

# Britain: Report into summer riots recommends oath of national allegiance

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17 December 2001

On December 12, the Community Cohesion Review (CCR) released its official report into the racial disturbances that broke out in a number of northern conurbations this year. The conflicts in Bradford, Oldham, Leeds and Burnley, were the worst in Britain for nearly two decades.

Serious rioting and fights between Asian and white youth and the police broke out last summer after the fascist British National Party and National Front sought to stir up racial tensions in deprived neighbourhoods. In Bradford, scene of the worst incidents, hundreds of Asian youth clashed with police after an attempted National Front march.

The CCR was commissioned by the Home Office to investigate the disturbances and recommend what lessons should be drawn.

The official report is full of typical New Labour double-speak. Even though it paints a damning picture of social deprivation and condemns various government and local authority initiatives for contributing towards racial tensions, the report ends up recommending more of the same.

The CCR reports that it was “particularly struck by the depth of polarisation of our towns and cities”. Employment opportunities for young people of all racial backgrounds in deprived areas are “lamentably poor”. Denied adequate training, many young people are also subject to “postcode discrimination” by employers—i.e. rejected because of the neighbourhoods in which they live. Youth facilities are “in a parlous state in many areas” and in much need of “greater investment”.

It is unfortunate, the report continues, that even where young people participate in regeneration programmes and other schemes, they do so “against the odds and with very limited and fragile resources”. The short-term government regeneration schemes “often seemed to institutionalise the problems” and “seemed to ensure divisiveness.”

The provision of social assistance, housing, schools and regeneration programmes in deprived areas have become increasingly racially based. The “equalities agenda” has become selective and targeted at certain groups, seemingly at the expense of others in similar need. Consequently,

ethnic communities have become “problematized”, whilst some white communities “felt left out completely”. The most consistent and vocal concern expressed to the CCR inquiry team was the “damaging impact of different communities bidding against each other and the difficulty of being able to convince them about the fairness of the present approach.”

The CCR is also critical of the growth of single-faith schools—the encouragement of which is a central plank of the Blair government’s education policy. These schools pose “a significant problem”, the CCR states, and “can add significantly to the separation of communities.” These faith-based schools, combined with state schools that largely draw their pupil intake from a specific local area, are contributing to a situation in which the student body in some schools consists almost entirely of one race or religion.

Existing housing is also segregated, and new housing schemes “appeared to simply reinforce present community settlement patterns.” The report also notes, “Housing expenditure is capital intensive and represents a long term investment in the social infrastructure. As such it possibly distorts regeneration programmes and may lead to an over-concentration on area based programmes”.

It is also worth noting the CCR’s findings on the role of the media and local politicians.

A review of the media’s role in the disturbances was not part of the CCR remit, the report admits. But the team said they were surprised at the “overwhelming” level of criticism directed against the media for “promoting divisiveness or labelling areas as problems”.

There was also a lack of political leadership in many areas. Many people had complained that the local political activities of the mainstream parties, including the selection of candidates, were based on clique ties, personal interests and backroom deals.

All these issues had led to a situation in which there were “separate education arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks”, and in which rightwing groups could

prey on ignorance and mistrust.

Having correctly identified some of the major factors responsible for the disturbances, however, the CCR then back peddles furiously. For every criticism it levels, the CCR also provides the government with an escape clause. For example, having “recognised that poverty and deprivation contributed to disaffection and social unrest, to a greater or lesser extent, in all the areas we visited”, the report finds that the relationship is “not straightforward”. It does not explain how it has reached this conclusion, and it contradicts the earlier assertion that “where high levels of poverty and unemployment were found community cohesion was unlikely to be very evident”.

Whilst acknowledging that the team was “implored to draw attention to the problem of the overall level of resources by all agencies”, it finds that “some rationalisation of youth services does, however, seem possible” and that there is “a case for a review of resources more generally in relation to areas of greatest need”.

Without any apparent embarrassment, the CCR team state, “we do not see ‘integration’ and ‘segregation’ as necessarily opposed”. Segregated housing and schools are not “necessarily problematic” in themselves, it states. Rather, “community cohesion fundamentally depends on people and their values.”

This statement, presented as a penetrating insight, is a rationale for accepting social, and racial, divisions. There are no specific proposals made to increase funding to redress the glaring class inequalities detailed throughout the report. All the CCR recommends is a programme of “twinning” schools to encourage cross-cultural links, organising mixed-race sports activities, and encouraging single-faith schools to offer “at least 25 percent of places to reflect the other cultures or ethnicities within the local area.”

In effect, the CCR absolves the government of any responsibility for making serious efforts to change the social and economic conditions—and political policies—that led to this summer’s clashes. Instead, they urge the government to promote a new version of British nationalism, in which the fundamental issue is to “gain consensus on... ‘cultural pluralism’.” There should be a “clear focus on what it means to be a citizen of a modern multi-racial Britain”. The government should lead an “honest and open national debate” to determine “both the rights—and in particular—the responsibilities of citizenship”. Common elements of “nationhood” should be identified, “based on (a few) common principles which are shared and observed by all sections of the community”.

These core values, which should also place a “higher value on cultural differences,” could then be “formalised into a form of statement of allegiance,” the CCR recommend.

Home Secretary David Blunkett immediately seized upon the ideological kernel of the CCR’s recommendations. Brushing aside all of the social problems identified in the report, and which Labour’s big business policies are exacerbating, he urged an immediate discussion on the “rights and responsibilities of being a British citizen”.

According to Blunkett, those from ethnic minorities must adopt British “norms of acceptability” and he suggested introducing a US-style oath of allegiance, setting out a “clear primary loyalty to this nation.” In a recent speech in Birmingham, the home secretary complained that the “UK has had a relatively weak sense of what political citizenship should entail... It is vital that we develop a stronger understanding of what our collective citizenship means, and how we can build that shared commitment into our social and political institutions.” He told the *Independent on Sunday*, “We have norms of acceptability and those who come into our home—for that is what it is—should accept those norms just as we would have to do if we went elsewhere.”

The government’s call for a national debate on race relations is fraudulent. Neither the inquiry’s findings, nor the government’s own pronouncements on the subject provide a progressive basis for addressing the serious issues raised by June’s disturbances.

Rather, the objective is to try and concoct a new variant of British nationalism. Its aim is to conceal the growth in social inequality that is the root cause of the explosion of inter-ethnic tensions and the bitter hostility felt towards the police, while encouraging the type of patriotic flag-waving and unswerving loyalty to the nation more normally associated with the political right. The efforts to make this witches’ brew more palatable, by including an acknowledgement of the multi-ethnic makeup of Britain, cannot hide its reactionary central message. Blunkett’s comments were welcomed by the Conservative Party, which has previously demanded that immigrants take a “cricket test”—equating patriotism with support for the England team as proof of loyalty to the nation. For his part, British National Party leader Nick Griffin, who played a central role in fomenting the disturbances, said his party would use the home secretary’s statements in its own campaign literature.



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