

BLOCKING THE WAY TO SOCIAL COHESION

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These few pages move from celebration to cogitation, to document how well-intentioned organizations and individuals seemingly ignorant of geopolitical realities are now damaging the prospects of what they aim to achieve.

Celebrating racial diversity in Outer London

By mid-afternoon of 23rd June 2007, the London correspondent of the Santiago Times could have reported SMALL DEMO IN HAYES / NO-ONE HURT — had he been short of copy. The “demonstration” was one of support for refugees — four hours of *Celebrating Cultures in Hillingdon*. It was one of the events organised by local authorities for Refugee Week, to challenge “negative stereotypes of refugees and asylum seekers” and “show the positive contributions that our communities bring to Hillingdon through culture, music and art”. These words of the leaflet advertising the event come from the Refugee Council, as do those that asked readers of the leaflet whether they knew that fish and chips, the Mini and Marks & Spencer were all “created or invented by refugees who came to the UK” or that other refugees include “world-famous” figures such as Freud, Marx, Pissaro, Yentob, Conrad, Kapoor, Wek, Solti and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown.

One of us went to this event in Hayes. It started with impressive bangla drumming from the bandstand, with no poster proclaiming the Refugee Council’s self-denying maxim that in music “there are no borders and when you have no borders you have no refugees.” The racially diverse crowd moved into the nearby Methodist hall for the celebration proper, one that could have been mistaken for a village fete — if it had not been for unconcealed campaigning from what seemed to be a high moral ground. No-one could be found who had heard of the “world-famous” Yasmin but there was a large poster of Einstein as refugee. There were information stalls around the hall revealing the wide range of activities of the refugee business. At one stall, Southeast Interpreting and Translation Services Ltd was free to advertise its commercial expertise in 90 languages. The main business of the morning was the presentation of

certificates to refugees whose stories sounded most pitiable: with friends and families, refugees made up the bulk of the assembly. The afternoon was given up to the pleasures of Albanian, Afghan and South Indian dancing, poetry reading and singing. There was every indication that the mainly female supervisors of the event would be rewarded for the part they were playing with such obvious enthusiasm. The celebratory character of the event ensured that casual onlookers might have left with little awareness of the deep social significance of the occasion — which they need not have done if they had picked up and read the Refugee Council’s latest pocket guide *Tell it like it is: The Truth about Asylum*. Its first page would have told them that:

A lot of rubbish is talked about asylum. The same old myths and scare stories are peddled again and again. The truth is in short supply. Well, here at the Refugee Council we believe it’s time to put that right, time to tell it like it is. That’s why we’ve produced this pocket guide packed with facts and figures you can rely on. Keep it with you, so that you can speak up for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

The Refugee Council’s little red book

Does the pocket guide (at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk) really “tell it as it is”? Would its partial selection of the “facts and figures” motivate anyone to speak up for those “rights”, without serious caveats reflecting the way the Home Office handles immigration? Here are some observations that come down on the negative side:

(1) The guide says that some failed asylum seekers go home voluntarily, some are returned by force, while “for some it is not safe or practical for them to return until conditions in their country change”. But we all know that a majority of “asylum seekers” are economic migrants, officially accepted as “asylum seekers” at the initial decision-making stage but who then are able to stay in the UK, outside the tunnel vision of a dysfunctional Home Office (see (3) below) . Does the Refugee Council think that the phrase “safe or practical” applies to them? If not, why does it not mention this fourth category? Elsewhere the

guide has *definitions* that assume, contrary to all the evidence, that “asylum seekers” cannot be economic migrants.

(2) The statement that “asylum seekers represented just 0.025% of total entries to the UK in 2005” (only one in four thousand!) reveals the Refugee Council’s unconscious bias — either that or special pleading. The 0.025% is actually the ratio of 25,710 (the number of applications for asylum, excluding dependants) to 101.9 million (the number not of “entries” but of “international arrivals”). The figure of over 100 million is Uncle Tom Cobley and All — everyone who came through any port of entry where people are counted. A sensible denominator might have been “net immigration” — the difference between those travellers saying they are coming for more than a year and those going out for more than a year. That figure is based on the International Passenger Survey (a haphazard one-in-two-thousand sample at the main ports of entry). For 2005, it may be taken to be something under 200,000 — which turns the 0.025% into $25,710/200,000$ or 13%, a figure that should have been big enough to interest policy makers but still a great reduction on the percentages for earlier years. That asylum seekers are now such a small proportion of immigrants is because those concerned realise that it has become so easy to enter the country, legally or illegally, without the bother of applying for asylum.

(3) The pocket guide correctly reports that, in 2006, the Home Office refused 88% of applications from Iraqis at the initial decision-making stage. The table from which the 88% was selected (at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/asylumq107.pdf) gives 79% as the figure for the whole world — and even higher values: 94% for Jamaica and 91% for Nigeria. The Refugee Council probably picked on the figure for Iraqis because it knows that we know that many Iraqis have good cause to emigrate and possibly a good case for asylum. But no matter! All those high refusal rates are pertinent to any interpretation of the next “fact” we are presented with — that as many as 23% of the asylum appeals against refusal that were decided in 2006 were successful. The Refugee Council takes this as evidence of poor decision-making by the Home office. On the other hand, it also unquestionably means that 77% of appeals were *unsuccessful*. The guide says that “Britain’s asylum system is very tough” which is perhaps its own way of conceding that the 77% failure rate should be respected — that the integrity and

judgement of the appeal adjudicators should not be seriously questioned. If so, it has then to be accepted that the majority of asylum seekers are either economic migrants or migrants with some other reason for wanting to enter the UK (e.g. the “sleepers” who will take care not to waken Trevor Philips’s “sleepwalkers”).

(4) Much of the Refugee Council’s campaign relies on the natural sympathy we all have for the fate of children in need. But the guide makes only one reference to children — by quoting the estimate of a Save the Children study that the Home Office detains roughly 2000 asylum-seeking children with their families each year. The Refugee Week’s “Fact Pack” (at www.refugeeweek.org.uk/InfoCentre) is less restrained. It quotes the head of Save the Children as saying that “detention puts asylum seeking children at unnecessary risk and has a lasting impact on their mental and physical health” and reports that in 2005 there were 2965 applications from individuals classified as an “unaccompanied” child according to the definition in the Home Office report *Asylum Statistics: UASCs Quarter 1 2007*:

An unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) is defined as a person who at the time of making an asylum application is under 18, or who, in the absence of documentary evidence establishing age, appears to be under that age; is applying for asylum in his or her own right; is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so.

This definition applies whatever the route the UASC child takes to get the attention of a local authority. We were surprised to see from the report that only one in ten UASCs come to an authority through immigration: as many as 90% are classified as “[already] in country”. What were the initial decisions for the Refugee Council’s 2965 UASCs? Only 5% were granted asylum, one in four were refused and two-thirds were given “discretionary leave” to stay in the country — which meant that they became the responsibility of the local authority. That responsibility appears to have been uninfluenced by the fact that, in 82% of cases, the authority disputed the age claimed by the UASC or by attendant adults. Given that 90% of UASCs have been in the country for some time, the distribution of claimed ages is noteworthy:

most of the 2965 claimed to be 16 or 17 (even if we allow for a typo in the slightly inconsistent 2005 figures).

The reason that any local authority might want to be cautious about accepting the UASC age claims has become clear in Hillingdon over the last decade. Even in 2000, the leader of Hillingdon Council was driven to tell the press that:

As a port of entry, with Heathrow airport, our position in London is unique. In law we have full responsibility for unaccompanied asylum seeking children ... Council Tax in Hillingdon will need to increase by nearly 4% just to cope with the costs we face ... [16% of the total Social Services budget was for asylum seekers].

Things got worse. In 2003, Hillingdon lost a court case and are now even obliged to pay the university costs of hundreds of UASCs for whom it is *in loco parentis*. Then, in March 2007, Hillingdon lost its judicial review case against DfES for recovery of all these costs.

(5) “Asylum-seeking children contribute very positively to schools across the country” is another of the reassurances to be found in the pocket guide. It is attributed to a 2003 report by OfSTED which we have been unable to locate. Some of us may know of UASC children that do just that: among such large numbers, there must be many encouragingly positive examples. But, when taken statistically rather than anecdotally, the reassurance defies the evidence of whole-school performance measures and the experience of teachers: schools with significant numbers of UASCs have to divert appreciable resources to meet the special needs of pupils who enrol in the middle of teaching schedules, often with poor or non-existent English and often with severe behavioural or psychological problems reflecting their earlier experiences. Things might have been different if educational ideologues and Whitehall fellow-travellers had not already turned state education into a shadow of its former self.

(6) The Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) is invoked as authority for the last example of a Refugee Council “fact” — that “immigrants, including refugees, pay more into the public purse

compared to their UK-born counterparts”. Strictly speaking, this purported fact is irrelevant to the question of the economic contribution of refugees or asylum seekers — since the latter are not allowed to work and, even taken together, they are only small proportion of the present immigrant population. If we are kind to the Refugee Council by ignoring the illogicality, there is still the big problem of what to do when more than one authority can be invoked — and when they disagree. Is the Refugee Council an authority on choosing between econometric authorities? We think not. The IPPR is proud to call itself the UK’s leading progressive (i.e. left-leaning) think tank. Another authority is the increasingly respected (but right-leaning) organisation Migration Watch UK. Then there is Robert Rowthorn, University of Cambridge Professor of Economics, who last year went to the Press and put his professional reputation on the line with:

As an academic economist, I have examined many serious studies that have analysed the economic benefits of immigration. There is no evidence from any of them that large-scale immigration generates large-scale economic benefits for the existing population as a whole. On the contrary, all the research suggests that the benefits [of immigration] for the existing population as a whole are either close to zero or negative.

Blairism in a tailspin?

Will Blairism be brought down with its progenitor? The final month of the 10th year of the Blair era saw publication of *Our Shared Future* — the 168-page report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk). Actor Blair’s brilliant infantilisation of the country’s political discourse allowed the report to be welcomed as new insight — simply because its “new [undifferentiated] definition” of “integration and cohesion” suggested that diversity and difference are not unmitigated blessings. If it comes, mitigation will be the fruit of 57 question-begging exhortations dignified as “recommendations”. Just two extracts are enough to give the flavour of a report that manages to integrate the responses to its survey of more than 600 other public bodies:

Although we can see the benefits of immigration, some people are concerned about its impacts in their local area — we need to address this. ...

Local authorities should develop myth-busting strategies aimed specifically at established communities. This might include myth-busting packs which would contain accurate and impartial information about recent changes to the community and the benefits of migration.

.... Without doctors, nurses and other migrant staff the National Health Service would literally collapse: ... 58% of new doctors in the NHS were born overseas.

“Myth-busting packs” like the Refugee Council’s little red book, perhaps.

Two nations

On the question of immigration, England is a moral maze with no entrance or exit but with two entwined areas each accommodating its own section of the population.

On one side of the hedge separating the two areas are the “pros” — those who openly, tacitly, or hypocritically, give broad support to very liberal immigration policies, either through personal conviction or because they are employed to do so. That category embraces the Refugee Council, the Commission for Integration and Cohesion and a host of quangos, pressure groups and charities (not forgetting the Guardianistas of the Today programme).

On the other side are the “cons” — the largely silent majority rejecting what it sees as the excessive liberality (open borders, generous welfare, etc) of the present state of affairs, whose opinions are largely articulated by a minority of journalists and academics and who have not wished or been able to join the many thousands of Brits who have emigrated in response to the increasing number of immigrants in their area. Only two political parties can be said to be wholeheartedly on this side of things — UKIP and the BNP.

The two areas are unconnected — except for a few holes in the hedge through which the pros propagate the right and proper view of things, to which only a few of the cons venture to make a measured non-racist response. The supporters of the heretofore government line write their pamphlets and conduct

their debates confident that they occupy an unchallengeable moral high ground. Pitiable asylum-seeker cases are openly deployed to suggest that the rejectionists are heartless when they are not positively racist. But, if we exclude the latter category, there is really no moral high ground — simply two very different views of where true morality lies. When she left her Treasury job to become chief executive of the Refugee Council, Maeve Sherlock became an organ of compassion. Her speech entitled “Asylum seeker destitution” to the 2005 Church Action on Poverty conference told the sad story of a sick, rough-sleeping Kurd, Abdullah, who had been denied more than minimal assistance because he refused to sign up for voluntary return. The Refugee Council succeeded in a judicial review case against the Home Office, which helped Abdullah until the Home Office was able to tighten the rules against all Iraqi asylum-seekers.

We came across another “hard case” illustration in the January 2007 report by the Hillingdon & Uxbridge Times of Hillingdon Council’s judicial review, already mentioned. Without explanation of its relevance to the otherwise bland reportage, the reporter reproduced the gruesome family history of a “distraught and and traumatised” Iranian boy who had escaped to the UK.

It used to be said that hard cases make bad law. It is now more useful to say that they can easily be exploited to make bad public policy — especially when society responds only to those cases that turn up on its doorstep and ignores unseen adverse consequences beyond its ken. Government has set up a complex legal machinery to decide hard cases. Like any other piece of government machinery, it will be making wrong decisions at an unknown rate (appeal court decisions are part of the machinery and will be doing the same). The policy that the Refugee Council and like-minded charities want government to adopt is for government to be very liberal — in effect, to let heart not head be the guide in most cases. But there is another policy that the Refugee Council could favour — without compromising its praiseworthy objective of getting justice for genuine refugees. That would be to concentrate its appreciable resources on a campaign to improve the sensitivity and power of the decision machinery — to reduce from their present levels both the chance of turning away the genuine refugee and to reduce the chance of granting asylum to undeserving cases that, in the aggregate, have costly consequences for the

Treasury and also for social cohesion & pathology. A fraction of the current cost of legal patching of mistakes would go a long way to improve the precision and accuracy of the relevant information about applicants both here and abroad.

Some idea of how difficult that would be can be gleaned from a collection of academic essays by 11 lecturers in law, a legal interpreter and a House of Lords legal assistant. In the introduction, its editor Prakash Shah sees recent moves to limit legal aid for asylum cases as a toleration of “official lawlessness” and as a “slide towards more draconian anti-law strategies”. He goes on:

There is surely some form of exploitation going on here where the state and its powerful agencies and sub-contractors can brutalise people and increasingly direct authoritarian measures, like systematic dispersal, detention or expulsion, against entire families with children. We could explain this in terms of a new type of political economy that continues to exploit such vulnerable people with the aim of diverting the use of resources to subsidise their [sic] activities on the pretext of securing borders. This can be placed within the wider picture of Euro-American societies increasingly living with the disconcerting consciousness that they are continuously transformed into extensions of the South through population movements and the formation of non-assimilating Afro-Asian-Latin diasporic communities in their midst.

Shah ends his exposition of how he sees things with the observation that it “introduces all sorts of questions that it seems we are hardly prepared to face”. Those in the rejectionist camp might say Amen to that!

Lady Bountifuls, Sabine women and New Missionaries

One of the current taboos of political discourse is against conceding that men and women share some of the behavioural characteristics of the higher primates. But if we do make that concession, we can say that, in matters of the heart, the motherly instincts of the female clearly trump those of the male. We have already suggested discreetly that this may be a factor in why the pro immigration business (or at least its

less personally profitable side) is conducted in the main by Lady Bountifuls (while convenient, this portmanteau label may be a category error: the original Lady Bountiful in George Farquhar's play *The Beaux Stratagem* was generous with her own wealth, not that of others.)

Is it out of the question that the difference between the two sexual drives may also be a relevant factor? In its 25th anniversary volume, the *New Yorker* reproduced one of its late-twenties cartoons entitled *Our modern gallery of ancient favourites: Rape of the Sabines*. The cartoonist added a touch to the famous Castello painting and to the story about how Romulus and his men seized women of the Sabine tribe with a view to forced marriage — one of the buxom ladies can be seen to be winking at another. To be applicable here and now, the metaphor has to be changed to something on the lines of “Lie back and don't think of England!” Mixing genes to avoid inbreeding is a Darwinian plus in most situations — but the plus cannot be taken to override other social consequences when these may be harmful.

In March 2007, one of the Economist Debates was held in City Hall, London, with the very bold motion that *For Britain to thrive, it needs many more migrants*. The “audio” can still be heard at www.economist.com/audio/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8877420. One of the two speakers against the motion perceived a new sort of zealot among the army of pressure-groupies in favour of open borders:

Old Missionaries went abroad to sell a faith that paved the way for colonization and economic domination. New Missionaries have a position rather than a faith — a position they want to sell to those at home. What is the New Missionary position? Quite simply, to persuade a nation to look kindly on migrants, while the big boys of international finance can then complete their mission — mobility of labour.

Such mobility was the feature of uncontrolled immigration strongly favoured by the proposers of the motion — with some caveats by Sarah Spencer of Oxford but, without reservation it seems, by John Ross (Mayor Livingstone's economist). We do not think that the missionary metaphor here seriously misrepresents either what is happening on the ground, especially in the London area, or the rationale of the economic boosterism that supports it. The very first sentence of a book by a leading New Missionary,

Jonathon Moses, gives us the necessary article of faith:

I believe that free migration offers the potential and hope to better an unjust world.

In contrast, there is a book by philosopher Rudiger Safranski that offers a Central European antidote to such optimism.

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