

Report

Immigration/ Housing/School leavers

The aim of the Conservative Party's proposals on immigration is apparently to allay people's fears about the level of coloured immigration, particularly from the Indian subcontinent. However, apart from a register specifically designed to control and bring to an end the entry of wives and dependent children from the Indian subcontinent (of whom 15,944 were admitted last year), the effect of the Tory proposals, if they been government policy in 1977 would have been felt most severely by white English speaking foreigners mainly from the United States and the Old Commonwealth. Parents and grandparents would only have been permitted to settle if virtually destitute. Last year, according to the latest *Control of Immigration Statistics 1977* (HMSO, 95p), this would have affected no more than 4,003 people from all over the world of whom 1,268 were from the Indian subcontinent. By removing the right of a British woman to live together with her foreign husband in Britain, the proposals would in 1976 have prevented 11,061 men settling here, of whom 24 per cent came from India, 8 per cent from Pakistan and 6 per cent from the United States. Severe restrictions on the issue of work permits would have hit Americans the hardest. Of the 17,208 work permit holders whose families were admitted in 1977, 6,130 came from the United States and 197 from the Indian subcontinent.

Reductions in permit-free employment would have affected not only doctors, dentists, and ministers of religion, but also presumably business men and working holiday-makers from the Commonwealth. All these people are included, along with long-term visitors, in the category of "others" on permission to enter for 12 months." In the total of 45,940 allowed entry under the heading in 1977, 45 per cent were from the Old Commonwealth, 31 per cent from the United States, and 3 per cent from the Indian subcontinent.

Besides restrictions on entry the Tories intend to create a class of permanent "guest workers" who never acquire a right of settlement. In 1977 this would have affected 13 workers who had their conditions of employment removed after four years in approved employment and possibly an additional 17 men who were allowed to settle permanently after working in some other capacity. Of these 588 were from the Indian subcontinent.

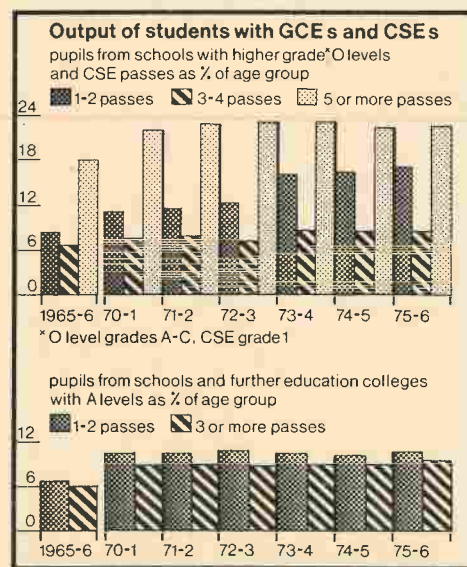
As inflation ran away with itself, the Department of the Environment has been very good about regular revision of the building cost yardstick—the elaborate table

of expenditure ceilings for new council housing, introduced in 1967 to protect the central purse from local extravagance under cost-linked subsidy schemes. The latest increase, set out in DOE circular 24/27, brings the ceilings more or less into line with actual cost increases. The quarterly review is virtually automatic now. The new overall cost control system for housing—which enables councils to make cuts where it suits them best—seems to have stopped the department saving money through forcing them to build shoddier houses under an out-of-date yardstick, as happened so often in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

But the new overall increase of 6 per cent covers variations that virtually concede all the initial objections to the yardstick. Though still not setting a limit for every individual council, as the Scots do, the range varies from 4.5 per cent up to 9.5 per cent on the previous local level. Also, the constraints that have made unusual types of housing—notably, old people's sheltered schemes—impossible have now been removed, by giving councils more freedom to switch cost items from one budget to another.

The number of pupils leaving school without any exam qualifications at all continues to drop. Whereas in 1965-66 over half of the school leavers had no qualifications, by 1974-75 a fifth had no qualifications and last year (1975-76) only 17 per cent (*School leavers CSE and GCE, 1976, HMSO £4.25*).

Though the rise in the number of exam qualifications has been greatest at the lower levels of attainment (passes at O level at grades D and E and CSE grades 2 to 5), there has been an increase at every level. The graph below shows the output of students with specified qualifications as a percentage of the relevant age group (15, 16, 17 and 18 year olds) from 1965 to 1976. The Department of Education has here adjusted the figures on the percentage of school leavers gaining these qualifications to take account of the mix of age groups.



Diogenes on law

Has the tide of natural justice reached its high-water mark? The increase of control by the courts over the activities of bodies acting in the public sphere—the most notable feature of the jurisprudence of the last two decades—has often been achieved by invoking this ancient concept. A legal obligation to act fairly has been superimposed upon such diverse functions as those of inspectors at and after planning inquiries, of immigration officers and of the disciplinary committees of trades unions and universities. But in a series of recent decisions the courts seem to be showing reluctance to extend their new frontiers.

In the last six months alone, a distinct negative trend has developed. It has been held that boards of prison visitors have no legally enforceable duty to act fairly; that the Department of Trade need offer no opportunity to a company to dissuade it from appointing inspectors to investigate alleged misconduct; that a party's national executive can suspend a local committee without notice. The decision in *McInnes v Onslow-Fane* is thus no eccentric judgement.

Mr. Justice Megarry held, in that case, that the British Boxing Board of Control had no duty to disclose reasons when it refused a manager's licence (which is needed to manage professional boxers).

The decision gets an important precedent. The decision gets an important precedent. As the judge himself observed: "many bodies . . . , though not established or operating under statute, exercised control on a national scale over activities important to many people both as a means of providing a livelihood and for other reasons, either by granting or refusing licences or by accepting or rejecting applications for membership."

Why are the courts beating the retreat? It is too facile to say that they are avoiding a clash between executive and judiciary that seemed imminent—at any rate to some doomsayers—after such cases as *Laker*, *Tameside*, and the television licences affair. What does seem clear is that the courts are recognising that specialist decisions should be left, where possible, to specialist bodies; and that there is a danger that, in imposing procedural due process on every kind of decision, however preliminary and however localised, they would open the floodgates to litigation from, say, prisoners with a grievance, political tacticians, and the like.

"The courts must be slow," said the judge, "to allow any implied obligation to be fair to be used as a means of bringing before the courts for review honest decisions of bodies were far better fitted to judge, . . . even where such bodies were concerned with the livelihoods of those taking part in such activities." It is no doubt proper for the courts to seek to divert a stream of bad cases. The danger is that in adopting a more rigorous attitude towards their powers in this field, they may risk injustice being done in good cases.



Shop window in Bradford: Daniel Meadows

Findings Asians in Bradford

John Cater and
Trevor Jones

Tom Forester's recent article, "Asians in business" (*NEW SOCIETY* 23 February), draws attention to the recent emergence of Asian enterprises in British cities, an important but largely ignored aspect of community relations. While there may be a general awareness of Asian-operated shops and restaurants in cities such as Leicester and Bradford, there is probably little conception of the size, vigour and variety of the Asian sub-economy.

From modest beginnings, in the shape of a handful of general grocers and cafes catering for some of the needs of early immigrants, Asian businesses have demonstrated spectacular growth rates over the past two decades. As the Asian population has increased, so business has proliferated, extending its scope far beyond the original confines and into various specialised activities in retailing, wholesaling and manufacturing.

The initial impression of dynamism is heightened by the realisation that Asian success is being achieved cheek-by-jowl with the failure of others. Accustomed as we are to the doom-laden theme of inner city decline, it is refreshing to learn that fresh opportunities are actually being opened up for Asians whose commercial complexes now represent perhaps the only real growth industry in many inner areas.

From the Asian viewpoint, the success of an Asian-owned business sector is of immense economic and social significance. Its most important contribution has been to provide an alternative route by which Asian workers may by-pass the white-controlled labour market. Where better qualified Asians are prevented by discrimination from realising their job ambitions, the success of Asian enterprise is crucial in providing

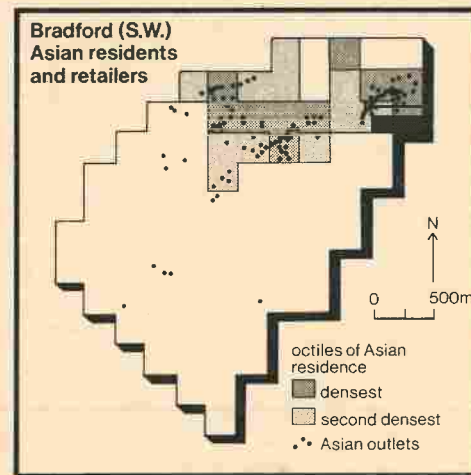
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alternative opportunities for self employment. The Asian response to discrimination has been in effect to create their own system of reward distribution.

This is amply demonstrated by Forester's case studies of businessmen who were virtually forced into self employment as a means of securing what was denied them by the white job market. These findings tend to support the widely-held image of Asian minorities as a self-willed group busily engaged in achieving their own goals on their own terms, irrespective of the dictates of white society.

Much of the literature which exists on Indians and Pakistanis in Britain portrays them as isolated self-segregating groups who voluntarily elect to live and work apart from the indigenous society in order to preserve their cultural exclusiveness. Commercial development is clearly consistent with this aloofness. By providing an easily accessible supply of goods and services which are integral to the culture, it ensures that minority members can maintain traditional customs and behaviour (food taboos, clothing styles and so on) with the minimum of effort and without patronising white premises. In this respect, the ethnic business performs a similar cultural function to mosques and Sikh temples.

Superficially at least the Asian experience in Bradford epitomises their success in adapting to the British commercial environment, with small shops adorned by extravagant hieroglyphics and strung out like beads along the major radial routes into the city centre. In statistical terms Asians now operate almost 650 assorted commercial and



industrial establishments providing employment for perhaps 2,000 to 2,500 workers, self employment for approximately a third of this number, and support for a far larger number of relatives and dependants.

Comparison with earlier estimates shows that this profusion of firms is the outcome of almost twenty years of very rapid growth, with the number of establishments more than trebling in the last decade. Growth has been accompanied by diversification away from the original narrow base and into higher-order retailing (clothing, electrical goods, cinemas, estate and travel agencies), wholesaling, manufacturing and

finance (Bradford now boasts four branches of the Habib Bank and seven branches of other Indian and Pakistani banks). The sheer breadth of this business sector is vital in maintaining cultural and economic self-containment. Culturally it caters to almost every specialised ethnic taste while economically it ensures that much Asian income is spent in Asian rather than white-owned enterprises.

Without wishing to detract from the undoubted enterprise of Bradford's Asian businessmen it must be said that this picture of commercial vigour is in many senses illusory. While some diversification into highly profitable branches of industry has taken place, this has affected only a small minority of entrepreneurs. The large manufacturing firm—with its export orientation, rapid expansion rate and its high profitability—is totally unrepresentative of Asian ventures as a whole. Indeed the typical firm represents the reverse side of the coin in almost every respect, being small rather than large, engaged in retailing rather than manufacturing, and reliant upon a local Asian clientele. The majority of the 560 Asian retail outlets in the city are, in purely commercial terms, under-capitalised and frequently unprofitable, classic cases of the marginal firm.

The very physical fabric of Asian commerce provides a visible testimony to its marginality: shops are almost invariably housed in converted dwellings, cramped premises in Victorian terraces and often in obscure locations. Viewed in this light it is evident that Asian commercial development is largely confined to branches of the economy and sections of the city which are being abandoned by whites as undesirable and unrewarding.

Undoubtedly the principal barrier to business development is an excessive reliance upon the Asian consumer market. With the exception of a few general stores, grocers, off-licences and restaurants, Asian retailers are rarely patronised by whites and apparently make little effort to attract white custom. As a whole they are geared to a predominantly Asian clientele, an ethnic exclusiveness which becomes most marked in the case of firms offering specialised goods or services. Thus Hilal butchers are totally Asian-oriented as are cinemas showing Punjabi films and travel agencies promoting trips to the subcontinent. Strength of orientation towards the ethnic market is shown by the distribution of retailing activity, with Asian-owned shops located almost entirely in areas with a high proportion of Asian residents. Their number and variety tends to rise with the number of Asian residents (see figure).

While ethnic orientation is vital in maintaining cultural integrity, in several ways it acts as an inhibition to commercial development. In the first place it severely limits the number of individuals who may enter and participate in business. Clearly there are limits to the number of retail and service outlets which may be supported by an Asian population of 38,000 (our estimate based on electoral registers and other local