

**DON'T  
DIVIDE  
US**



## **FROM DEMOCRACY TO IDENTITY**

**The role of public policy in fostering the preconditions for violent social disorder**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The recent riots across the UK are deeply alarming for anyone who loves this country, but it is facile to blame far-right thuggery while ignoring years of public policy failures that have entrenched divisions within our society
- Racially-motivated violence can never be accepted. If we want to eliminate the spectre of extremism – whether from the far-left or far-right – we must face uncomfortable truths about its causes and origins
- The riots and the atmosphere of resentment and simmering racial tension are the inevitable result of inherently divisive, government-sponsored identity politics that have taken over the full range of UK institutions
- There is a wealth of evidence that the social contract is failing large swathes of the UK public, particularly in the area that has the biggest impact on people's life chances: education. This has not happened by accident. The rise of official multiculturalism and identity politics, the separation of people into 'identity groups' and the prioritisation of certain groups in a 'hierarchy of victimhood' have fostered a sense of disenfranchisement that is fatal to social cohesion.
- This paper examines how these divisions emerged in the UK. It charts the state's journey towards regulating social relationships from the 1965 Race Discrimination Act to the emergence of multiculturalism in the 1980s, in particular within education policies. Finally, we look at the recent Equalities Acts and their dangerously divisive effects.
- Further, we show how, over the past four decades, British institutions – especially schools – have encouraged ethnic minorities to cultivate their own minority identity as an end in itself, to the exclusion of integration of people who share a common British identity. Logically, re-integrating the majority into political, cultural and social life is a precondition for integrating immigrant minorities into British society.

- This is driven by the rise of the powerful, unaccountable and tendentious Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) industry, which is corroding society, entrenching division and undermining integration. Its core tenets encourage addressing what should be a general public as a proliferating number of discrete 'communities'.
- This paper identifies how successive governments have sponsored these corrosive policies, to the detriment of the working class (the largest social grouping), who have been 'de-presented' and subsequently disenfranchised from the British body politic. To help restore bonds between the public and its national, public institutions - that is, to *re-integrate the general public* of which ethnic minorities are a part - we suggest the following:
  - Review the Equality Act and where it is found incompatible with affirming foundational values of freedom and equality, and divisive rather than integrative, it should be reformed or, if needed, repealed.
  - Review the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion sector and where its provisions are incompatible with foundational values of democracy and equality, and divisive rather than integrative, a range of sanctions or regulations needs to be considered and enacted.
  - Political and cultural leaders should start thinking in terms of policies that address a British public (unified in its diversity) rather than imposing top-down uniformity or inclusivity on people categorised into prescribed communities.
- Popular calls for control of immigration need to be understood as a response to more than numbers alone. Some of the reasons why immigration acquires its current significance are:
  - increasing competition for decreasing services;
  - frustration at successive governments who have made, and broken, promises regarding immigration control;
  - anger at majoritarian concerns being ignored and, more recently, stigmatised by new cultural elites who use

minoritarian rights to assert that any questioning of immigration is evidence of racism.

- In other words, immigration is intimately tied to a key issue of democratic accountability. The people assent to the authority of their political representatives on the basis that their representatives have the ability, and the will, to put their interests first. It has been a long time since any government has been able to do this.

## INTRODUCTION

Anti-immigrant rioters who attacked Muslims in their mosques and asylum-seekers in their hotel accommodation, will get no *apologia* from me – partly because I am a brown-skinned woman born in India, but mainly because as a British citizen I am loyal to Britain's democracy, with its championing of free speech and concomitant hostility to mob violence.

On the other hand, in defending British democracy, surely we must address the underlying factors which prompted the recent spate of anti-immigration protests, even if some of these protests subsequently became racist riots. And in doing so, we should consider whether racism and rioting really did constitute cause and effect; or could it be that immigration and immigrants happen to have become the focus and the target for a far wider range of social anxieties and political problems?

Now that the disorder on our streets has subsided (at least for the time being), we should also consider the extent to which public policy may have been a contributing factor. Until now, the 'how did this happen?' conversation has been confined to blaming 'the far right', social media and populist politicians such as Nigel Farage. But this shortlist of usual suspects omits a key culprit: the role of public policy in institutionalising a divided society, and stoking up divisions to the point where a backlash was all but unavoidable.

In this paper, I will show that government policy on race and racism has always been potentially divisive, but its sectarian character remained latent for as long as the institutions of social democracy – predicated on a robust idea of the general public – were strong enough to hold this in check. Today, by contrast, government-sponsored identity politics has supplanted social democracy, and in this new context, the primary role of British institutions is to establish and maintain the separation and containment of distinct identities. This further suggests that the recent riots were, at least in part, a lumpen response to such sectarianism by those who have the smallest stake in it.

Reacting to the riots with a typically left-field trope, the Runnymede Trust [blamed](#) them on institutional racism and the failure to address it. 'People of colour have faced a rowback on their civil and political rights over the past five years', claimed spokesperson Alba Kapoor. But this claim draws attention away from a much deeper problem – a problem which, if our

concerted attention is continually drawn away from it, cannot but manifest itself in ugly and arbitrary outbursts such as rioting.

The elephant in the room, so to speak, is the disenfranchisement of great swathes of the British public. This process has been aided and abetted by the gradual institutionalisation of multiculturalism and identity politics. The latter has served to recast the general public as a series of identities, delineated by ethnicity, gender or sexuality, while reaffirming the state as the arbiter of which identities are acceptable and which are to be no-platformed. Perversely, the British state has effectively no-platformed the most populous social group in Britain: the white working class. Accordingly, a British general election where if [non-voters](#) were a party, they would have won the largest share, was followed within a month by widespread violent disorder, particularly in towns and cities with especially large numbers of non-voters. *Quelle surprise!*

Participation in and expectations of employment are in accordance with the trend towards political disenfranchisement. Department of Employment research shows that during the 1990s, participation in the economy by people in socio-economic groups A-C was double that of groups D to E. Longitudinal cohort studies on social mobility show that the economic status of those growing up in the 1970s and 1980s is more strongly associated with parental economic status than those growing up in the 1960s and 1970s – that is, the majority of those currently of working age have enjoyed less social mobility than the previous generation.<sup>1</sup>

[Data](#) for pupils following a curriculum that would allow them to be entered for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) indicate the structural shifts in social mobility are expressed within education. For example, of those pupils entered for the EBacc in 2022, 34% of pupils were white while 47% of candidates were black. The data for the distribution of EBacc pass rates suggests the effect of geography, too, with the overall London pass rate being 29% while the figures for Middlesbrough and Liverpool were 12% and 6% respectively. The official and media discussion around exam results is usually [limited](#) to the life chances or access to university of the young, but the effects of this educational disenfranchisement for the hopes and aspirations of older generations of parents and grandparents for their children are rarely considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in *Changes in Intergenerational Mobility in Britain*, 2002, Royal Economic Society Annual Conference proceedings, no. 31. By J. Blanden, A. Goodman, P. Gregg & S. Machin

The era of social democracy was characterised by a social contract stipulating that, through political representation and participation in economic life, the lives of all citizens would improve, irrespective of their class position. The tripartite corporatist government (where interests of labour, capital and government had political representation) secured public legitimacy by a tacit understanding that governments would act for the general public good. Today there is no *general* public, only proliferating, officially sanctioned identity groups; and increasingly, the government seems unable or unwilling to act at all – except to police relations between such groups, preferring instead to outsource its other duties to any number of quangos, charities or other third-party bodies.

There is substance to the claim that, in contrast to the period when social democracy was at its height (electoral turnout was over 80% in 1950 and 1951), much of today's working class is absent from the process of political representation and the public conversation surrounding it. This is reflected in the [2023](#) British Social Attitudes Survey, which reported that class remains a salient category of self-identification, but today it is less closely associated with occupation. The survey also found that 32% of respondents think it is 'more difficult to move from one class to another' than in 2005, when the figure was 17%. Finally, the results of the 2019 and 2024 general elections suggest that the [correlation](#) between class self-identification and traditional party-political allegiances is very weak.

If the era of social democracy can be understood as a period of *increasing* political, social and cultural representation, encompassing a wider spectrum of the populace, the decades since the end of the 1980s amount to a period of *decreasing* representation of the general public in politics, policy and culture, and a re-presentation of social relationships in increasingly sectarian form. In this shift, working-class identity has become one of many possible forms of cultural identification. Then, when state-sponsored multiculturalism reifies cultural traits into ethnic identities, the result is that being working class becomes, in effect, a quasi-ethnicity – especially when the person so identified presents no non-white ethnicity to override the quasi-ethnicity 'working class'.

Moreover, in their relationships with the revised form of the British state, it transpires that some ethnic identities are promoted while others have come to be stigmatised. Thus, in the transformation of Britain into a patchwork quilt of sectarian identities, the quasi-ethnicity 'white working class' turns out to be the form of identification most likely to be



stigmatised by a range of state-sponsored organisations, especially in the education sector.

To provide a more granular picture of how we got here, we begin by looking at the 1965 Race Discrimination Act – a law that enabled the state to regulate social relationships that hitherto had been unregulated. We then consider how multiculturalism emerged in the 1980s in education policies introduced by the Conservative government. Finally, we look at the recent Equalities Acts and their dangerously divisive effects.

## RACE DISCRIMINATION ACT 1965

In May 1965, the Race Discrimination Bill was introduced by a Labour government as the pre-emptive response to an expected rise in racism prompted by increased immigration (although [net migration](#) into Britain remained relatively low until 1994). There had been race riots, as in Notting Hill, but these were exceptional episodes; discrimination was commonplace, though by no means uniform. The 1965 Act, which received royal assent in November that year, was thus an admixture of ideological and realist motivations.

Discrimination in housing and employment was acknowledged by both sides in the Parliamentary debate; the disagreement was whether the Bill would be the best response to the contemporary context in which tolerance and intimacy co-existed with '[episodic moments of racial conflict](#).' The 1948 Nationality Act, brought in under Clement Atlee's Labour government, had [meant](#) that immigrants from the Commonwealth were arriving as citizens of the United Kingdom and the Colonies, and so to introduce legal restrictions would have been seen as undermining an important aspect of Britain's imperial tradition. On the other hand, immigrants arriving from Europe, under the European Voluntary Workers (E.V.W.) scheme, were classified as aliens, echoing the 1904 Aliens Act, the stated aim of which was to limit Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe.

In the post-Second World War period, the expectation among most, if not all, of the political class was that the integration of immigrants from the Commonwealth would not need much more than practical provision of housing with some attention to avoiding the possibility of ethnic ghettos. The National Service Hostels Corporation, which [existed](#) from 1941 to 1956, provided housing for workers, irrespective of ethnicity, near their place of



work. In 1949, one such hostel in the [West Midlands housed](#) 235 Poles, 18 E.V.Ws, 235 Southern Irish, 50 Northern Irish, 65 Jamaicans and 100 English, Scottish and Welsh labourers.

In May 1965, Sir Frank Soskice, Secretary of State for the Home Department, when introducing the [Bill](#) in Parliament, said that the Act would be directed towards:

*. . . achieving the task of settling the new arrivals into our community as in every sense first-class citizens . . . Basically, the Bill is concerned with public order. . . acts of discrimination in public places . . . breed ill will which, as the accumulative result of several such actions over a period, may disturb the peace.*

Soskice continued:

*We are convinced that, faced with the problem of a large coloured immigrant minority, it is far better to put this Bill on the Statute Book now, before social stresses have the chance of corrupting and distorting our relationships. This is a transitional period when the new arrivals are settling in. It is bound to bring its own difficulties. But when, as we all hope, this period has passed happily over, we must contrive to live amicably together and with mutual respect.*

The aim was to ensure equal 'first-class' citizenship through preventing discrimination in public places. In this, it was consistent with Britain's social-democratic model of citizenship. However, the Bill added an element of coercion when it also incorporated public order legislation in order to prevent the 'distorting of our relationships' which may arise from 'social stresses'.

Soskice's formulation expresses confidence, in that he regards any difficulties as things that can be 'passed happily over', but the recourse to public order law to prevent any corruption of social relationships implies that Labour felt less certain about its ability to maintain social order without extending the authoritarian arm of the state into new areas of public life. Thus, freedom of speech became subject to scrutiny from the new lens of race discrimination. Section 5 of the Public Order Act (1936) refers to incitement to stir up public disorder (where intentionality is considered). Its provisions were incorporated into the Race Discrimination Bill as 'the likelihood to stir up hatred'.

A Conservative MP, Peter Thorneycroft, was swift in his response to the focus and formulation of the Bill, which he saw as a threat of to Britain's traditional constitutional arrangements and freedoms:

*This House deplures discrimination, whether on racial or religious grounds, but declines to give a second reading to a Bill which introduces criminal sanctions into a field more appropriate to conciliation and the encouragement of fair employment practices, while also importing a new principle into the law affecting freedom of speech.*

The other provisions of the Bill introduced criminal fines for discrimination in 'places of public resort', rental accommodation, hotels and pubs. The thrust of Thorneycroft's opposition was that criminal law was being extended and that, as a consequence, a two-tier law would be established whereby 'the majority would be tainted with criminality'; furthermore, informal means of dealing with discrimination were being rejected in favour of state regulation. Additionally, Thorneycroft pointed out that the Bill did not meet the triple test set out in *The Times*:

*Is the problem large enough to warrant extending criminal law?  
Is the proposed law likely to address the problem?  
Is it reasonably free from unintended consequences?*

In his view, the Bill failed to meet the concerns of immigrants themselves, most of whom were more concerned with employment, progression at work and housing ownership. Finally, he pointed to the illogicality of an Act which would mean that landlords could prevent tenants from refusing to share the building with immigrants while they themselves were left free to do so.

Despite Soskice's reassurances that the Race Discrimination Act would not affect freedom of speech, the rapid dismissal of Enoch Powell from the Shadow Cabinet following his 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968 suggests that Thorneycroft's fears were well-founded. The late Frank Field MP [notes](#) that after Powell's speech and the reaction to it, mainstream politicians were effectively barred from openly discussing immigration, national citizenship and social order. Curiously, while Field was a Labour stalwart and Powell a trenchant Conservative, they became friends as a result of their shared concerns.

The Bill was [passed](#) by a narrow margin of 12 votes, in keeping with Labour's slim majority after the 1964 general election (Labour 317 MPs; Conservatives 304). Shortly after the Race Discrimination Act was passed, in 1966 a [Race Relations Board](#) was established by the Home Secretary. Its remit was to investigate *individual cases* of discrimination in areas of public housing and, after the 1968 Race Relations Act, employment. The Board set up seven regional conciliation committees which, if reconciliation proved impossible at their own level, could refer cases up to the Board, and eventually to the Attorney General. In 1968, the [Community Relations Commission](#) was established. Appointed by the Home Secretary, its 12 members were tasked with coordinating 'national measures to encourage harmonious community relations' across sectors including housing, employment, and education.

In addition to these state bodies, the Labour government incorporated schools into its integration strategy via the Department of Education's [Circular 7/65](#). This recommended that the school-age children of immigrants should not constitute more than a third of any school's total enrolment, so that ghetto schools would be prevented and integration facilitated. To this end, local authorities were directed to arrange catchment areas to aid the dispersal of immigrants' children. Where this was not possible, such children could be bussed to schools outside the catchment area. But only 11 local authorities adopted this policy, and when in 1975 the Race Relations Board found that [bussing](#) was discriminatory, it was abandoned altogether.

In 1975, the government opted to merge both the Race Relations Board and the Community Relations Commission into the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) – the first non-departmental public body (NDPB) established in the area of race relations. This was the moment when non-departmental public bodies began to appear as a mode of governance. While the CRE's remit seems familiar, an important distinction is that where the previous bodies were responsible to government departments, NDPBs are responsible to [individual ministers](#). This move thus represents an early example of outsourcing important state functions to arms-length organisations which are not directly accountable to Parliament.

In the decade between 1965 and 1975, the pendulum swung between Labour and Conservative governments, led by Harold Wilson and Edward Heath, respectively, with a concomitant distribution of the popular vote

between Labour and Conservative parties. From this, it seems fair to surmise that the British electorate and its representatives were divided between those who favoured state intervention into relations between people of different races, and those who preferred an informal approach. At this point, however, apart from a tiny minority on the far left, there was no suggestion that the body of MPs elected to the House of Commons was anything less than a true representation of the British electorate *as a whole*.

## THE LONG MARCH OF MULTICULTURALISM

The regulation of public spaces, and by extension, the relationships within them, was extended through the 1968 Race Discrimination Act, and was met with qualified approval from the Campaign Against Race Discrimination, a lobby group established in 1964 during Martin Luther King's [stop-over](#) in Britain on the way to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. The founding group was led by Marion Glean, secretary to the Quaker International Affairs office in London, and its members included CLR James. It is interesting to see that among its list [of concerns](#) was a clause in the Act that would 'legalise discrimination if it were done with the intention of maintaining a racial balance'. Their objection was that this could lead to the use of quotas in industry.

As noted above, the advent of the Commission for Racial Equality not only reflected the increasingly institutionalised character of race relations, it also marked a shift from direct to indirect forms of institutional accountability. But the pattern exemplified here was also imprinted on other institutions that were not ostensibly concerned with race, but came to be bound up with it and, eventually, re-made in its image.

What became the Arts Council was inaugurated in 1940 when a Royal Charter established the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. Its ethos reflected the universalist principles associated with social democracy, as subsequently implemented in the Festival of Britain (1951). This ambitious cultural project provided a positive national narrative – a tonic for a nation ravaged by war but buoyed by victory over fascist Germany.

Forty years on, in the 1980s, the Arts Council [began](#) to offer resources to ethnic minority communities in the name of strengthening social bonds and citizenship. Instead of nurturing a singular narrative of the unified

nation, it became a contributor to the multicultural mode of governance pioneered by Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council (GLC). But what if the cultivation of ethnic minorities through targeted grants was having anything but the supposedly integrative effect? This question is raised by Parveen Bancil, who was then a young Sikh playwright in receipt of such a grant. He [asks](#):

*Is it possible that enforcing multicultural policies – conventionally accepted as being progressive and liberal – could actually make this more difficult?*

Whereas previously, immigrants and their offspring had been expected to integrate as British citizens – with the promise, far from perfectly realised, of formal and substantive equality, from the 1980s onwards, progressive British institutions have cultivated ethnic minorities as allies in the good cause of social order, and, inadvertently or not, thereby encouraged them to cultivate their own minority identity as a social good – in other words, as a thing in itself. Over time, the thing in itself has become increasingly an end in itself, to the exclusion of other, competing identities which tend to be similarly exclusive (especially since such sectarian demarcation is an essential precondition for obtaining that all-important, publicly-funded grant).

While Labour-led councils often held sway over the terrain of culture, in the 1980s the national Conservative government tightened its grip on education. These were the Thatcher years in which cross-party consensus is understood to have irretrievably broken down: the defeat of the miners' strike (preceded by the steel workers, and followed by print workers and telecoms workers), and the inner-city riots (Brixton, Handsworth, Liverpool 8, Broadwater Farm) are conclusive proof of that. Throughout this period, Labour councils were wont to present themselves as enlightened bodies holding out against Tory reactionaries – and the adoption of multiculturalism was held up as a sure sign of their enlightened character. Yet, as it turned out, the adoption of multiculturalism was common to both parties. In education, successive Conservative governments (1979–1997) carried this ethos into areas where Labour local government could not reach.

## TRANSITION FROM THE NATIONAL TO THE MULTICULTURAL VIA SCHOOLS

We now look more closely at the developments that made multiculturalism – the ideological antithesis of national identity – a viable option for a Conservative Party that sees itself as the guardian of the nation's collective tradition.

When in the run-up to the 1987 general election, the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, rashly [declared](#) 'there is no such thing as society', she actually touched on a deeper truth: the social-democratic understanding of society and the relationships within it were being eroded and recast. Not, as Thatcher would have it, solely through 'individuals and their families', but frequently through the new path of multiculturalism.

In the field of education, the genesis of the Swann Report illustrates the period of transition in which the idea of the general public began to be officially reconceived in terms of minorities and identities. Schools were turned to as a significant site through which this transitional programme could be developed and implemented.

Multiculturalism in education is associated with the left-wing politics that prevailed in organisations such as the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), which was set up in 1965 and disbanded by the Conservative government in 1986. Some greeted ILEA's demise as a sign of Tory malevolence or fear of '[Black Radicalism](#)'. However, what is often missed is that the year before, a Conservative commissioned report, *Education for All: the Swann Report*, had proposed sweeping changes in the school curriculum, teacher training, exam boards and accountability – a set of practices oriented towards multiculturalism that was more far-reaching than anything ILEA could have accomplished.

In 1979 the then secretary of state for education, Labour's Shirley Williams, had set up the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Minority Groups, with the aim of looking into educational underachievement on the part of children of West Indian origin. At this point, we could say that the Committee's remit was framed within a broadly social-democratic paradigm. Disadvantages or discrimination facing some sections of ethnic minorities were understood as being improvable by measures that would facilitate integration and participation in social life on the basis of *equal political and social citizenship*.



A committee was duly formed which was approved by the Conservative ministers who came to power later that year. Its interim [Report](#), chaired by Anthony Rampton, a businessman and philanthropist, was published in 1981, the year of the first Brixton riots. It faced significant criticism. Some thought that the Report's chairman was compromised by his business connections in the area. Sections of the teaching profession and teachers' unions were affronted at the implication that they were responsible for racism. The Report was critical of some teachers who might have entertained negative stereotypes about the cultural traits of West Indian pupils in particular (at this time, these constituted the most underachieving ethnic minority group), and thereby, unintentionally, may have contributed to the racism encountered by these pupils.

The Report recognised that some West Indian parents opposed the suggestion that schools should be teaching Creole: they wanted their children to improve their English. The Committee's response was that using home dialect in English lessons would, on balance, help remove the psychological stigma of racism. Even more remarkable is the statement on page 14 which suggests that schools and teachers were now, consciously or not, being *politically instrumentalised*.

*In short we are asking teachers to play a leading role in seeking to bring about a change in attitudes on the part of society as a whole towards ethnic minority groups.*

Previously, the role of schools with regard to socialising the next generation had been couched in terms of exemplifying existing moral values and social norms, as tacitly agreed by the majority of citizens: not to change them. Aiming to 'bring about a change in attitudes on the part of society as a whole towards ethnic minorities' is *not* integration within a social-democratic paradigm. Now 'society as a whole' was not something into which minorities were expected to integrate; on the contrary, society as a whole needed to change its attitudes towards officially sanctioned ethnic groups.

Between 1979 and 1981, an important shift had occurred. The instrumental approach to social order - social engineering - that previously characterised many Labour administrations, was now being endorsed by significant sections of a Conservative government; ironically, a



government that elsewhere claimed allegiance only to the free market and 'the manager's right to manage'.

The Conservative secretary of state for education and science, Sir Keith Joseph, promptly replaced Rampton with Lord Swann, a recognisably academic figure (he was a Cambridge-educated biologist). Over the next few years, the composition of the committee changed dramatically. Many more representatives of multicultural organisations were brought on board and the presence of businessmen was reduced. There was to be no union representative. Thus, the committee became an early model of the academic and cultural types that have since developed into a new elite – an elite led by sectors in which multiculturalism has been dominant since the days of the Swann Report.

The final [report](#), *Education for All: the Swann Report*, was welcomed by Sir Keith Joseph:

*The government is fully committed to the principle that all children, irrespective of race, colour or ethnic origin, should have a good education which develops their abilities and aptitudes to the full and brings about a true sense of belonging to Britain . . . We can all be grateful to Lord Swann and his colleagues... They have done a great service in drawing the issues affecting ethnic minority pupils to public attention.*

On the face of it, Joseph is merely maintaining traditional Conservative principles. Yet, in pursuit of a new social order, the political instrumentalism signposted in the Rampton Report is made much more explicit in the Swann Report, as we can see in its recommendations (pp 770–772):

- Changing curriculum content; to promote and use materials that 'reflect a pluralist perspective'
- Changing pedagogic practices; from more group discussion to an end to withdrawal lessons for language support
- Changing teacher training; trainee teachers to be 'taught' multiculturalism
- Closing separate language centres
- Government and local authorities to disseminate and monitor multicultural provision; collect statistics on regular basis

- Exam boards and Secondary Examinations Council to ensure 'cultural diversity in the syllabuses they offer and in their working practices'.

The 'cultural diversity in the syllabus' included the suggestion that Rangoli patterns from Hindu religious rituals be used in geometry lessons.<sup>2</sup> Maureen Stone's *The Education of the Black Child: Myth of Multiracial Education* (1981) raised important sociological and educational objections to the multicultural assumptions about children of immigrants. She merited a mention in the Swann Report, but her work was largely ignored.

All this was happening at the same time as Thatcher was [talking](#) about bringing education back to basics via a core curriculum. Yet the 1986 and 1988 Education Acts that followed the Swann Report were by no means an affirmation of long-established curricula. Instead, they introduced wholesale structural changes that a) put the teaching profession and curriculum in a more direct relationship with central government, and b) restructured the administrative arm of state education in the name of parental choice and school effectiveness. In the process, first-order moral principles that underpinned education as a public service, enacted by a coherent and cohering nation state, were transformed into education as technical efficiency enacted by an increasingly incoherent multicultural state.

The potentially sectarian tendency inherent in these reforms was expressed in the institutional and curricular fragmentation which occurred consequently. For example, a 2008 [Report](#) by Cambridge Assessment notes that 'by 2007 the proliferation of exam syllabus specifications, and the number of possible texts, offered a potential 21,672 routes, which made it theoretically viable for almost every candidate to have their own unique combination of prescribed texts.' From the noble aim of integrating minorities into a common culture, at the level of the school syllabus, by this time there was barely a common culture left for anyone to be integrated into.

## DE-PRESENTING THE WORKING CLASS

The Equality Acts of 2006 and 2010 were presented as a largely technical tidy-up of the numerous anti-discrimination laws which had accrued

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<sup>2</sup> Doctoral dissertation by Alka Sehgal Cuthbert, *A Progressive Case for a Liberal Subject-Based Education*, 2017, held at Cambridge University Library

during the decades since 1965; and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was established as the purely administrative body set up to monitor the implementation of the Acts. However, while it is the case that the Acts draw on a set of legal precedents, they are also a significant escalation of the trends enshrined in previous legislation. This amounts to far more than a technicality, just as the EHRC is more ideological than administrative.

The 2010 Equality Act has played a significant part in formalising the [redefinition](#) of the relationship of the individual to the state. Hitherto, the idea of equality before the law has meant that all citizens should be equally free from unwarranted state intervention and, within our polity, should be universal in its application. The 2010 Act changed this with its introduction of special legal exemptions and provisions applicable to marginalised groups, who were designated as having 'protected characteristics'. Protection can be extended to members of the white ethnic majority as [some](#) Employment Tribunal Decisions suggest. But a public comprised of multiple groups in need of official protection and cultural recognition, is a public conceived as having little agency of its own.

Moreover, it is not *the* public (singular) – the general public of social democracy. Instead, the Act ratifies an idea of the public as an aggregate of distinct identities requiring constant surveillance, lest they rub each other up the wrong way. Drawing on the radical cynicism of critical race theory, which holds that race and racism are indestructible, this approach extends multiculturalism to the point where it ceases to be an allegedly progressive route running parallel to the mainstream; instead, the core of what we are and who we can be has been redefined in sectarian terms and ratified in the adoption of 'protected characteristics' under the terms of the Act.

The new order is enacted largely through the [new sector](#) of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion organisations. This sector and its constituent organisations are more arms-length and far less accountable than NDPBs. Furthermore, the mobilisation of terms such as trauma, bias and lived experience often obstructs our only democratic means of redress – openness to the risky business of free discussion, no-holds-barred argument and potential persuasion.

This paper has outlined the cultural process by which a nation-based, social-democratic state has been re-stitched into a sectarian patchwork based on officially recognised identities. The price of official validation is that citizens think of, and present themselves, as separate, vulnerable groups in need of protection. Symbolically, the general public no longer exists in any meaningful way. Indeed, the term 'general public' assumes a set of relationships capable of engendering affiliation to society as a whole, over and above immediate allegiances. In the era of social democracy, public accountability, formal and informal, was the basis upon which such relations were sustained. Afforded to the majority population by a (no doubt privileged) minority of capable state functionaries and relatively coherent politicians, bonds of this calibre have now been eroded or weakened through a series of transitions. Yet even when the weakening of such bonds is acknowledged, it is almost always assumed that the transitions which have caused this erosion are beyond the remit of the nation – such as the deindustrialisation of the North as a consequence of globalisation, and that government policy has been a brave attempt to ameliorate the corrosive consequences.

To the contrary, this paper has indicated how government policy is the source of such corrosion – by no means the only source, but perhaps the determining factor in what amounts to the slow disappearance of the British body politic. In public life, if people's experiences at work – or as a patient, teacher, parent, etc – is that there is little connecting an individual initiating something and the eventual outcome, then the intrinsic motivation to see yourself as part of a public decreases, and our concerns and energies become more privatised.

Moreover, when the state does seem able to act, it repeatedly does so in order to stigmatise anyone who dissents from the orthodoxies of identity politics. This has left many people of a certain age, who may still think of themselves as constituent members of the general public, wondering what on earth has happened to their country. Despite protestations to the contrary, such questions do not arise from ignorance or racism, but because at each important step in the transformation from social democracy to identity politics, they, as *the general public*, were never properly consulted. Being invited to focus groups or being polled does not compensate for this symbolic loss.

In this light, it makes sense to speak of a de-presentation of the working class, the majority, rather than lack of representation or 'democratic

deficit' – terms which suggest a less dangerous political problem than the cliff-hanger we are now facing. Some [regard](#) Multiculturalism as a democratic good without which our social fabric would be weaker. On the contrary, we argue that Multiculturalism has provided the political and cultural resources for the political class to enact the transition from a social democratic state into an identitarian state, which increasingly sees the need to censor, criminalise and stigmatise [thought and speech](#) to meet the (imputed) interests and concerns of those with protected characteristics rather than a general public. Nothing about this is democratic.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

Concerns about immigration or anti-white discrimination do have a basis in reality in the failure of the political class to either to keep national borders secure or to consider what policies could better facilitate integration. But if we remember that, for example, riots, or anxieties about immigration, have existed in a period when Britain was a net *emigration* country, we can see that the problem is not solely one of numbers alone.

The public discussion on immigration may, for some, be about cultural anxieties. But most importantly, and less widely discussed, is that concerns about immigration are also concerns about the loss of democratic accountability. One consequence of de-presentation is that the issues around which concerns and worries cohere can become more arbitrary. Immigration has become a vivid symbolic proxy of the public's de-presentation not just in the political sphere, but from the public sphere as a whole.

Similarly, the expression of frustration and anger taking the form of white ethnic identity is all too predictable once a society is divided along sectarian lines of identity. If accepted, a precondition for addressing these problems and preventing the scope for further episodes of disorder has to be challenging, and defeating, the claims of identity politics. We have seen how, historically, both Labour and Conservative have contributed to de-presentation. This suggests that, ultimately, the task of re-presentation will need leaders capable of acting along principles derived from first-order values of democracy and freedom rather than those of partisan party interests.