

PRIME MINISTERMONITORING ETHNIC ORIGINS

The discussion in H on Monday night was extremely uneasy. Some Ministers were worried about the effect of publishing the Leeds survey on top of our other immigration difficulties. Janet Young and Michael Heseltine believed that the Government was effectively committed not only to publishing the Leeds survey, but also to go on to carry out a nationwide ethnic survey of the Civil Service, now that several large companies are carrying out their own survey. The compromise reached by the Committee, even if accepted by the Government, can be only a holding operation.

We seem to be well advanced down the slippery slope towards positive discrimination. The race relations industry may welcome this. But our supporters will not.

It would be an illusion to suppose that just publishing the Leeds survey and then waffling and delaying constitute a sustainable alternative.

It is the publication of the Leeds survey in its present form which is the crucial step in the wrong direction. For this is likely to enshrine, once for all, in popular mythology, the belief that "there are only half as many immigrants in the Civil Service as there ought to be, because of racial discrimination" - 2.1% in the Leeds area compared with 4.1% of all those of working age.

The figures, thus crudely presented - and they will be crudely presented - are hopelessly misleading. They take no account of the following facts revealed in the survey:

There are no immigrants now in the Leeds Civil Service who joined before 1964 and only a handful who joined before 1974.

If you take those who joined over the last 10 years, however, the proportion of immigrants in the Leeds Civil Service is about 3%.

There are only 6 immigrants over the age of 45 in the Civil Service in the Leeds area.

Thus the sample - already dangerously small - is completely distorted by the fact that so much of the immigrant population is recently arrived.

Even if recruitment were precisely proportionate to racial origin, it would still be 20 years or so before you would expect the racial composition of the Civil Service to mirror the composition of the working population.

What the present figures suggest is that in reality there is a gap of only about 1% between the percentage of immigrants joining the Civil Service in recent years, and the percentage in the working population.

There are more than enough benign explanations for that gap: statistical error; the fact that most immigrants came here in the first place with jobs outside the Civil Service in mind, in some cases being attracted here by specific job offers (Enoch's nurses); shortage of relevant qualifications; lack of information about a Civil Service career; lack of interest in that sort of work.

Many of these problems may be expected to fade naturally with time. More young immigrants will have done secretarial courses and will possess the right O-Levels. A tradition of going into the Civil Service will grow.

There may conceivably be discrimination at present in the Civil Service and other public bodies, but we have no worthwhile evidence for it. And it would be tragic if we published a string of partial and half-baked surveys which gave credence to the belief in widespread or systematic discrimination.

Conclusion

The survey must be properly presented to give it an historical perspective and so prevent newspapers from snatching at the incorrect 2%-4% correlation.

What we want to say is something like:

"Fifteen years ago there were virtually no immigrants in the Civil Service. The new figures show that the immigrant

population is gradually making its way into the Civil Service, at a rate roughly in accordance with reasonable expectations.

"We have at present no evidence of discrimination in the Civil Service against immigrants. There is therefore no justification for discrimination in their favour, which would be unjust and unnecessary.

"The Government is and will remain a fair employer. Our policy is to recruit the most suitable and best-qualified candidates to the public service, regardless of colour or creed."

If we are to undertake future surveys on a wider basis - and this will be difficult to stop if we are not to be accused of suppressing the true facts - we must make sure that these too explain the historical perspective, and take a strongly positive line, instead of passively permitting misinterpretation.

Recommendation

We should not attempt to interfere with the decision of H Committee to publish the Leeds survey at the end of November. But we should express the hope that the Lord Privy Seal's announcement accompanying the report should be positive and comprehensive.

FM

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