

“Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report” DEFENDING STATUES RATHER THAN BLACK LIVES.

As Britain embarks on its new independent role in the world, the need arises to portray itself as a beacon of light, a model country ready and able to set an example to others, a country celebrating its triumph over its racist past. Instead of being a beacon of light, this report is more akin to a phenakistiscope, a mere illusion of change and movement.

This report has been roundly criticised for gaslighting and whitewashing institutional racism in this country. It is also seeking to rewrite history in order to bolster the new Police Bill, which includes a novel new clause; the crime of grievous bodily harm against statues carrying a maximum sentence of 10 years. Critics have condemned the report for its cherry picking of data, and many of the experts it relies on deny ever having made a knowing contribution to it. It is well known that prior to the Report, its authors were already assailing the notion of institutional racism. Therefore, its task appears to be designed to trim the facts to fit these prejudices. After failing to Track and Trace Covid, the Johnson government has failed once more to track and trace racism. At least this last effort was less expensive though it did involve cronyism. It is an exercise in delusion which is bound to backfire sooner rather than later.

There is a material underpinning to this Report. A minority can only rule a majority by dividing the majority. Traditionally the fault lines it has exploited have been based on nationality, race, religion, gender skill and age. Some of these fault lines have become more difficult to exploit because the ruling class itself has become more diverse as a result of globalisation. It is now populated by more black and brown men and women capitalists and politicians, and with it, the propensity to project these accomplishments throughout society. From a black president to a black vice president to five black and brown members of Johnson’s cabinet including two out of the four top positions - chancellor and home secretary.

This report adapts to these changes. Instead of fragmenting society at a chromosomal level, i.e. race, religion, gender etc, it seeks to fragment society at a gene level, that of the individual. This is logical. Capitalism is a competitive system. Since the inception of neo-liberalism and its assault on the collective organisations of the working class particularly trade unions, it has sought to focus on the individual rather than society. Hence the escalation of testing at school to atomise pupils, hence recurring individual workplace evaluations to atomise the workforce, hence performance related pay to turn worker against worker. Thatcher’s mortal words resonate throughout this report. “There is no such thing as society, only individuals and families.”

What this report concludes is that failure is primarily due to the individual, or failing that, the lack of family support, but god-forbid, not society. And if society is not to blame then how can there be institutional impediments. It declares the only impediment to your economic and social advancement is you, yes you. The kernel of truth on which this is based turns out to be an obscenity. Yes, it is true that in a competitive society, any individual able and willing to outcompete his or her fellow improves their chance of advancing, but always at the expense of the other. If competition is compared to quicksand, then it is true that by standing on the shoulders of others you can climb out of the pit, but at the cost of pushing your fellow deeper into the quicksand. Yes, like the lottery, there are winners but there are also losers, and the

losers always outweigh the winners. In the case of the lottery there have been 17 million losers for every one of the 5,700 millionaire winners since 1994.

Funny this, many of the remedies outlined are institutional.

At least half of the 24 recommendations rely on institutions for their fulfilment. This includes the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, the Care Quality Commission, the Police (6 recommendations), the NHS (3, including setting up an Office for Health Disparities), the setting up of a government funded enterprise programme to groom budding entrepreneurs from low-income groups, calling upon the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to reduce wage disparities, and various add-ons to the Education System (3 recommendations) which will benefit academies more than pupils, and funnily enough, it includes one recommendation which seeks to overcome the fragmentation of the education system which academisation has brought about (recommendation six).

Recommendation 8 takes the cake. It is worth quoting in full. *“The Commission calls on organisations to now move away from funding unconscious bias training. The existing training should be replaced with new interventions that when implemented, can be measured or evaluated for their efficacy, such as: • the use of sponsorship to ensure wider exposure of ethnic minority individuals to their peers, managers and other decision makers • training and routine skills support for all employees in their professional and personal lives (for example on collaboration, confidence, communication, and presentation skills), which could disproportionately benefit more disadvantaged groups B) The Commission also calls on the government to work with a panel of academics and practitioners to develop resources and evidence-based approaches of what does work to advance fairness in the workplace. The landscape of diversity training is highly mixed, and the government can play a role in guiding organisations to high quality materials and resources.”* So it is up to sponsors, academics and practitioners to bring fairness to the workplace. This is reminiscent of the debates the USSR during the 1960s. Not a single word about the one agency which brings fairness to the workplace, trade unions. No recommendations anywhere for empowering and funding grassroots organisations. All that the commission has hereby revealed, is its conscious bias against trade unionism and activism, or what is the same thing, bottom up collective responses.

The recommendations do rely heavily on the family. The commission attributes the disparity in social advancement amongst ethnic groups to differential familial pressures to succeed. It does give the game away when it reveals the most paralysed group to be white boys. Surely if this is the case, the problem is not the family, but the family drowning in poverty. But all it offers in this regard is mentoring and the call for yet another enquiry into the causes debilitating families. Another enquiry, this is a shabby device to delay what needs to be done now, namely reforming the benefit system, refunding local councils, building social housing and inhibiting precarious work.

In sum, it is a steroidal Hodge Bodge of recommendations seeking to expand the roles of existing institutions, setting up new institutions, increasing transparency and dispersing information. It is a technocratic solution to a political and economic crisis. And like all technocratic solutions all it will do is to streamline failure.

Its claimed successes are dubious.

“Until COVID-19 struck, the vast majority of people aged under 25 from all ethnic backgrounds were in permanent employment, although those from minority groups were more likely to be unemployed and on

zero-hours contracts. Additionally, it's clear that job opportunities and labour market conditions vary based on where you are in the UK." (page 28 of the report). Thus the Report celebrates the farcical data provided by the Office For Notional Statistics (ONS) that the UK enjoyed record low unemployment rates prior to the epidemic, even for the youth.

If we look at the group most likely to be antagonised by this report, the youth, this conclusion is inaccurate. Statista reports that in 2020 zero-hour contracts for workers aged 16 – 24 rose by 156,000 to 1.052 million representing 10% of jobs for those workers. We also note that the number of annual zero-hour contracts exceeds the number of workers on them at any point as workers move into and out of these contracts. Add that to an unemployment rate of 15% and we find that at least one in four young workers are either unemployed or in precarious work. For young black workers that rises to nearly one in three.

Graph 1.



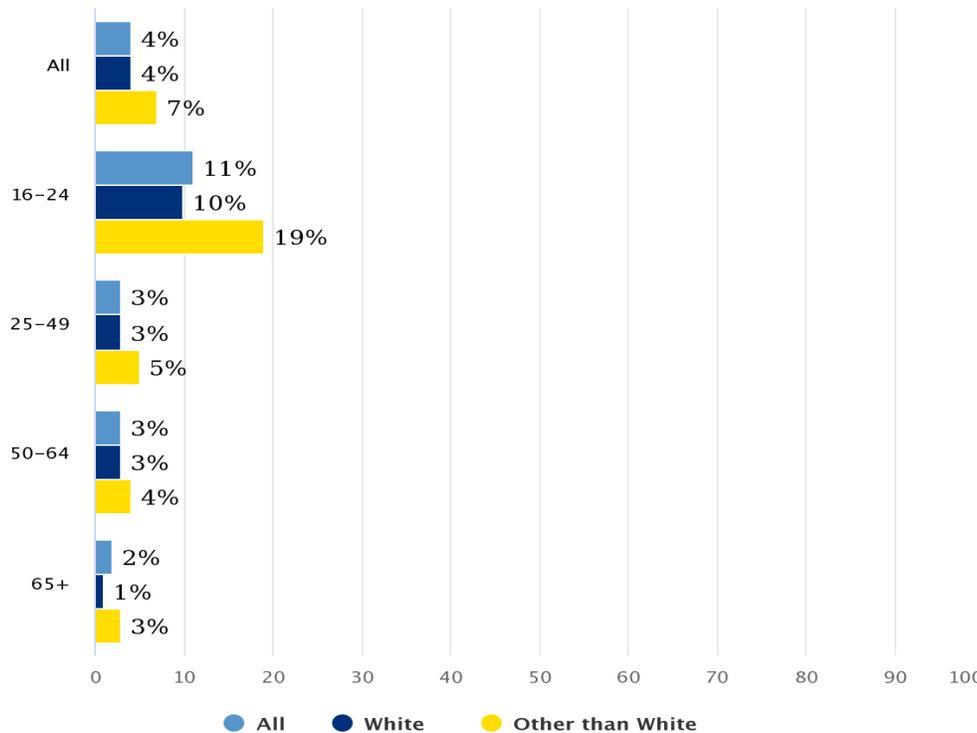
Source:

(Source: ONS)

We also note that unemployment levels are back to the levels of the 1990s having fallen for a brief period leading up to 2008.

Graph 2.

Title: Percentage of the economically active population who were unemployed, by ethnicity and age (White and Other than White). Location: England, Wales and Scotland. Time period: 2019. Source: Annual Population Survey | Ethnicity Facts and Figures GOV.UK



<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment/latest#:~:text=Percentage%20of%20the%20economically%20active%20population%20who%20were,%20%207%20%208%20more%20rows%20>

The same applies to the convergence in pay between ethnic groups. “The hourly median pay gap between all minorities and the White British ethnic group has shrunk to 2.3%, its smallest level since 2012 when it was 5.1%” (page 110). However, this welcome convergence has to be set against the reality of a median wage in April 2020 amounting to £586 pw, which itself has shrunk by 4.9% since 2008. Thus black and brown workers on average are at least 6% worse off and white workers at least 4%.

The likely reason for this convergence is not because employers are becoming colour blind or because there are more black and brown workers in senior posts and professions, but because of the steady rise in the misnamed National Living Wage (NLW). It currently stands at 60% of the median wage.

The current estimate of the number of workers on the NLW is below 10%. But a government report claims that the maximum figure could be as high as 18% which coincides with many workers’ experiences. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/852505/The_impact_of_minimum_wage_upratings_on_wage_growth_and_the_wage_distribution.pdf

Furthermore, the minimum wage not only affects workers directly but indirectly. The low pay commission remarking on 2018 found an additional 20% of pay was affected by the rise in the minimum wage. “The findings suggest that although only around 7 per cent of the workforce are paid the NLW, in the period to

2018 workers in the bottom 30 per cent of the pay distribution benefited directly or indirectly from it.” [The National Living Wage, inequality and job progression: two research projects - Low Pay Commission \(blog.gov.uk\)](#) Thus the NLW affects more than half the workers paid below the median wage. Finally one of the best reports on pay gaps, this time published by the Bank of England, found that the bulk of the shrinkage in ethnic pay gaps was due to the rise in the pay of ethnic women. They were the ones suffering the lowest pay therefore were the most likely to benefit from the uplift from the NLW. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/working-paper/2020/understanding-pay-gaps.pdf>

We should also note that the total social wage not only includes pay packets, but benefits and local government services. These have been cut by a further 2% of GDP since 2010 in order to balance the books and pay for tax give-aways for the rich and their corporations. Unison estimates that this has led to a loss of half-a-million local council jobs since 2010, jobs that were desperately needed to support ethnic communities and provide the services that contribute to their standards of living.

Finally on the question of unions and wage disparities. Despite the rise in the NLW, wages have not caught up with 2008 and following the pandemic are likely to fall even further behind. The main reason for this is undoubtedly the assault on trade unionism. Even the Bank of England in the form of its Chief Economist, Andy Haldane, is forced to acknowledge this: *“trade union membership has been associated with higher pay for workers of between 10 and 15 per cent and that the decline of unionisation is therefore likely to have exerted downward pressure on pay.”* *“Using the long-run estimates that will have lowered wage growth by around 0.75 percentage points per year over the past 30 years, a significant effect,”* quoted in the Independent <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/trade-union-pay-bank-england-andy-haldane-chief-economist-a8577696.html> Thus instead of falling 4.9% since 2008 the median wage would have risen by 4.9% (compounding a rise 0.75% over 12 years).

So not only are unions responsible for an overall rise in wages, but they are also responsible for reducing wage inequality. *“Unions increase wages for the poorest 35%, while decreasing them for the top 20%, a direct reduction in inequality.”* <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/blog/unity-strength-how-trade-unions-reduce-inequality> But this is a government, which together with Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition, continues to operate and/or refuses to repeal Thatcher’s battery of anti-union laws.

The MLW was in many ways a pragmatic response to low pay draining government coffers via tax credits caused by the absence of strong trade unions which would have prevented low pay in the first place. What the Report never mentions out of fear, are recommendations based on collective actions to remedy the ills of society. Instead it is a populist document which glosses over reality and applies recommendations which fortify individual solutions. To stretch a quote, these ingredients are not “oven ready”.

Conclusion.

British society is still haunted by 2008 with standards of living down an average of 6%. Looking forward, the projection is for a further fall of 7% in eventual standards of living due to the legacy of Brexit and the Pandemic. This economic erosion will make society socially unstable.

The pandemic exposed the inequalities and susceptibilities within British society. This wasteful and inept government has had one success, it signed an exclusive arrangement to acquire the Oxford vaccine which is not without its problems. Other than that, it has lost more of its citizens to this disease than any other major European country and it is on course to have piled up the most government debt. Looking into this

uncomfortable future, the state is preparing for class war through strengthening its police force and tightening up on the right to protest.

Johnson has promised to level up and build back better. The government has claimed that the age of austerity is over, but the opposite is the case. The data for this can be found in a previous posting on the UK economy <https://theplanningmotivedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2021/03/brexit-or-wrexit.pdf> This report form part of this momentary political delusion.

The truth is that the economic stresses to come will pressurise the working class and probe its weaknesses, in particular the divisions of race and nationalism. This Report has revealed the large group of white workers and youth who now find themselves at the bottom of the pile. We must ensure their resentment is not exploited by the racists.

We need to ensure that anger is directed upwards and aimed at those who are the source of all the problems facing workers - the bankers, the corporations and their capitalist owners. This requires class politics. Only then can we inhibit the sideways anger directed by worker against worker - black against white, British against foreign, male against female. No doubt as conditions deteriorate groups of capitalists and associated opportunists will see the merit in supporting right-wing groups and Parties focused on directing anger sideways in order to deflect anger away from them.

Racism is a live issue. Politics is about solutions. This means we subsume the fight against racism into the fight to abolish the system which gives rise to racism; the system based on capitalist private property which by disempowering workers and stripping them of control, forces them to compete for jobs, homes and services creating the potential of turning worker against worker. We disown the politics of black nationalism, this petty bourgeois strand of politics based on personal solutions which seek merely to reform capitalism. We stand together will all those fighting racism, seeking at every turn to draw in white workers. We stand under the banner of inclusivity, freedom for all, freedom from exploitation and oppression. An attack on one is an attack on us all.

In contrast to the Report we declare Black Lives Matter to All Workers. In contrast to the Report which calls for top-down individual solutions we stand for bottom-up collective solutions. We stand for an inclusive class that pursues its own exclusive interest, the ending of capitalist private property.

Brian Green, 3rd April 2021.