

## The Triumph of Political Correctness

Despite its counter-culture and possibly Marxist origins, political correctness has now become the dominant ideology of the West. But just how far does its influence extend? And how did it progress through the institutions and minds of the West?

Some junior members of the British aristocracy may hold ‘colonial and natives’ fancy dress parties in the year 2005—and even that was almost certainly just an anti-PC tease—but in the rest of the country, PC has completed a pretty clean sweep imbedding itself through all the institutions, from school to TV broadcasts, from company HQs to the army. It is difficult to think of any part of life—certainly public life—that has not succumbed to the dictates of PC. The first black Archbishop of York has declared that the Church of England is institutionally racist.

Political correctness came to national prominence in the 1980s, but it was only a decade later that people started becoming concerned about its advance. In the widely debated Letter to Conservatives in 1999, Paul Weyrich, the conservative commentator, stated:

it is impossible to ignore the fact that the United States is becoming an ideological state. The ideology of Political Correctness, which openly calls for the destruction of our traditional culture, has so gripped the body politic, has so gripped our institutions, that it is even affecting the Church. It has completely taken over the academic community. It is now pervasive in the entertainment industry, and it threatens to control literally every aspect of our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Complaints about it taking over the academic community in the US are well founded. Studies of multiculturalism, racism and sexism have in many institutions

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overtaken the traditional Judaeo-Christian canon. US textbooks in public schools and colleges have to have 'sensitivity vetting' to check they are politically correct. A whole series of books such as Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* has charted the transformation. The former White House policy analyst and American Enterprise Institute fellow Dinesh D'Souza wrote:

The transformation of American campuses is so sweeping that it is no exaggeration to call it an academic revolution.<sup>2</sup>

In Australia, the former government minister Peter Coleman described the pervasiveness of PC:

Its first and pre-eminent characteristic is that it calls for the politicisation—one might say the transformation—of life. It wants political direction of all departments from, say, children's fiction to judicial judgments. No profession is exempt. All must meet a political test—of correct thinking and progress. Lawyers, accountants, doctors, scientists, novelists, journalists and businessmen must all pass it.<sup>3</sup>

In the US, Lind wrote in 2004:

The ideology that has taken over America goes most commonly by the name of political correctness. Some people see it as a joke. It is not. It is deadly serious. It seeks to alter virtually all the rules, formal and informal, that govern relations among people and institutions. It wants to change behaviour, thought, even the words we use. To a significant extent it already has.<sup>4</sup>

So much has political correctness become the established ideology, that the traditional roles of Right and Left have been reversed. The Right has traditionally represented the established status quo against the revolutionary assault of the Left. But the PC Left has now become the establishment, so that, as the Cincinnati University academic Herbert Shapiro wrote:

The Right presents itself as the defender of intellectual freedom against a Left that would close off the dialogue of ideas. The American university is now portrayed as though under the domination of the radicals.<sup>5</sup>

## THE RETREAT OF REASON

In 1997, Britain began, in effect, to be ruled by political correctness for the first time. The Labour government was the first UK government not to stand up to political correctness, but to try and enact its dictates when they are not too electorally unpopular or seriously mugged by reality, and even sometimes when they are. The previous Conservative government was almost deliberately politically incorrect, and during the previous Labour government political correctness had too little grip on the body politic to hold much sway.

In Britain, at the start of the twenty-first century, political correctness encompasses almost the entire range of policies from women's pay to race relations, health care to education, crime to child discipline, and almost every institution, society, company and authority.

Political correctness has gained power over public services, from schools and hospitals to local authorities and central government. Political correctness became institutionalised at the BBC, but also started exerting control over ITV and broadsheet newspapers. Politically correct alternative comedians quickly swept to power, becoming the new establishment, while PC triumphed in the literary field. PC triumphed not just in trade unions and charities, but in professional and trade associations, from medical Royal Colleges to business associations. Finally, even multinationals and the police started succumbing to PC.

The long march of PC through every nook and cranny of national life, leaving nothing untouched, was helped by the fact there is little competing ideology: although PC has been ridiculed, there has been virtually no counter-PC movement. A society enjoying unprecedented affluence and no external threats can afford to become intellectually decadent.

PC's methodology of controlling speech and isolating opponents has been extraordinarily effective in a society that has practiced free speech for so long—and had to

fight for it so little—that it has become complacent about it.

Since its establishment as the national ideology, political correctness sets the ground rules for debate, and is the benchmark against which public opinion is measured. When two strangers meet and talk politics, the need for acceptance means that more often than not they will usually stick to the politically correct text, even if they don't agree with it. So heavy is the punishment for transgression that few mainstream politicians or public figures would dare to be un-PC unless there is huge electoral advantage. Those simply seeking popular approval, such as actors or pop stars, automatically adopt and espouse politically correct beliefs, reinforcing them in the public mind in the process.

Anything that breaches political correctness is automatically controversial, and so any institution that wants to court public acceptance and avoid controversy must be PC. Since most institutions in Britain want to be publicly accepted, most have now become thoroughly permeated by political correctness.

The broadcast media, and the BBC in particular, stick to the politically correct text on most issues because it safely protects them from criticism. The BBC can endlessly promote mass immigration against the wishes of its licence fee payers with impunity, but as soon as one Panorama programme pointed to some downsides of mass immigration, it was attacked by the government and left-wing press as being 'Powellite'. The film industry, both in the UK and US, almost uniformly sticks to the safe territory of promoting political correctness.

PC has silenced many awkward debates, as well as those that oppose them. As the row over Charles Murray's book *The Bell Curve* showed, the study of racial differences has become almost totally taboo. Groups such as the Southern Poverty Law Centre have proved very effective at silencing those they deem guilty of 'hate'.

Amnesty International has been turned by political correctness from a worthy fighter for political prisoners around the world into a knee-jerk anti-Western-government campaigning organisation that has all but lost sight of its founding principles. Index on Censorship is on the brink of turning from an organisation that campaigns for freedom of speech to one that campaigns against it.

Political correctness has also created a climate that has fuelled a vast growth in charities and pressure groups that support and promote the politically correct world view on almost all issues. From Greenpeace to Amnesty International, from Refugee Action to the National Council for One Parent Families, a huge non-governmental sector has grown up, all pushing in the PC direction. They are often taxpayer-funded, or charities subsidised by tax relief, and can campaign for funds from the public without opposition. They are given endless invaluable free publicity from the BBC and most newspapers as objective, independent groups—the BBC repeats everything that Liberty says with such unquestioning respect that they treat it often as a justification for a story in itself, with no counterbalancing points of view, even though Liberty is tied closely to the Labour party and cannot be described as politically neutral. As frequently complained about in the tabloid media, the National Lottery has been reduced to a fund to promote political correctness.

Non-government groups that may have a politically incorrect aspect to their work usually silence it. The Council for the Protection of Rural England campaigns about house building in the countryside, but it would never dare tackle one of the main, and most easily tackled, causes in the growth in housing demand, mass immigration.

In contrast, there are virtually no pressure groups that promote politically incorrect views, and most of those that do, such as Christian family groups, tend to have a low profile and are treated with suspicion by the media,

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especially the BBC. One example is Migrationwatch UK, founded by the former ambassador Sir Andrew Green, a lone group campaigning for less immigration (a view supported by 80 per cent of the public), against literally dozens of groups promoting mass immigration. In contrast to these other groups, Migrationwatch gets no taxpayers' money and is almost totally blackballed by the BBC, and to some extent by the broadsheet media. Political correctness also means that high profile figures are far less likely to support Migrationwatch in public than they are any politically correct organisation, because they will automatically become open to attack.

Political correctness also succeeds, like the British empire, through divide and rule. While those on the politically correct side of a debate can happily hang together, whatever their differences, the politically incorrect often end up appeasing political correctness by denouncing fellow travellers, in an act of 'triangulation' aimed at making them appear less extreme than the others. Political correctness is so powerful, and the guilt by association that it promotes so effective, that even the politically incorrect fear being seen together. This makes it far more difficult for politically incorrect individuals and groups to work together for common causes.

Changes in society have fuelled the growth of political correctness. The growing emphasis on emotion and feelings over reason and logic in recent decades, combined with the decline in the study of science, has given PC a more powerful grip on the mind of the nation. The triumph of a more superficial celebrity culture over an intellectual literary culture has reduced resistance to PC, as shallow celebrities are more likely to succumb to the fashionable pressure of being PC than an intellectual icon. The TV culture champions the personal experience over abstract reasoning, intrinsically giving backing to politically correct ways of thinking.

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PC encourages policies that further increase its potency. It encourages Third World immigration to the West, importing challenges to traditional Western values, and dividing society into ethnic groups where identity and grievance politics can thrive. It encourages the growth of the public sector, increasing the domain where it has the most powerful grip.

Political correctness also binds its values into the fabric of a country by laws and international treaties that make it very difficult to challenge. Various human rights laws, charters, conventions and treaties, from the UN to Europe to the Human Rights Act, create an entire international and domestic legal framework that upholds PC values and beliefs, making it very difficult for future governments to challenge them. When Michael Howard, the Conservative leader, said in 2005 that if elected Prime Minister he would take Britain out of the UN convention on refugees, he was told by the European Commission that he had no legal right to, and Britain would immediately be taken to the European Court of Justice.

Ultimately, political correctness is the luxury of a powerful society. As the fear of Islamic terrorism has shown, PC's enemy is a society's sense of vulnerability. When people feel insecure, they more strongly resist what they see as the idiocies of PC because they believe the stakes are too high.

The combination of all these factors meant that PC, one of history's most wide-ranging ideological revolutions, enjoyed the most extraordinarily rapid advance. Ellis wrote:

Dissenters can expect to be not only criticised, as dissenters always are, but denounced as both moral outcasts and unsophisticated simpletons. Yet this is done on the basis of a viewpoint that coalesced far too quickly for it to have been properly thought through, one that seemed to advance not by its intellectual force but instead by a kind of tidal action that suddenly surged everyone. It is time to retrace our steps, to do what should have been done initially; we must take a hard look at what this position really

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amounts to and whether it is sound enough to deserve the commanding position it now has.<sup>6</sup>