

Colour and Citizenship: The Rose Report

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by Michael Dummett

The publication of *Colour and Citizenship*, the report on British race relations prepared by E. J. B. Rose, Nicholas Deakin and seven others, and published by the Institute of Race Relations, was registered by the Press as a major event. It was the first occurrence of a kind favourable to those who hope for the defeat of racialism to have been so registered by the mass media since the publication of the P.E.P. Report on Discrimination. Those who prepared the Rose Report did so with a sense of urgency. The Survey of Race Relations, which did the work on which the Rose Report is based, had originally intended a series of detailed studies, of which four, including Rex and Moore's *Race, Community and Conflict*, have already appeared. But, as the situation so rapidly and palpably deteriorated, they saw this response as inadequate: what was needed was a single comprehensive study, to make an impact on public awareness and official policy, and not a library of volumes which only the 'experts' would read.

The initial response must have been encouraging to the authors. The Press, that very haphazard and often insensitive seismograph for measuring the importance of what occurs, recorded the publication of the Report as an event of the first magnitude. But already disappointment must have settled on those who worked at desperate speed to get the book out before it became pointless to publish such a book at all. The columns devoted in *The Times* and *The Guardian* to summarizing the book's contents have initiated no debate, in the correspondence columns or elsewhere, on Britain's racial policy; the speeches of politicians contain no reference to it, nor do they seem in any way altered in tone as a result of it. Of course, it may be that it will take people time to digest the work, that it will in the long run change the public outlook as it was meant to do; but the danger exists that it will simply be forgotten.

The Kerner Report (on the uprisings in the cities) sold in the United States in hundreds of thousands: but then it was produced as a paperback and sold at paperback price. The Rose Report has a paperback edition, but that costs 55s. The greatest service which the Oxford University Press could render for race relations in this country would be to bring the book out for 7s. 6d.

The Rose Report consists of thirty-two chapters of analysis, giving in often compressed form all the basic factual information concerning the racial situation in every one of those areas on which it impinges

—housing, education, employment, the police, Government action and inaction, the Churches, etc.—and, with this information, a frequently penetrating diagnosis of the situation. For this factual information alone, it is indispensable reading for anyone concerned with the most critical challenge which our society faces. Concluding the book is a single chapter of recommendations for public policy. One may well disagree with some of the analyses; one may find some of the policy recommendations inadequate or misconceived: but the prime importance of the book lies in the fact that it is the first sustained plea, put out by people of the kind who are, in our society, being what it is, listened to with respect rather than dismissed as cranks or not reported at all, for our having such a thing as a policy for race relations. Hitherto, there has been a great deal of talk by politicians and journalists about ‘the problem’: but, since ‘the problem’ has usually been defined, tacitly or explicitly, as consisting in the mere presence of black people in this country, it is not surprising that the solutions offered to the problem so regarded have consisted in ways of keeping them out (out of the country or out of specific areas of it), or sending them back. We have had a more and more hysterically and inhumanely exclusionist immigration policy: we have had no race relations policy at all. True, of course, the politicians have made grudging qualifications to their plans for exclusion or ‘repatriation’ to the effect that ‘they must be treated fairly once they’re here’; and we have had the botched Race Relations Act: but we have had no attempt by the politicians to educate the public into understanding that, now we have allowed the development of racialism among the white people of this country to reach such a pitch, race relations has become, and will remain for at least two or three generations, a major item of public policy—as important an item as economic or foreign policy. Such a policy needs to be thought about all the time, as deeply as economic or foreign policy: a vague good will is no more adequate in this field than in economics or foreign affairs. Above all, it needs to be thought about as a whole: we need a comprehensive policy, based on a general understanding of the situation.

So perhaps if the O.U.P. brought their price down, the general public would still not buy (that, of course, is no reason why the O.U.P. should refuse to do so). For, in the United States, everyone had long ago accepted that race is a major sector of public policy: everyone knew that something had to be done, and it had probably got to be something drastic, and they read the Kerner Report to find out what. But, in Britain, the major lesson which the Rose Report has to teach is precisely the assumption which a man has to have already if he is even to think of reading through an 800-page book.

What the authors of the Rose Report have done is to set out a series of policy recommendations which are not only based solidly

on the factual analyses which precede them, but are of a kind immediately intelligible to those involved in politics. They have been at pains to avoid proposals which might strike the majority of people as visionary or impracticable, and to set out the proposals that they do make in just the terms which politicians can readily understand. The book has been designed to serve as a basis for constructive discussion: it is greatly to be hoped that the opportunity which it affords of initiating such a discussion will not be lost.

The book has two outstanding general features: its clear separation of race relations policy from immigration policy; and its understanding of the way in which racial problems are intertwined with other social problems. On both points there has been much confusion in the past, and many half-truths have been uttered. The official line of both Government and Opposition during the past four years has been that 'integration has nothing to do with immigration': this slogan has been offered as an excuse for combining a harshly exclusionist immigration policy with at least the profession of a policy of fostering 'good race relations' within the country; indeed, the exclusionist immigration policy has even been claimed as being itself a contribution to the maintenance of 'good race relations'. At the same time, both race relations and immigration have been under the charge of the same Government department—the Home Office—and, within that department, under the same Under Secretary. The Rose Report makes very clear that the correct approach is precisely the reverse. It underlines very sharply the incompatibility of a racially exclusionist immigration policy with the discouragement of racialism within the country. Measures intended to prevent black people from entering the country, even when they are U.K. citizens, are recognized by black people and white people alike for what they are, namely, pieces of racial discrimination: indeed, they could not have the effect they are proclaimed to have—that of allaying the fears of those who see the presence of black people as a threat—unless they were so recognized. Being so recognized, they inflame in prejudiced whites the sentiments they were designed to appease, by giving to these sentiments the sanction of authority; and they produce in black people the feelings of being alienated and rejected which are always the effects of discrimination. In this sense, then, it is flatly false that an internal race relations policy can be pursued independently of a racially discriminatory immigration policy; and the Report makes very plain how far-reaching an effect upon the growth of racialism in Britain the continual pursuit of an ever harsher exclusionist immigration policy has had.

At the same time, the Report makes clear that immigration policy ought to be conducted in such a way that it can be separated from race relations policy. If immigration policy were to cease to be subject to the pressures of racist demands to keep Them out, but were instead devised in a rational way according to the legitimate bases

on which a country may decide such a policy, then it would likewise cease to have repercussions upon the racial situation within the country: and this is the state of affairs at which we have to aim. In order to bring about such a state of affairs, control of the two aspects of policy ought to be in the hands of different agencies of Government. One Government department should have charge of immigration policy, for both aliens and Commonwealth citizens, and another for race relations policy. The Rose Report recommends removing *both* aspects of policy from the control of the Home Office. This is a sound recommendation, which doubtless will be stoutly resisted by the Home Office itself: but even if the Home Office succeeds in retaining responsibility for one of these two aspects of policy, the essential feature of what the Rose Report advocates is that they should be separated.

The second fundamental feature of the Rose Report is its correct understanding of the intertwining of racial and other social problems. This, too, has been a point on which there has been much confused thinking in the past few years. From many different standpoints it has been urged that the crucial problem facing us is not a racial one but an economic or social one. From one extreme this has been proclaimed by Maoists, who seek to capture black people's organizations and then advocate an alliance of black and white workers to overturn capitalist society and bring in the socialist revolution: from the other extreme, it forms a disguise for racialism, whose adherents explain that what they object to is not the colour of immigrants' skins but the fact that they live off National Assistance, occupy hospital beds, etc., etc. In between are members of community organizations, who, perceiving that white as well as black are (for example) forced to pay high rents for overcrowded, squalid accommodation, deprecate the fostering of racial consciousness by operating on the basis of a fight for racial equality. The same idea is involved, too, in the replacement of the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants by the Community Relations Commission.

The Rose Report makes explicit recognition of the partial truths contained in this idea. A black person in England suffers from racial discrimination: but at the same time he suffers from forms of exploitation which are also practised upon unprotected white members of society. Furthermore, racialism seeks to propagate itself partly by blaming the ills of society upon the rejected group, and those suffering from these ills are vulnerable to this type of propaganda, because it gives them a readily identifiable target upon whom to vent their grievances; the politicians responsible for the ills acquire at the same time an alibi. Racialism occurs but seldom in a chemically pure form: it very readily combines with other forms of human meanness and other varieties of social injustice. The Rose Report draws from all this the correct conclusion that the solution to our racial problems depends upon the solution of many other social

problems which, in origin, have nothing whatever to do with race at all: and, of course, before such problems can be solved, people must be brought to a recognition of their nature, and disabused of the illusion that the problems would evaporate, or, indeed, be one jot affected, if all black people were driven out of the country, or deprived of rights enjoyed by white members of the population.

But, with equal clarity, the Rose Report exposes the fallacy in the assumption that, because general social problems are so intertwined with racialism, there is therefore no specifically racial problem, or, at least, none that deserves separate consideration. Racial prejudice, though it is usually to be found in combination with other forms of hostility, is an identifiable factor which must be combated as such. Someone who believes that he resents immigrants only because they compete with him (and his kind) for jobs will in fact identify the group at which his resentment is directed on the basis of colour: his resentment will not be assuaged by learning that a black person who has got some job he believed he would otherwise have landed was in fact born in Britain. In a specific area, people may be brought to see that some immediate evil from which they suffer (e.g. housing) should be opposed by making common cause with black people suffering from the same evil: but no worker is going to espouse the cause of revolutionary socialism until the racist myths with which his head is cluttered have first been dispelled.

As for the danger of increasing racial consciousness, there might have been a time, many years ago, when the hope that racist sentiments might not come to the surface was strong enough to give some force to talking in this way: but it has now long been true that there is no black person living in this country so sheltered as not to be acutely conscious of the extent of colour prejudice in our population and in its leaders. It is true enough that, once racialism takes hold, the struggle to overcome it is afflicted with an inner tension. The object of the struggle is to make racial differences irrelevant to people's behaviour to one another, to relegate them to the insignificant position—namely, a matter of physical appearance—which they occupy when viewed in proper perspective: but the necessity to expose racial prejudice for the irrational force that it is, and to correct the injustices that spring from it, imposes the obligation, during the course of the struggle, to draw attention to the differential treatment currently accorded to members of different racial groups. In this way, racial consciousness has first to be heightened in order that it should be made pointless. There is, moreover, a further sense in which this is true: when, namely, the degree of racial prejudice prevalent in the society becomes so acute that members of the racial minorities can no longer with self-respect identify themselves as members of the main society. This is the state of affairs which Enoch Powell, with his perpetual harping upon the theme that immigrants, and their children, and their children's children, are

'alien' and can never become or be recognized as English, is desperately trying to bring about. If this attitude becomes sufficiently prevalent, then it becomes self-fulfilling: it will not be anything in the skin-colour or the cultural inheritance of the descendants of immigrants which will make it impossible for them to be English, but simply the refusal of the racial majority to accept them as such. But any man, if he is not to suffer irretrievable psychological damage, must have some identity, some group to which he conceives himself as belonging: if those who belong to some rejected sub-group within a society are to preserve their sense of their own dignity, they then have to foster among themselves an identification with and pride in a people separate from that which has rejected them: they cannot accept the fate which Powell gloatingly describes, of having no identity whatever. This is, of course, one of the things which Black Power is all about. The further the society goes in alienating from itself the minority group, the more pressing a need is created for that minority to heighten its sense of unity with others outside that society.

That resistance to racialism involves in these two ways the heightening of racial consciousness is, of course, a paradox. It is not, however, an avoidable paradox: it is merely one example of the intractability of the problems which racialism so wantonly creates. Whether this inner contradiction can be resolved, whether, that is, the heightening of racial consciousness which is the necessary first response to the pressure of racialism can in the end lead to the desired relegation of racial differences to their true, insignificant, place, no one is in a position to say: no society which has become infected by racialism has yet come close enough to eliminating that infection for it to be possible to be sure of the answer.

Because the Rose Report is the first comprehensive treatment of Britain's racial situation as a whole, because it is based on solid research and contains proposals both well thought out and readily practicable, it is required reading for anyone who cares about the future of the society in which he and his children are going to live.

It is not, however, in relation to policy, a definitive document, but only a basis for discussion. Many of the proposals are excellent: but in some instances, they require thorough revision, and in others, they are palpably inadequate to the analysis on which they are supposed to be based.

An instance of the former defect is contained in the proposals concerning immigration. These are complex, and in some respects to be welcomed: but they include one recommendation, for a revision of our citizenship law, which would be disastrous, and which is all the more likely to be taken up because its having been put forward in this book gives it a respectable liberal endorsement. The authors urge, quite rightly, that immigration policy, as it affects both aliens and Commonwealth citizens, should be planned as a whole. But, in

pursuit of this unification, they make the error of suggesting that, in effect, the status of Commonwealth citizen should be abolished altogether. They propose that the existing status of 'citizen of the U.K. and Colonies' should be abolished (as it already has been in practice by the Immigration Acts): those who now hold this status should either become 'citizens of the U.K.' or citizens of the various colonies. Everyone not a citizen of the U.K., whether an alien, a citizen of an independent Commonwealth country, or a citizen of a colony, should then be treated exactly alike. This would involve, as the Report explicitly notes, that Commonwealth citizens would lose the civil rights (the vote, jury service, etc.) which at present they have as soon as they come to Britain. One can understand the thought that the Commonwealth has by now been rendered so meaningless that the legal recognition of its existence has become pointless. Nevertheless, after all that has happened, the attempt to deprive Commonwealth citizens of the civil rights which still distinguish them from aliens (the last surviving distinction, now that entry certificates have been made compulsory) could only be seen by them as a further attack upon them, and would be disastrous. As for the proposed status of citizen of a colony, this would be a ratification of what was from the start a fraud. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 introduced a distinction of status between people all carrying passports as 'citizens of the U.K. and Colonies', according to the place of issue of the passport: those passports issued in colonial territories were deemed to have been issued by the colonial government concerned, and their holders made subject to immigration control. But the fact is that a colonial government is not a sovereign authority, but an agency of the imperial government: however much autonomy it may have, it has no control of foreign affairs, cannot offer protection to its subjects when out of the country, and therefore cannot be considered as capable of issuing passports. It is surely wrong in principle to deprive those subject to a colonial régime of membership of any sovereign state. The Rose Report is emphatic that anyone having the proposed new status of 'citizen of the U.K.' should have unrestricted entry to Britain. In my view, the old status of 'citizen of the U.K. and Colonies' should be retained, and the right of free entry restored to those who hold it: there are, in any case, so few colonies left that no talk of 'floods' in this connexion would have any plausibility. Citizens of independent Commonwealth countries are, of course, in a different position: but no attempt should be made to interfere with the civil rights to which that status entitles them when they are in this country.

An example of the second type of defect is contained in their proposals about the Government's help to voluntary action, as now embodied in the Community Relations Commission. The chapter in the text on this subject gives an exceedingly penetrating analysis of the operation of the National Committee for Commonwealth

Immigrants, the forerunner of the C.R.C. It shows how the N.C.C.I. adopted the ideology of 'harmonious community relations', according to which the first priority is to prevent conflict from coming to the surface. This ideology was, in turn, imposed upon the local community relations councils which were virtually the sole bodies which the N.C.C.I. was grant-aiding, and which became dependent on the good will of the N.C.C.I. for the grants which enabled them to employ a full-time worker. The councils were to seek to correct injustices by persuasion, not by protest: the chapter mentions two occasions on which such councils attempted to prevent protest action by independent groups. The motive would not have been to avoid endangering negotiations in progress, but simply because protest was seen as intrinsically bad, because it threatened 'harmony': the principle was to promote harmony at all costs—if possible, a harmony springing from justice, but, if not, then a harmony which concealed the injustices which persuasion had failed to remove; it 'rejected confrontation, even as a last resort' (p. 387).

The whole chapter contains the most incisive critique, to which this brief summary can do no justice, of the strategy and mode of operation of the local councils: the only possible conclusion from it would be to the utter inadequacy and occasional actual deleteriousness of voluntary work of this kind. A policy recommendation which answered to this analysis would therefore have to propose a means by which other forms of activity could be supported in the way in which the community relations councils are: how financial aid and other encouragement could be channelled to immigrant organizations, so-called 'campaign committees' and other types of community organization. Directly this question is raised, it becomes apparent that no body with the kind of structure and composition which the C.R.C. has could carry out such a task: the C.R.C. would have to be replaced by a body formed on a wholly different conception. Such a conception was embodied in the proposals put forward in 1968 by the Rev. Wilfred Wood, and briefly mentioned in a later chapter. Yet, when we come to that section of the final chapter of recommendations which deals with Government support of voluntary work, we find no such proposals. We find only a suggestion that there should be a corps of community relations officers recruited by the C.R.C., and seconded by them to local councils. This proposal, good sense as it might well be in a different context, can only be harmful in one in which an ever more authoritarian central body is engaged in constant pressure on the local groups to conform. It is, in fact, totally unresponsive to the situation analysed in the text with such keen insight. Doubtless, the authors' reason for not putting forward recommendations along the lines of the Wood proposals was their consciousness that no one in the white Establishment would now think them to fall within the sphere of practical politics. It will need a long education before they are so regarded. All the more reason,

however, for the Rose Report to have begun this process of education: for the fact is that the Wood proposals remain the minimum conditions under which any Government intervention into voluntary work can be more than, at best, a mere sham.

These two are far from the only examples of such defects: but it would be short-sighted to end on a note of complaint. The Rose Report, whatever mistakes it contains, provides a basis for a discussion of public policy which ought to have started long ago, and which still only a tiny minority of people know of the necessity for. In that discussion, the voices of the racial minorities themselves must be heard and listened to. Hitherto, they have not been heard, partly because it occurred to very few people that they might have anything to say which there was any point in attending to, and partly because the gap was too great between the assumptions from which they started and the normally accepted bases of political discussion for what they said to be comprehensible to most people. The Rose Report in no way represents their views: it represents those of decent, middle-of-the-road liberal opinion. But if it succeeds, as it ought to, in initiating discussion of the remedies which are needed for the ills which the spread of racialism has inflicted upon our society, then it may also provide a context in which the voices of the black minorities may be heard. At present it seems that, after the initial splash quickly subsided, the Rose Report has sunk without trace to the bottom of the pool. Let us pray, for the sake of us all, that this is a false appearance, and that the politically conscious public is not, after all that has happened, quite as obtuse as to ignore this most significant work.