-seekers so that those whose claims are accepted have the best chance of successful settlement – cash support at not less than the basic income support level choice of available housing, English language and skills training.
- Co-ordinated approach to the settlement needs of those granted asylum, so that the Social Exclusion Unit, or a similar body, can identify needs and develop a national strategy for meeting them.
- An independent commission on all aspects of immigration, asylum and nationality

Politics and representation

- Each political party to publish a statement showing how it will avoid playing, or appearing to play, the race card in European, national and local elections. The statement should be quoted in the party manifestos and brought to the attention of all candidates and party workers.
- Each party to conduct an audit by ethnicity of its own membership and, drawing up and publish plans on how it proposes to ensure that more Asian and black candidates are selected for safe and winnable seats.
- The Appointments Commission to have a statutory duty to ensure that the second chamber (the present House of Lords) is more representative in terms of ethnicity.

Religion and belief

- Legislation to prohibit direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of religion or belief.
- A commission on the role of religion in public life, for example, chaplaincy arrangements in prisons and hospitals, the conduct of weddings, and the privileges of the Church of England.
- Closer links in religious organisations between anti-racism and inter-faith dialogue.

Background

The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain was set up by the Runnymede Trust. It was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Nuffield Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain is published by Profile Books for the Runnymede Trust. ISBN 1 86197 227 X. price £10.99. Copies can be obtained from any bookshop or directly from Profile at the reduced price of £9.99, inclusive of postage and packing at SBA Hatton Garden, London EC1N 8LX, fax 020 7404 3003. Further copies of this leaflet, and copies of a special edition of The Runnymede Bulletin about the report's background, are available free of charge from The Runnymede Trust, 133 Aldersgate Street, London EC1A 4HA.