

KEEP BRITAIN WHITE

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ONLY a few weeks before the outbreak of last summer's race clashes in Britain I was sitting on the platform of a meeting addressed by Bishop Reeves of Johannesburg. The meeting was held at Central Hall, Westminster, London, within a few paces from the House of Commons. There must have been nearly 1,000 people at the meeting. Bishop Reeves had hardly begun to speak when my eyes were attracted towards the gallery. And there, truculently spread out was a large white banner with the heavy sign in black: "KEEP BRITAIN WHITE".

Although I had come up against colour prejudice on several occasions previously, this was the first time I had witnessed it in so blatant a form. I could hardly believe that what I saw was real. Yes, it was real enough. But it was incongruous. Incongruous, because it seemed out of place among an audience of serious-minded men and women, both young and old, who had come to show their appreciation of the good work being done by Bishop Reeves to fight racialism.

Those responsible for displaying the banner were quickly led out of the hall and the meeting went on as if nothing had happened. But I must confess that even though I did not see that banner again, a white flash with the inscription "KEEP BRITAIN WHITE" remained as an image in my mind in the same way that the slogan "FOR EUROPEANS ONLY" has stuck since my childhood in South Africa.

After the meeting we found that at most about a dozen youths, of both sexes, were responsible for this display. A mere dozen out of an audience of about a thousand. It was a comforting thought that, after all, the great majority of those present did not believe in colour prejudice. Yet it was the mischievous behaviour of a handful of teenagers which caught the headlines of the following day's newspapers and not the calm and dignified disapproval of the vast audience.

This is not to suggest that colour prejudice, as distinct from violence which characterized the disturbances in Nottingham and Notting Hill, should be dismissed as not being serious. Indeed, as subsequent events and newspaper reports and correspondence have shown, colour or race prejudice is more wide-

spread than many would like to admit. The Rev. Donald Soper once put it something like this in a newspaper article: "Most people would unhesitatingly deny that they had colour prejudice. But ask them whether they would have a Coloured family as neighbours and the answer would be an equally unhesitating 'no'".

Colour prejudice festers under the surface of a somewhat benign and disciplined code of good and correct behaviour. Give this code of good behaviour even the slightest jolt and the true passions come to the surface. Then we get Nottingham and Notting Hill and everybody is surprised.

During the two weeks when the race disturbances were at their worst I was drawn into numerous discussions with Asians, Africans and West Indians. Nearly every one of them had a grievance. On occasions I found myself in the difficult situation of trying to convince them that not every Englishman had colour prejudice, that they must distinguish between those who had and those who had not. My arguments had little impact. Many of them had come to this country as students. Their difficulties and problems, mainly because of colour prejudice, have left them with bitterness and frustration. That there was ample justification for this feeling is shown, for instance, in a recent survey which indicated that only about 15 per cent of London landladies would accept a Negro student. It is shown by the extreme reluctance of employers to take on Coloured workers except in the lowest-paid jobs, and certainly not in a supervisory capacity. It is shown by the increasing number of clubs which bar Coloureds from membership. It is shown by many other instances too numerous to detail.

Many of those who accuse the British of colour prejudice point to other countries in Europe where, they say, there is far less prejudice. And they are right. During the disturbance an English woman resident in Paris wrote indignantly to one of the papers here: "In spite of the fact that it is quite impossible to determine whether the Arab in the street does or does not belong to this minority (North African), is or is not armed and ready for murder, no French man, woman, or child of whatever educational level has ever cried out 'dirty Arab' or entertained for a moment the idea of personal violent retaliation, which in the circumstances would be, if not justifiable, at least understandable. Arabs drink in cafes side by side with French people. It is in Notting Hill Gate, where I used to live, that a little child

pointed her finger at a respectable Black lawyer and shouted 'dirty Nigger'. She is in no way responsible for her action. The onus rests upon her parents who brought her up on un-British ideas of totalitarian racial hatred."

Whatever the origins of prejudice, there is no doubt that it exists to an alarming extent. Those who uphold it may point their fingers at Coloured people and accuse them of living on prostitution, of being a burden on national insurance welfare, of being untidy and lazy, of being bad-mannered and noisy.

But these evils, if they can be so described, are not the monopoly of Coloured people. They are to be found in equal proportion among the British people themselves.

Another fallacy is the mistaken belief among left-wing politicians that Coloured prejudice arises from unemployment, lack of housing and low living standards. This is an oversimplification. There are many parts of the world where conditions are much worse and yet retaliation does not take the form of race or colour prejudice.

The root of colour prejudice can only be found in historical terms. It is to be found in the British colonial system which, over the centuries, had conquered and subjugated many peoples in many parts of the world. And so has grown the myth that military defeat is equivalent to an "inferior" status. Despite the vast changes, specially since World War II and the emergence of independent nations in Asia and Africa there has been little change in the educational system. History books are still permeated with ideas that to be "Coloured" is to be "inferior". As a well-known educationalist has pointed out: "Relatively few British persons start with a strong prejudice against the Coloured man, but they assimilate the idea of his 'inferiority' because it is part of the cultural atmosphere. Children's books, for instance, are still riddled with grotesque representations of Coloured people; many texts used in schools are anthropologically out of date; and it is only a few years ago that the cinema gave up depicting the Negro as a ludicrous and degraded coon."

While people differ widely in the interpretation of the causes behind the recent disturbances, a surprisingly large number of them, including several Labour M.Ps. are calling for the control of immigration.

There are about 200,000 Coloured people in Britain today. Of these it is estimated that about 110,000 are West Indians and about 50,000 Indians and Pakistanis. Of the remaining 40,000

about 50 per cent are West Africans. Considering that Britain's population is 51,000,000 the proportion of Coloured people is about 4 out of every 1,000. And contrary to popular belief, the number of people coming in from the West Indies and elsewhere is falling and not rising.

The race clashes have come and gone and many people are only too glad to forget them. But the virus of colour prejudice is still there. It is being fed and nourished by racial propaganda of various kinds, the most dangerous and potentially harmful being that which is seeking to use the ballot box. Already a candidate has appeared in a London borough by-election and collected almost 500 votes by openly propagating racialism. True, the winning candidate, a Conservative, won by a very large majority. But significantly, the Communist candidate representing a party which has been active in the area for many years and has unreservedly opposed colour prejudice, came at the bottom of the poll.

In Britain, where many people with colour prejudice are ashamed to admit it openly, the ballot box seems to offer a way out. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the colour issue becomes increasingly prominent in election battles unless firm and immediate action is taken to outlaw race and colour prejudice.

Up to now race and colour issues have not figured in British politics and governments have not found it necessary to take any action. Indeed, because of the absence of legislation outlawing racialism, it is even possible for dance halls and other public places to exclude Coloured people. In a recent case in Wolverhampton the magistrates granted licence to a dance hall with colour bar, even though strong objections were raised by the Labour Party, the International Friendship League, the Musicians' Union and local churches.

It is incomprehensible that Britain, being a member of the United Nations, should not take action to implement the principles of the United Nations Charter which forbids race and colour discrimination. It is a welcome sign, therefore, that the Labour Party has adopted a policy statement committing itself to introduce legislation. Legislation alone, however, cannot rid people of race prejudice. It is a problem which requires a new approach to race relations and the positive inculcation of ideas towards human brotherhood.