

BOOK REVIEWS

Britain's Black Population by the Runnymede Trust and the Radical Statistics Race Group (Heinemann 1980) 160pp., £4.95.

This book is a welcome addition to those already written on 'ethnic' minorities. However, this book is unique in that it deals only with the black population. In Britain the term 'ethnic minority' is defined very vaguely to include white immigrants such as Scots, Welsh, Greeks and Italians along with blacks. This tends to mask real problems facing blacks and most of the British whites are not aware of the problems facing blacks settled or born in this country. It is fair to say prejudice does exist against white immigrants, whereas blacks are discriminated simply because of their colour. It is very true in the case of West Indians living in Britain. West Indians adopt the same way of life as any white British, eat the same food as any white British and adopted the same religion as any white British. Still they are discriminated against in employment, education and housing because of their colour. In this context there is a greater need to discuss the problems facing blacks in Britain. The aim of the book is very well defined. The term black used in this book refers to the population of New Commonwealth and Pakistan origin. Obviously the term does not imply a cultural homogeneity among the various groups (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladesh, West Indians, Africans and East African Asians) to which it refers.

The book is conveniently divided into various chapters. Chapter one provides a statistical picture of Britain's black population from 1951 to 1978. By means of charts and graphs, it looks at Britain's black population in detail giving information about such characteristics as age, sex and marital status. It gives the break down figures of number of coloured immigrants settled in Britain from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and West Indies. It also gives the spatial distribution of coloured immigrants settled in England and Wales. Chapter two deals with government legislation to control the immigration of blacks to Britain. It clearly points out where as Irish, EEC nationals and old Commonwealth citizens including South African whites are free to enter Britain, the legislation enacted in the House of Commons in 1962, 1968 and 1971 was specially aimed at blacks to restrict their entry to Britain. It also includes the Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1968 and

1976. These acts were meant to show to blacks that everyone in Britain was to be treated on the same basis of individual merit, regardless of colour or race.

Chapter three discusses in detail the employment situation of the coloured population in Britain. According to the last census in 1971, a total of 1.5 million of the work force were born outside the U.K. or had both parents born outside the U.K. Approximately half a million of these were black. Most of the early immigrants came to U.K. for economic reasons: it suited them and it suited Britain. They were recruited by organisations like London Transport to work as drivers and conductors in buses and in tubes. They were specifically brought to U.K. to carry out skilled or unskilled jobs. These urban jobs were vacant since the white workers were not interested in carrying out dirty jobs. Even 30 years after their arrival in Britain, the employment pattern of black workers has not yet changed. The chapter clearly brings out with the help of statistical data, the problems that black workers have to face in employment. For example, a large proportion of black workers are employed in shift work or in unskilled, low paid jobs. Unfortunately this book fails to reveal the statistics of coloured workers doing white collar jobs. While it is a recognised fact that blacks are under represented in middle class professions such as teaching, civil service, legal and management services, there is no statistical data available to prove this point. It is very easy to count the number of black academics employed in any higher educational institutions in Britain. Even a so called 'radical institution' like the Open University is not an exception to this generalisation. It is in the white collar jobs that blacks find most discrimination. In order to influence political parties in Britain, it is essential for the blacks to enter middle class white collar professions. It is the middle classes who decide the outcome of general elections. The chapter includes a list of possible factors that have been suggested for the increase in the unemployment amongst black people. However, it fails to mention 'institutional racism', which is the root cause of unemployment amongst second generation blacks. According to the Rampton Committee report, second generation Asian children do very well in schools and universities but since they are discriminated against in employment because of their colour, most of them are unemployed.

Chapter four looks at the quality of accommodation in which Britain's black population live and also their access to council housing and other forms of tenancy. It is clear that blacks tend to live in lower standard housing than the rest of the population. The basic truth is that black people tend to be in the lowest socioeconomic groups (Group 5), which are the least paid and hence forced to live in poor quality housing. It discusses in detail how black people are discriminated against in Greater London Council housing. The black tenants of the GLC were more likely to be accommodated in pre-war flats in central London, whereas white tenants were more likely to be in the newer cottage estates. White people are not often offered accommodation on estates which predominately house black people. The point to be born in mind is that people who operate this system are all whites and institutional racism operates in such a way that it is difficult to prove whether black people are discriminated in the allocation of council houses. The same is the case in private housing also. Estate agents keep two different type of registers one for black customers and another for whites. It is not strictly true to say that the economic position of Britain's black population is reflected in the location of their housing. It is very difficult for a black person to buy a house in a purely residential area occupied by whites, even if he is very rich. White people even today think that the property value of their houses will go down if blacks move into their area. In most cases black immigrants are offered houses which are of poorer quality and in less desirable areas. In general, standards of housing provides an example of how institutional procedures and traditional methods of organisation often have the effect of discriminating against black people.

Chapter five deals with problems facing coloured people in the field of education. The chapter brings out the truth that the education system in terms of both of its staff and of its books, has tended to reflect the racial ideology within British society, which is a product of Britain's colonial and imperialist past. These factors have played an important role in creating educational disadvantage amongst black children. In 1973 the DES discontinued the collection of data regarding the number of black children attending schools or higher educational institutions and their educational achievements.

Hence, there is a lack of information regarding the number of black children obtaining 'O' levels or 'A' levels every year in relation to the number of black children coming out of schools. It appears the percentage is very small and most of them end up doing CSE or nothing. Similarly no statistics have been kept to find out the exact number of black teachers employed in schools. However, it is true to say that black children are usually taught about the history and culture of a white society by white teachers, while the society and culture from which the black children and their parents originate receives no attention. Textbooks written in arts, humanities and social studies usually epitomize the great virtues of the British colonial rule in Asia and Africa. The available evidence suggests only a very small number of black teachers are employed in schools. In a study conducted by the society for Immigrant teachers in the mid 1970s, the society reported evidence of discrimination against black teachers. This situation prevails even today. The Radical Statistics Race Group should try to collect information regarding the number of black children attending schools and their educational achievements in terms of the number of 'O' levels or 'A' levels or degrees and also the number of black teachers employed in schools.

Chapter six deals with the question of whether black people in Britain have any 'special needs' with respect to the provision and operation of the health and social services. There is no systematic or detailed evidence available about the health of black people in Britain. The book brings out the fact that it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions about different patterns of illness among black people in comparison with the white population. There is no evidence to show that blacks from Indian sub-continent suffer from chronic diseases. Some Asian women suffer from certain minor ailments such as Anaemia, Rickets and Osteomalacia. These ailments do not drain the resources of the National Health Service, as claimed by some right-wing groups in Britain. The Radical Statistics Race Group should try to collect more information on this subject in order to clear the myth widespread among the white population that blacks bring diseases that are common in their country to Britain.

Finally, chapter seven discusses the need for keeping statistical records. Since white racism is institutionalised in British society, there is a greater need to monitor the progress of black people in the field of education, housing and employment. The Rampton Committee

report has stressed the need to maintain statistics of the numbers of coloured children attending schools and their achievements in schools. The Appendix contains a glossary, statistical sources, general bibliography and also lists publications from the Runnymede Trust and Commission for Racial Equality.

The book is very well written and precise in discussing the basic problems facing blacks in Britain. The book contains less than 150 pages and is very reasonably priced. This book should not be considered simply as one more addition to adorn the book shelves of white Britains who are concerned with race relations. This book is a must for all sections of the white population especially educationists, trade unionists and government officials. The Radical Statistics Race Group should explore the possibility of publishing the chapters on employment, housing and education as booklets. These booklets should be sent to all white people who are directly dealing with black people, such as teachers, trade union officials and housing officers. Of course the information has to be updated based on 1981 statistics. There is no point in blaming black youths for recent riots in big cities. The white population ought to be informed about the problems facing blacks in Britain. The Radical Statistics Race Group has done a wonderful job in bringing out this book and Heineman educational books are to be congratulated for publishing this book.

Dr. A. Vaidyanathan, The Open University.

I & C 8 Power and desire: diagrams of the social (Spring 1981, 130 pp., £1.95).

The title of this issue of I & C says much: that there's something interesting - indeed, exciting - going on here, and with a bit of application even the lay reader (that is, roughly, anyone who isn't French or a member of the I & C editorial collective) can begin to get a grasp of what it is that is going on.

This is the third issue since I & C stopped calling itself Ideology and Consciousness, and the first to contain an article of direct and obvious relevance to radical statisticians, Ian Hacking's How should we do the history of statistics? (Indirectly and less obviously, I & C has always probed issues central to Rad Stats too: the understanding of Power and ideological practices.) Hacking's paper is a broad and rapid

survey of the grounds for perceiving statistics as an ideological practice that both helped create what we see as social facts and participates in the technology of power in a modern state.

Little of this is unfamiliar, except to non-radical statisticians, but in spelling it out Hacking shows that it is by the end of the last century that the problems we still confront were firmly structured:

Our governments classify us, lodge us, tax us according to the systems that they [Farr and Quetelet] began, and by law we shall die of the causes enumerated in Farr's nosology. ...
The bureaucracy of statistics imposes not just by creating administrative rulings but by determining classifications within which people must think of themselves and of their actions that are open to them.

It is well to be reminded that "the quantitative revolution" (whatever that may be) discussed by John Bibby in RS21 is deeply rooted in the nineteenth century - the important bit of it was over by 1900; and taking decisions on difficult modern debates (such as our attitude to the Census) is even harder without the level of understanding promoted by I & C.

Hacking's paper is not in the usual I & C house style. There are but a couple of token genuflections towards Michel Foucault.

John Fauvel, The Open University.

TELEGRAPHIC REVIEWS

John Gall, System-antics: Fontana, 1979

Subtitled "How systems work and especially how they fail", this paperback provides a light hearted yet critical viewpoint on systems theory. Includes several memorable Parkinsonianisms. Try this one for size: "When a fail-safe system fails, it fails by failing to fail-safe".

A PLEA, AND AN APOLOGY!

A plea. More reviews, please! (Telegraphic or epistolic.) Send them, please, to John Bibby, The Open University, Milton Keynes.