Edited by Vivienne Coombe and Alan Little

ROUTLEDGE

RACE & SOCIAL WORK

A GUIDE TO TRAINING

Race and Social Work

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Edited by

Vivienne Coombe

and

Alan Little

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Introduction

Alan Little

Five years ago Lord Scarman was asked to report to the government on the 'Brixton disorders'. At the core of his recommendations was his conclusion that 'there is scope for a more coherent and better directed response…to the challenge of policing modern multi-racial society'. The scope of that response was wide: recruitment, training, and supervision of policemen; discipline and complaints procedures in the force; methods of policing multi-racial areas; and the vexed issue of consultation/accountability in racially mixed communities. It was, to use Scarman's phrase, 'an agenda for a national discussion'. That discussion is not confined to the police and policing. The implications of racial and ethnic diversity for professional practices relate to all professional groups: doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, personnel managers, etc.

The focus for this book is social workers, the aim to provide materials for use in their in-service training in order to help the profession respond more effectively to the social work needs of multi-racial areas. We believe that the lack of effective initial training in this field means that immediate improvements in professional practice will come through in-service courses. This view was shared by the DHSS, which funded a development project to create a set of materials that would serve as a resource for in-service courses. Pilot work was completed with social workers, probation officers, police, and students on a range of initial training courses. In part, this was to try out the materials themselves and a variety of ways of presenting the complex and sensitive issue of racial diversity.

Materials in this book represent one of the resources coming within the project. The second is a video film *(Colourblind)* giving the views of black social workers on professional practices. The project also made use of a game which can be used to sensitize students to the issues of race, ethnicity, and migration. A self-monitoring teaching strategy was developed to assess the impact of presenting factual information on relevant issues on students' awareness and understanding of aspects of race relations.

The essays in this volume are a selection of some of this material. The issues covered are those that are most worrying to practitioners and trainers with experience in multi-racial social situations. One of the concerns of many trainers was the lack of basic information on the larger ethnic groups in Britain; hence

the profiles of the four main groups. Questions about immigration and race prejudice frequently occur within professional groups. Equally important to practitioners are the problems they encounter when making contact with certain groups (for example, adolescents and the old). Some aspects of professional practice were seen as problematic (issues like children in care, fostering, social enquiry reports, and casework are examples) in a multi-racial context.

Contributions to this book were prepared to respond to these needs. None of the authors would claim that his or her essay is definitive; limitations of length alone prevent this. The authors were asked to prepare an introductory essay that would serve as a basis for discussion on the topic by trainers and students on courses. Supplementary material is included: where appropriate, further reading is indicated; and at the end of Sections One and Two, and following individual chapters in Section Three, lists of 'Suggestions and Exercises' highlight key issues and extend the discussion in the essays through project-and group-work.

Common to all the contributions is the objective of opening up discussion on the topics—not resolving them. The aim is to provide the trainer with basic information on issues that are recognized as problematic in social work practice. Through considering the information and ideas presented in the essays it is hoped that better informed professional practice will follow.

This book is intended to be used primarily as a training guide. Several books deal with the prevalent issues relating to race and social work, notably *Social Work and Ethnicity* (London: National Institute for Social Services, 1982) and *Social Work Services for Ethnic Minorities in Britain and the USA,* both by Juliet Cheetham. There has also been an increase in the popularity of racism awareness courses. This is to be welcomed, as first and foremost individuals must be aware of their feelings, attitudes, prejudices, and racist behaviour if they are to cope effectively. However, it would be counter-productive if, having undergone racism awareness training, workers became so consumed with guilt that they were left impotent to do any useful work; or if such training enabled then to produce a 'socially competent, non-racist performance' but not 'anti-racist practice' (see Husband, Chapter 1). Where it is not possible to merge the two, racism awareness courses should be followed by the examination of practice issues and the implications of policy on ethnic minority groups.

Because racism awareness training is, rightly, a highly specialized field, trainers in the local authority or the voluntary sector are still unable or unwilling to provide adequate training for their personnel, and so it is done on an *ad hoc* basis in many areas.

The material presented here is in three main sections to enable trainers to organize a course in a logical manner. We have found that an effective format is for students—be they managers or those with face-to-face contact—to examine the position of black people in society generally before moving on to look at specific ethnic minority groups, and then to relate these to service delivery and practice; this is therefore the way in which the sections are organized. Some of the points made in the general sections are reiterated in the examination of specific

issues. We make no apology for this; as well as being aware that racism is endemic in British society, workers should also be able to identify it in areas of their work and seek ways of eradicating it.

So where does the trainer begin? We would suggest four ‘do’s’ as a useful starting point:

1 Do read the book and become familiar with the material before mounting a course.
2 Do seek advice.
3 Do be sure of your stance on race. Whatever it may be, it is sure to be challenged during your course(s).
4 Do get black people to participate in running the sessions.

SECTION ONE

Racism in Society

In this section the authors examine the current state of race relations in Britain, and particularly racism that operates on an institutional level. The main thrust is the manner in which governments over the years, by trying to placate racists, have responded to the presence of ethnic minorities in this country. Husband, Chapter 1, gives an historical perspective to twentieth-century racism. He looks at stereotyping, the manner in which racism has evolved and been dealt with in the past, and the power structure that denies blacks access to the decision-making process. Martin, Chapter 2, takes us through the maze of complex immigration legislation, which appears to be racist in intent, and examines the part legislation plays in perpetuating racism. He also looks at the Nationality Act 1981, which could adversely affect children born in Britain to parents who are not British citizens. Haynes, Chapter 3, outlines the various race relations bodies set up over the last twenty years and questions their role in combating racism. He sees equality as being achieved only through a black civil rights movement.

Together the three articles provide a useful backcloth to view the kind of environment in which black people function daily. They set the scene for an examination of social work provision in a multi-racial society.

CHAPTER 1
Racism, Prejudice, and Social Policy

Charles Husband

It is ironic that in the 1980s in Britain, whilst the belief in the objective existence of races remains consensual in everyday speech and in considered opinion, there is a considerable unwillingness to examine the ramifications of racism throughout British life. The irony lies in the fact that race is not a real entity, whilst racism as a range of personal and institutional practices is very real in its existence and impact. The core of racism consists of people acting as though race concepts were valid criteria for differentiating among human beings; yet there is wide support for the view that there is no adequate biological basis for believing in 'race' as the idea is so frequently used in Britain. After the Second World War, and with the tragic and brutal consequences of Nazi race policy very much in mind, UNESCO in a series of 'Statements on Race and Race Prejudice' virtually buried the notion of biological races beneath the weight of criticism from the international academic community. More recently Banton and Harwood (1975:8) assert that

> 'As a way of categorising people, race is based upon a delusion because popular ideas about racial classification lack scientific validity and are moulded by political pressures rather than by the evidence from biology.'

However, the lack of scientific support for the validity of categorizing people into 'races' has done little to undermine the everyday usage of such terms. We should not be surprised; the idea of race has a long history and was particularly moulded into British culture through its central role in 'explaining' imperial expansion up to the beginning of the present century. Particularly with the development of European nationalist ideas in the nineteenth century, race as a concept became theorized in the language of science.

From the early writing of the French anatomist Cuvier at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to the influential texts of Robert Knox's *The Races of Man* (1850), or the bitterly anti-Semitic analysis of Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), race became a central concept to the explanation of political events. Lands were to be conquered, people to be colonized, as a proper expression of a natural order. 'Subject races' required the beneficial control of their superiors so that they might be saved from their own

fecklessness. Whilst there may be no scientific validity to the concept of race, what gives it continued power in contemporary Britain is the historic fact that race has been an integral part of British practice as well as being a long-established 'idea'. Belief in British and white superiority has taken hold in the national consciousness, but not because it is a flattering *idea;* it has a continuing credibility because so much of past and current actions, based as they were and are upon a belief in race difference, confirmed through their material effects the assumptions of race theory. When Lord Cromer, in his book *Modern Egypt* (1908), outlined the deficient intellect and culture of Arabs, it was not a theoretical conjecture:

> 'The mind of the Oriental…like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description…. Endeavour to elicit a plain statement of facts from any ordinary Egyptian. His explanation will generally be lengthy, and wanting in lucidity. He will probably contradict himself half-a-dozen times before he has finished his story.'
>
> (Cited in Said 1978:38)

These views were derived from personal experience; from the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 until 1907 Cromer had been in charge of the British control of that country. His opinions of the intellectual superiority of the British were informed by the objective superior power of the British in Egypt.

The same illegitimate stereotypical extrapolation from relations of power to belief in differences in intellectual and moral characteristics can be seen in the English Victorian view of the Irish, African, or Indian (Curtin 1964, Curtis 1968, Bolt 1971).

What the English had in common in their view of Irish, Egyptian, Indian, or African people was not identical stereotypes of their intellectual and moral failings; it was a common *theory of race*. The success of the physical sciences in apparently explaining and harnessing the forces of nature lent credibility to the scientific explanation of human nature. So in discussing race and racism it is important that we distinguish between the images and stereotypes associated with particular 'race' categories, and the theory that seeks to explain the validity of using such categories. The images may remain constant whilst the theory changes, or vice versa; they have a degree of independence and so add a conceptual flexibility to race thinking, which allows for images to change with shifting objective relations between groups, or for theory to remain consistent with dominant academic and intellectual thought. A stereotype too greatly at odds with objective relations between groups is likely to expose the entrenched bias of the holder of that stereotype. Similarly, race theory that seeks to legitimate the use of race categories is most potent when it is consistent with the dominant ideas of the time, thereby becoming uncontentious and commonsensical.

The belief in differences between 'races' could be defended in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by reference to theology (see Jordan 1969, Walvin 1971); from the latter half of the nineteenth century until the close of the Second World War, by an explicit reference to biology (Banton and Harwood 1975, Kamin 1977, Billig, 1978). As we shall see, the association of Nazism and neo-Nazi organizations with a strong biological model has now created a more subtle variant on biological determinism (Barker 1981). Asserting an unmodified and explicit biological basis for racial superiority is now seen as characteristic of the ideology of extremist fascist groups. Race theory must necessarily have the status of common-sense thought, for to be open to the charge of being 'ideological' exposes the arbitrary, rather than the seemingly 'natural', nature of race categories.

Stereotypes

Duijker and Frijda have defined stereotypes thus:

> 'A stereotype we shall define as a relatively stable opinion of a generalizing and evaluative nature. A stereotype refers to a category of people (a national population, a race, a professional group, etc.) and suggests that they are all alike in a certain respect. It is therefore an undifferentiated judgement. Furthermore, it contains, implicitly or explicitly, an evaluation.'
>
> (Duijker and Frijda 1960:115)

The unit of analysis in stereotyping is the *category*. Categories provide a reduction of an ever changing world into manageable chunks. However, there is a price to be paid for this efficiency in that they provided an arbitrary simplicity. We tend to impose dichotomous categories on to complex dimensions. Thus, for example, although modern science has indicated that identifying the sex of an individual is far more complex than the usual superficial judgement' allows, we happily label people as male and female. So too in the very great variability of *Homo sapiens* we allocate people into race categories; people become 'black', 'white', 'coloured', 'Asian', 'West Indian'.

Psychological research has indicated that there is a perceptual distortion arising from the use of categories; namely, we tend to perceive members of categories as more alike than they really are and we tend to exaggerate the difference between members of different categories (Tajfel 1973, 1981). However, stereotypes also indicate the dimensions, the characteristics, along which this distortion will occur. The culture that transmits social categories through language also transmits the historically derived attributes that are believed to be characteristic of members of each category. From the sex categories of male and female we readily move towards monitoring individuals' masculinity or femininity on such variables as strength, aggressiveness, or

emotionality. Where individuals are encountered who threaten this classification, rather than reassess the adequacy of the categories we are likely to stigmatize these individuals and fit them into alternative categories such as 'butch', 'cissy', or 'pansy'. Thus an important aspect of stereotyping is its non-random nature.

Lack of space prevents us from tracing here in detail the historical development of race categories and race stereotypes. It is nevertheless important to note the continuity of negative images of Africans and Afro-Caribbeans, which have focused upon their intellectual, aesthetic, sexual, and cultural characteristics. Jordan (1969), Curtin (1964), and Walvin (1971) are among those who have demonstrated the deep historical roots of these stereotypes. Bolt (1971) and Kiernan (1972) have also traced the more ambiguous historical stereotype of Asians. It is significant that with the influx of migrant labour from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent from the 1950s Britain's indigenous white population were able to identify this labour in 'race' terms that invoked powerful race stereotypes. These stereotypes focused the indigenous population's attention upon the cultural difference of the settling black communities, rather than upon their common class experience, or their mutual contribution to national prosperity (Hartmann and Husband 1974, Husband 1982, Miles and Phizacklea 1984).

Thus stereotypes introduce a very powerful distortion into an individual's view of their world via *selective perception*. We are not equally open to evidence on the characteristics of different people we meet; rather we are selectively cued to identify behaviour that fits our preconceived expectations. For example, the stereotypical presentation of 'mugging' as a particular crime of black youth (see Hall *et al.* 1978) doubtless contributed to police zeal in the application of the 'Sus' law. The comparable zeal of the magistrates in sustaining a very high conviction rate on ambiguous evidence (see Demuth 1978) completed the circle and gave spurious support to the stereotype of young black criminality. A great deal of the power of stereotypes lies in the cumulative distortion that is generated through selective perception on the basis of characteristics identified as critical by the stereotype. It should be apparent that stereotypes are not immutably fixed or static entities. They exist in a dynamic relation with the 'real' world and the experience of the individual. Through selective perception, the 'real' world is filtered to be consistent with the stereotype. As we have seen above, through the consequences of selective perception and the differential access to power of dominant and subordinate groups, the 'real' world may come more closely to approximate the stereotype. However, stereotypes are themselves not immune to changes in the external world. In a major review of the research literature on stereotypes Cauthen, Robinson, and Krauss (1971) cite the examples of US stereotypes of the Japanese and Germans changing as the United States became involved in the Second World War. In November 1941 the Japanese were regarded as courteous, ambitious, and tradition-loving; whilst 'aggressive' was the only trait reflecting the Japanese involvement in hostilities on the mainland of Asia. Yet after Pearl Harbor the traits 'deceitful', 'treacherous', 'sly', and

'extremely nationalistic' predominated, and 'courteous' and 'ambitious' disappeared.

In Britain the propaganda of the National Front in the 1970s provided an example of the limitations placed by 'reality' on the form plausible stereotypes can take. Much National Front invective was directed towards the black ethnic minorities, who were portrayed as a threat to the racial purity of Britain. As a complement to this view the stereotype of black minorities as presented by the National Front asserted the intellectual and cultural inferi ority of black people, and characterized them as highly sexed and given to excessive procreation. Given the nature of black migration to Britain and the very considerable discrimination black labour had encountered, the majority of the black population occupied a low status in Britain. This position, itself sustained by racial discrimination, was consistent with the stereotype of the inferiority of black ethnic minority groups and helped to 'prove' the validity of the stereotype. Thus for the National Front its propaganda was at least viable; yet at the heart of this propaganda was a belief in an international financial conspiracy to undermine Britain (Billig 1978). Clearly the economic position of the black communities in Britain ill-suited them for a role in this conspiracy, but the historical stereotype of the Jewish entrepreneur allowed the anti-Semitic core of National Front philosophy to identify Jews as being at the true source of Britain's demise. Within National Front propaganda we can see how stereotypes that have an historical and cultural vitality are woven together in order to provide a propaganda story that is at least seemingly consistent with some of the more visible aspects of contemporary Britain, and with the cultural repertoire of race stereotypes.

Prejudice

Given that there is a large body of historical literature demonstrating that British, and particularly English, culture has a very long history of racial stereotyping, we may then be tempted to see the 'race relations' conflicts of contemporary Britain as being historically determined through the inherent bias of British culture. And, given that social psychological research has suggested that categorization and stereotypical perception may be inherent properties of Western, if not of all, human mind (Turner 1981, Tajfel 1982), may we then not be inclined to view racial prejudice as an inevitable or at least an understandable facet of white British consciousness?

Whilst such conclusions may be attractive in reducing racial prejudice to a comprehensible reasonableness, they are illegitimate. Such a view, in making racial prejudice a mere variant on a ubiquitous cognitive fallibility (categorization and stereotyping), normalizes racism as a common individual human propensity. It tends to submerge questions relating to the social determination of ideas, and to obscure the political and economic forces that mediate access to shaping political agendas. It implies that racial prejudice is

normal, and that only extreme race hatred is aberrant. Even these extreme instances are then themselves explained in terms of personal dynamics (Rose 1969). It is a psychologically reductionist argument, seeking to reduce social phenomena to psychological (individual) explanation.

This reductionist view is consistent with what Barker (1981) has called 'the new racism'. Noting the extent to which explicit statements of belief in the inferiority of non-white 'races' have become politically increasingly untenable in recent decades, Barker discusses the emergence of a new race theory that argues for the immutable *difference* between races. Any statement of inferiority or superiority remains implicit in the apparent reasonableness of arguing that 'the genuine fears' of any social group faced with pressure from another group arise from fundamental elements of human nature. Barker argues:

> 'And here we have reached the core of the new racism. It is a theory of human nature. Human nature is such that it is natural to form a bounded community, a nation, aware of its differences from other nations. They are not better or worse. But feelings of antagonism will be aroused if outsiders are admitted. And there grows up a special form of connection between a nation and the place it lives….
>
> It is a theory that I shall call biological, or better, pseudo-biological culturalism. Nations on this view are not built out of politics and economics, but out of human nature. It is in our biology, our instincts, to defend our way of life, traditions and customs against outsiders—not because they are inferior, but because they are part of different cultures. This is a non-rational process; and none the worse for it. For we are soaked in, made up out of, our traditions and our culture.'
>
> (Barker 1981:21, 23)

In outlining this new formulation of race theory Barker provides a valuable platform for examining social work in contemporary Britain. The new race theory makes a virtue of its avoidance of the former explicit images of black inferiority, or Arab fecklessness. It is sufficient to focus upon cultural difference. We should not assume, however, that these earlier images are lost; images of white superiority are for example familiarly represented in any episode of *Mind your Language* or *It Ain't Half Hot Mum,* and in such films as the recent *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. However, Members of Parliament and all socially sensitive people have benefited via the relative virtue they have been able to afford themselves in refraining from the explicit racist epithets of neo-fascist groups like the National Front. In vilifying the National Front, mainstream politicians at the national and local level were able to claim the middle ground of tolerant reasonableness, whilst simultaneously rejecting the 'political extremism' of anti-racist groups such as the Anti-Nazi League (see Troyna 1982).

By targeting the National Front and other neo-fascist groups as the quintessence of racist thought and practice, there was a complementary

marginalizing of other expressions of racism. As members of a caring profession, social workers, like other professional groups, readily endorsed the consensual rejection of explicit racial superiority theory. The continuing vitality of race thinking, particularly of the variety Barker has called 'the new racism', has allowed for a complacency and an inertia in formulating policy for a Britain with a growing population of settled migrant labour who have continued to be described in the language of 'race' relations. Whilst racism has been conceptualized in terms of the racial prejudice of extremists, the majority of white Britons have been able to attempt flattering comparisons, and there has been no obvious necessity to examine institutional or other manifestations of racism (see Manning and Ohri 1982 for a valuable discussion of forms of racism).

Policy

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s British party politics and the British news media constructed a definition of events in terms of Britain having 'an immigration problem'. Specifically, immigrants *were* the problem (Hartmann and Husband 1974). Having defined events in these terms both the Labour and the Conservative parties were thereafter vulnerable to neo-fascist groups who were prepared to focus upon and exacerbate the racist sentiments that were at the core of this perspective. It was too late to attempt to rephrase the political agenda in terms of the realities of labour demand and the failure of government to plan for the consequent pressure on the resources of housing, education, or welfare in the areas of migrant settlement. British party politics in the 1960s and 1970s became profoundly entangled in a competitive struggle to contain and *co-opt* the growing racist vote (Dummett and Dummett 1982, Miles and Phizacklea 1984). Too late it became apparent that the electorate was being retained only at the cost of capitulation to explicitly discriminatory immigration legislation.

How then should the government address the increasingly visible impact of racial discrimination upon the minority communities? The political answer had to be: cautiously, lest there should be white resentment at any initiatives seen to be directed to ethnic minorities.

In the area of government programmes for inner-city stresses, and in response to Powellism, great care was taken to present policy in generic terms. In 1968 when Harold Wilson announced the Urban Programme it was defined as being designed to alleviate 'those areas of special need including but *not exclusively aimed at* those areas with a relatively high immigrant or black population' (emphasis added). In a period when minorities were defined as the problem, and black immigration as its major focus, the government avoided specifically countering minority disadvantage and deliberately chose to develop a general response to urban *malaise* and deprivation. Similarly with the introduction of the Inner Urban Areas Act of 1978 it was argued that, *since ethnic minorities experienced the same disadvantages as other people living in urban areas,*

> 'They should benefit directly through measures taken to improve conditions, for example, in housing, education and jobs…. However, the attack on the specific problem of racial discrimination and the resultant disadvantages must be primarily through the new anti-discrimination legislation and the work of the Commission for Racial Equality.'
>
> (Dummett and McCrudden 1982)

Given this background we can hardly be surprised at the development of policy within the helping professions. Jones (1977) in a study of statutory social services reported that most departments had not made a specific organizational response to black clients, such as keeping separate statistical records, undertaking staff training, or providing special treatment for black clients. This sorry view was supported in the 1977 report *Urban Deprivation, Racial Inequality, and Social Policy* (Community Relations Commission 1977), which said: 'It was very rare for Social Services Committees to have even discussed the needs of minorities.' The document went on to say that where some thought had been given to minority groups, it was in the context of an ideology of assimilation inasmuch as the 'promotion of good race relations was equated with the provision of multi-racial facilities'. The minimal extent to which there may have been any improvement in this situation was indicated in a study of eighteen social services departments in England by Cheetham (1981). Her review provided a depressing account of inaction in such areas as child care, fostering and adoption, and the monitoring of services.

Now, in the period following the urban civil disturbances of 1981, we have seen a rapid expansion in local authority provision for ethnic minorities. However, as Young (1983) has noted, much of the funding for this has come from Urban Programme funding or Section II of the Local Government Act 1966 funds; and he comments:

> 'In practice, they are marginal to mainstream provision and have had little effect in shifting priorities within main programmes; moreover, there is a notable lack of agreement on the legitimacy of using either scheme to the *specific* benefit of black populations.'
>
> (Young 1983:288)

Behind the inertia in developing a policy for the provision of social services appropriate to new ethnic minority client populations it has been possible to detect the sensitivity of national and local political interests to the 'genuine fears' of the majority white electorate. The universal description of these new client populations as 'immigrants' rather than as citizens facilitated the viability of such unspoken beliefs as 'It's our country' and 'Why should *they* be given special treatment?' As Young suggests, in concluding his review of 'Ethnic Pluralism and Public Policy':

> 'a satisfactory account of the underdevelopment of British race-related policies cannot be given in terms of programme ambiguity alone…. Behind the ambiguity lies a complex of psycho-cultural factors which bear upon the decision-making processes in central and local government, in firms, and in other public agencies. These sometimes take the form of ambivalence about the explicit identification of ethnicity, or a reluctance to shed established notions of ethnic assimilation; at worst they take the form of covert or overt hostility towards Britain's black population.'
>
> (Young 1983:296)

Quite so; but we should not be tempted to see these 'psycho-cultural factors' as arising from some inexorable transmission of a cultural heritage of racial stereotypes. A failure to identify and challenge racism and a propensity to operate within racist assumptions are not the passive legacy of a waning colonial past. Whilst racism has its continuity and immediate existence in individual consciousness, it has its political and ideological genesis in the contemporary contradictions of British society.

Where resistance to innovation is defined as arising from cultural factors it is consequently likely that remedial action may be located in providing experience and training that will allow for cultural assumptions to be challenged and changed. This again, too often, locates the problem and the solution at the level of the individual. In Denney's (1983) review of multi-racial social work literature he usefully identifies some models of analysis that focus upon culture as the area for practice innovation. He also points to their limitations.

For example, the proliferation of race awareness training is to my mind an unobtrusive measure of the latent attractions in addressing 'psycho-cultural factors'. In the new sophistication of 'the new racism' education in the variety of cultural practice and belief does not necessarily undermine a belief in 'race', or in one's own 'distinctiveness'. Race awareness training can produce a socially competent non-racist performance; it does not produce an anti-racist practice. It is even possible that the 'trained' worker will sustain the 'best' performance for colleagues who can impose professional sanctions, rather than for the client who despite the training remains relatively powerless unless the accountability of the social worker, and the agency, is itself modified. It is not the culture of client or worker that is fundamental in locating and challenging racism, though it remains part of the equation. It is the structural position of minority communities in Britain that primarily determines the relation of minority communities to the social work agencies. Many minorities experience their life in Britain as individuals disproportionately disadvantaged within their class through racism. For members of these communities racism is not principally problematic because of stereotypes or racial prejudice; it is problematic because of the power relations between groups, which allow these stereotypes to be expressed in action—in housing provision, in employment, in the discretionary operation of policing, in the marginalization of financial provision for their community needs.

During its long period of inertia social work failed to develop a coherent policy initiative. Now with the post-1981 enlightened self-interest of many local authorities, and the political commitment of some of them, we can see the growth of a policy debate and of changing practice. For very many local authorities 'race relations' policy is acceptable in the language of culture and disadvantage, but entirely unacceptable when formulated in the language of racism and discrimination. Consequently social work provision for ethnic minority communities is now a highly politicized field. If social services departments have been slow to develop appropriate policy in the last two decades, minority communities and minority professionals have noticeably failed to emulate this lethargy. There has been a politicization of minority professionals and an uneven development of patterns of community self-help, which have brought their own political education for members of minority communities. For minority communities in some cities the current programme of 'rate capping' could provide accelerated learning for political late developers.

At the same time resistance to committing resources specifically to minority communities probably remains as widespread as it was in 1966 and the mid-1970s. The difference in the mid-1980s is in the visibility of a minority of local authorities, like Bradford or Brent, that have taken an explicit position on anti-racist policy; such authorities, in the full glare of media attention, have generated their own reaction—what Shaw (1982), in another context, has called the 'threatened majority response'. A political statement of intent to allocate resources specifically to challenging racism in employment and in services has triggered the open expression of anger that it is now the majority whites who are being systematically disadvantaged. Given the long-established political practice of asserting that black and white urban populations share common disadvantages, this reaction has apparent credibility to many white Britons. Additionally it is ideally compatible with the rhetoric of the new racism in that it represents a classic instance of invoking the 'genuine fears' of a majority population who believe they have already sufficiently demonstrated their 'tolerance'. It is a response that is both spontaneous and politically orchestrated. As Barker (1981) has shown, the rhetoric of the new racism is consistent with a highly visible element of Thatcherite philosophy; through the euphemistic invoking of the 'genuine fears' of the majority white population, charges of racism can now be addressed only against the ideologically extreme neo-fascists. Thus it becomes difficult to place racism within local authority services on the political agenda. Where racism is not admitted, then clearly anti-racist strategy becomes by definition an ideological neurosis of the extreme 'loony left'. Acceptable policy innovation thus once more becomes contained in the domain of culture, not of power.

We, in the latter part of the 1980s, are in a period when 'race relations' policy staff and 'race relations' initiatives are becoming an integral element in local authority and social service rhetoric and practice. For the reasons indicated above

there are good reasons to doubt that such activity constitutes an assault on structural racism and its consequences for social work.

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