

How Political Correctness Affects Policies

Only a brave person is willing to admit honestly, and fearlessly to face, what a sincere and logical mind discovers.

Rodan of Alexandria

Being a way of thinking about policies, rather than a policy in itself, the tentacles of political correctness touch a vast array of issues, from the economics of the NHS to law and order, from the European Union to whaling. All involve received beliefs that are instinctively promoted and counter-beliefs that are silenced. These are just some examples of the policy areas affected by political correctness.

Women's Pay

One of the rallying cries of the politically correct is the 'unacceptable' gender pay gap between men and women: women's full-time hourly pay is on average just 80 per cent of that of men. Unions and the Equal Opportunities Commission regularly launch campaigns on the issue, insisting it shows just how prevalent sex discrimination still is in the workplace. Few ask whether the gender pay gap may be due to other factors, because that would be to appear to justify the pay gap and thus sex discrimination.

It is clear that, other factors being the same, equal pay for equal work is not just fundamentally fair and just, but also an essential basis for an efficient economy taking optimal advantage of the skills of all workers. If women are paid less for equal work than men just because of their gender, then that is irrational, prejudicial and unjust.

But even in a workforce with a total absence of sex discrimination, there could still be a gender pay gap. The

presumption that any pay gap is only explicable by sex discrimination is a presumption that men and women are identical in all their lifestyle choices and legal rights, when they are not.

Men's legal retirement age is five years older than women's, encouraging them to work longer careers, which uplifts their average earnings. Women get far more extensive parental leave than men, encouraging career breaks and limiting their lifetime work experience, thus depressing their average wages. On average, each week, men work nearly twice as many hours in paid employment as women, building up considerably more experience in their careers, which in a meritocracy would be reflected in greater pay. In addition, surveys suggest that women opt for more socially rewarding or emotionally fulfilling jobs, while men put a higher priority on high wages at whatever cost.

The danger is that if the only accepted explanation for income differentials is discrimination, then a range of policies will be adopted that may either be counter-productive, or actually introduce discrimination. Policies that specifically favour women at the expense of men are not only unfair, but by undermining meritocracy they undermine the efficiency of the labour market. Any initiative that is being introduced—such as the right for employees to know their colleagues' salaries—would be far less effective at producing the desired outcome than intended, and could ultimately just introduce more red tape, damaging economic efficiency and job creation.

Europe

Those opposed to further transferring of national powers to the European Union, or joining the European single currency, are often denounced as 'Little Englanders'. In an article Chancellor Gordon Brown rehearsed a whole series of problems with the European economy and why Britain

should not join the Euro, and then said, without any obvious irony, that ‘pro-Europeans’ such as himself had to combat anti-European ‘prejudice’. The clear suggestion was that opposition to further European integration could only be explicable by prejudice, presumably a dislike of Europeans.

Reports from politically correct media such as the BBC and the *Guardian* are underlined by a firm belief that being ‘pro-European’ is modern, cosmopolitan and progressive, and that to be ‘anti-European’ is to be a Little Englander, xenophobic, living in the past and obsessed by the Second World War. The former Europe minister Denis MacShane said explicitly that eurosceptics were driven by xenophobia.

But the arguments about centralisation or decentralisation of powers permeate all political entities from the United States to Britain to London. Arguing that no more powers in certain policy areas—such as working hours—should be transferred from London to Brussels is not necessarily being a Little Englander any more than arguing that powers shouldn’t be transferred from Sacramento to Washington is being a Little Californian, or arguing that some policies are best formulated in Edinburgh rather than Westminster is being a Little Scot.

The optimal balance of power between centre and regions has to be found for all levels. There is a contradiction between the politically correct presumption at the national level that powers should be transferred downwards (i.e. devolved to the regions), but that at the continental level they should be transferred upwards (i.e. devolved to Brussels).

There are many reasons to be opposed to further political integration in Europe, which can have more to do with a belief in accountability and keeping democratic decision making as close to the *demos* as practicably possible. There are profound economic arguments against

joining the euro, shared by many of Britain's top economists, that have nothing to do with prejudice.

Capitalism

Few things have done more in the history of humanity to improve human existence than capitalism. It has created wealth at an unprecedented pace, eliminated poverty, abolished hunger, improved housing, and increased life expectancy. It created the wealth so that people could enjoy holidays and it created the drugs to cure diseases. No society on Earth has ever had such a privileged existence as the capitalist West—even the lives of the poorest sections of society are almost immeasurably better in almost all ways than under any other form of economic system.

All alternatives have proved disastrous failures, creating untold human misery. Throughout Eastern Europe, Russia, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea communism has confined people to poverty and short life expectancy. When the world's two most populous countries, India and China, embraced capitalism, hundreds of millions of people were taken out of poverty.

Anything that has done so much for humanity should be seen as one of the best things that humanity has invented. Yet capitalism has persistently had a bad name: political correctness decrees it a 'bad thing', because it is based on people pursuing their own self interest, and richer people making profits out of poorer people.

But a system has to be judged by its results. Capitalism has proved perfectly able to curb its harsher aspects by creating the wealth to pay for the welfare state, social housing and socialised medicine. Capitalist societies have done far more to preserve their natural resources than any other non-primitive societies.

Political correctness causes widespread unease with capitalism, which makes governments less likely to pursue

capitalist alternatives to established policies in various areas, such as health and education, as would be the case if their only concern were maximising the benefits to society.

The National Health Service

The NHS is one of the few organisations that actually runs on the principle of political correctness, or as its founder Aneurin Bevan stated, on an ethical principle. Until recently, political correctness silenced any non-academic debate about alternatives to a free-at-the-point-of-use, taxpayer-funded, state-owned monopoly. However, there is overwhelming evidence that the NHS system delivers worse health outcomes for all categories of patient, and is more unequal, than many other health systems, such as social insurance with mixed public and private provision. The argument on this has been moving in Britain, and may finally lead to a better NHS, but in the meantime political correctness is literally killing people.

Crime and Punishment

The politically correct have a particular problem with crime. Their instinct is to support the criminal rather the victim of their crime, because criminals tend to be more socially disadvantaged and poorer, and their victims more privileged and richer.

The purpose of all law and order policies is to provide justice (otherwise known as retribution), deterrence and rehabilitation. But because of the growing politically correct concern for the socially disadvantaged perpetrators of crime, rather than for the privileged victims of it, policies have tended increasingly to emphasise rehabilitation over retribution, with a greater emphasis on the rights of suspected and proven criminals, and less on the rights of actual or potential victims.

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There has been huge public outrage at the logical extension of this, with prosecutions of people who are defending their properties from criminals, rather than the criminals who are attacking them.

Much to the distress of the politically correct, prison numbers in the UK are at record level, but are in fact far lower than if the number of inmates had followed the rise in the number of criminals. Charles Murray, the American academic, has calculated that if Britain in 2004 jailed the same ratio of people relative to the number of the most serious offences that it imprisoned in 1954, the prison population would be around 300,000, more than 200,000 above the real level.

According to Murray, in 1954 for every three robbers convicted, one was sent to jail, a ratio of 1:3. By 2002, this ratio was 1:22. For burglars, the ratio was 1:18 in 1954 compared with 1:59 in 2002, while for serious wounding the ratio was 1:5 in 1954 compared with 1:12 in 2002. In other words, the chance of being jailed for committing a crime is between a half and one-seventh of what it was half a century ago. The rise in crime over the last 50 years has matched the decline in chance of being sent to prison.

Obviously prison is far from perfect, and re-offending rates remain high. But there is abundant evidence that prison actually works in reducing crime, by several measurements. The shrinking risk of being sent to prison has reduced the deterrence of prison, and made committing crime far more attractive by tipping the balance from risk to reward. People in prison are also simply unable to commit crimes while inside. Political correctness has tipped the balance from the victim of crime to the perpetrators of crime, and society has paid with the inevitable result—an increase in crime. Many criminals have also paid because they were drawn into a criminal lifestyle whereas under a non-PC system they would have remained law-abiding citizens, not daring to stray.

Environmental Protection

The environmental movement has been one of the most successful mass movements of all time, second only perhaps to women's rights. From the 1970s onwards, it highlighted valid concerns about environmental degradation, put it on the political agenda, confronted vested interests, won the main intellectual arguments, and was the driving force behind the dramatic change in attitudes and legislation, as least in the western industrialised world.

But a politically correct paradigm was created in which the world's environment was presumed to be going to hell in a handcart—total destruction of the rainforests, the extinction of many if not most species, acid rain, the destruction of the ozone layer, the world was set to freeze until it was believed the world was set to boil. Good environmental news was suppressed because it didn't fit this paradigm, bad news, however shakily founded, was trumpeted, and those who questioned it were vilified. In this atmosphere, politicians in most of the West, and certainly the UK, could only say they would side with the environmentalists, promising ever greater environmental protection.

But the environmental movement in the West has become the victim of its own extraordinary success. In the UK, the rivers are cleaner than they have been since before the industrial revolution, the air in London is the cleanest it has been for over 300 years and forest cover is the highest it has been for more than 200 years, even if you discount monocultural conifer plantations. Rather than species becoming extinct, previously nationally extinct species are being reintroduced from other parts of the world, and endangered species such as otters and wild boars are thriving. Acid rain is no longer a problem, and the ozone layer is healing itself after suitable action was taken. Global warming is, however, still a threat.

Human Rights Abuses

Political correctness has ensured that in the West the severity of the human rights abuse depends more on who is abusing and who is abused than it does on the actual abuse. Western governments making small scale abuses are criticised far more harshly than the governments of third-world countries who are responsible for the overwhelming majority and most extreme examples of human rights abuses in the world. In its 2004 annual report, the human rights organisation Amnesty International showed it had succumbed to fashionable political correctness by declaring that the US has done more damage to human rights than any other country in the last 50 years, somehow ignoring Pol Pot's Kampuchea, Mao Zedong's China, Kim Il Sung's North Korea, let alone the extreme human rights violations in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Burma, Rwanda or Sudan.

Abuse is abhorrent irrespective of who is doing the abuse, and a champion of human rights must be unequivocal and impartial in its condemnation of abuses, rather than following a fashionable politically correct agenda of only attacking small scale abuses by western governments and ignoring the vastly greater abuses by non-western governments. Otherwise, there is a danger of implicitly condoning the human rights abuses of developing nations.

Racial Profiling

Racial profiling—the use of ethnic characteristics in detecting criminals—has become taboo in the UK, but more as a result of political correctness than the result of any rational argument.

Asked if racial profiling was ever justified, James Q. Wilson, the celebrated American criminologist, said in an interview:

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If by racial profiling you mean the police stopping or arresting somebody because of their racial identity, the answer is no; it ought to be illegal. If you mean whether race may be a factor in deciding whether a person should be a suspect, the answer is, under many circumstances it is properly taken as a factor. If you are in a white neighbourhood and a burglary is reported, and you see a young black man walking down the street at 2:00 a.m., are you more likely to stop him than if you see a young white man walking down the street? Of course, because you say to yourself the first is less likely to be here naturally than the latter. I don't think you can eliminate race entirely from police judgments any more than you can eliminate gender. Men are many times more likely to be violent and to commit crimes than women. So if you see a man and a woman walking down the street right after a burglary at 2:00 a.m., are you more likely to stop the man or the woman? More likely to stop the man.¹

As well as racial and gender profiling, there is also age-profiling, with police far more likely to stop someone for robbery if they are under 30 than over 60, on the simple basis that the young are far more likely to commit certain crimes than the old. If, as Home Office figures suggest, Afro-Caribbean men are around ten times more likely to commit violent street crimes than white men, then it is not a reflection of police prejudice but a reflection of relative crime rates if Afro-Caribbeans are investigated for violent street crimes proportionately more frequently than whites.

The most extreme example of police profiling is the one used in the battle against large-scale terrorism. Islamic groups in Britain have complained that they been unfairly targeted by the raft of anti-terrorism legislation that has been brought in since the attacks in New York on September 11th 2001. They have backed up their complaints of discrimination and racial profiling with statistics showing that almost all the people investigated under this legislation were Muslims. Few things show more clearly the flaws in politically correct analysis than the fact that the *Guardian* newspaper treated the complaints so uncritically that it carried them in a splash story on its front page.

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The simple fact, awkward as it is for the politically correct, is that Britain doesn't face the threat of mass terrorism from militant Hindus. Britain faces a very significant threat of a large-scale terrorist attack perpetuated by Muslims in the name of Islam, but an insignificant threat of terrorism from any other religious group (even Northern Irish Catholics by comparison).

The demand that police fighting mass terrorism should investigate all religious groups equally is in fact a demand that the police investigate thousands of people they know to be totally innocent so as not to cause offence to Muslims. Not only would this be an extraordinary waste of police resources, hampering their ability to tackle terrorism, but it would be an infringement of the rights of other religious groups not to be investigated without any grounds of suspicion.

The reason that there is a taboo about racial profiling and yet complete acceptance of gender and age profiling has nothing to do with any rational argument about law enforcement, but rather about the political correctness which makes it unacceptable to target vulnerable groups such as Afro-Caribbeans and Muslims, but perfectly acceptable to target non-vulnerable groups such as men.

Excessive racial profiling—up to and including, as James Q. Wilson mentioned, stopping people just because of their ethnicity without any other cause for suspicion—can indeed cause justifiable anger and alienation in some communities, which could itself prove counterproductive. The police must strike a balance between policing efficiency and offending minorities.