

OTHER NATIONS

Britain's Progressive Dilemma

"Too Diverse?" by David Goodhart, in *Prospect* (Feb. 2004), 2 Bloomsbury Pl., London WC1A 2QA, England.

After three centuries of striving to forge a common identity among the various groups in the United Kingdom, the British in the past half-century have become more diverse, not only ethnically but in their values and lifestyles. For progressives especially, that poses a dilemma: Multicultural diversity can reach a point where it endangers the communal solidarity that sustains the welfare state, the foundation of the progressive vision.

Goodhart, the editor of *Prospect*, sees this "progressive dilemma" lurking beneath many of Britain's current debates, from tax and redistribution policies to European Union integration. Among the country's progressive intellectuals and politicians, the underlying dilemma itself is increasingly the subject of debate.

Two British academics, Bhikhu Parekh and Ali Rattansi, have argued that ethnic diversity is no hindrance to social solidarity, noting that the expansion of the British welfare state in the late 1940s occurred even as the first big wave of nonwhite immigration from the West Indies and Asia began. Yes,

says Goodhart, but the welfare state was formed after a century of experience and agitation, and the immigrants were few at first.

"Scandinavian countries with the biggest welfare states have been the most socially and ethnically homogeneous states in the West," Goodhart points out. "By the same token the welfare state has always been weaker in the individualistic, ethnically divided U.S." Today, about nine percent of British residents belong to ethnic minority groups. As that percentage approaches America's 30 percent (which it already has, more or less, in London), there is a probable "tipping point" at which Britain would become "a wholly different U.S.-style society—with sharp ethnic divisions, a weak welfare state, and low political participation." So "it is important to reassure the majority that the system of entering the country and becoming a citizen is under control."

Replacing ethnic kinship with the more abstract concept of citizenship as the basis of national identity goes some way toward reconciling solidarity and diversity, but citizenship still requires common commit-



Sikhs gather outside 10 Downing Street in 2002 demanding recognition as a separate ethnic group.

ments, Goodhart says. Immigrants can hold on to “some core aspects of their own culture,” but as in the American melting pot, being a good citizen means “learning the language, getting a job and paying taxes, and abiding by the laws and norms of the host society.” Welfare benefits should be denied to

“people who consistently break the rules of civilized behavior.”

When diversity and solidarity come into conflict, Goodhart concludes, public policy should favor solidarity. Diversity is now so strongly reinforced by social and economic forces that it can take care of itself.

EXCERPT

The Arabs of Israel

Israel's decision to keep out terrorists by constructing a security fence separating itself from three million West Bank Palestinian Arabs will also work to keep in 1.2 million Arab citizens of Israel and tie their fate more closely to that of the Jewish state. Less foreseeable are the precise consequences for the Arab minority, now almost 20 percent of the population and growing, and for Israel's character as a state that is both Jewish and democratic.

Is there in the end a fatal contradiction between Israel's Jewish character and its democratic form of government? Only if you accept the idea—rooted in Rousseau, promulgated for more than a century by Marxists, and embraced by left-leaning intellectuals throughout the Western world—that the aim of democracy is to reflect in its institutional forms peoples' highest hopes, overcome individual alienation, and make all its citizens whole in heart and soul. But there is a more reasonable understanding of liberal democracy, one more in keeping with its first principles and classical formulations and less bound up with utopian hopes and communist nightmares.

In this understanding, majorities are given wide latitude to legislate, circumscribed principally by energetic protection of the individual rights that belong to all citizens. In this understanding, states do not have an obligation to affirm equally the grandest aspirations of all citizens, but they do have an obligation to ensure that all are equal before the law and that none fall below minimum or basic requirements for education, health, and material well-being. And in this understanding, there is no reason in principle why a Jewish state—one which is open to Jews throughout the world, and gives expression in its public culture to Jewish history, Jewish hopes, and Jewish ideals—cannot protect the political rights and civil liberties, including religious freedom, of all its citizens, provide them with equal opportunities, and require that they take their fair share of responsibility for maintaining the state.

—Peter Berkowitz, a law professor at George Mason University,
in *The Weekly Standard* (April 12–19, 2004)

Lifeline to Mexico

“Scoring Free Trade: A Critique of the Critics” by Sidney Weintraub, in *Current History*
(Feb. 2004), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

In the decade since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took effect, Mexico has endured serious economic woes: weak economic growth, insufficient new jobs, and continuing widespread poverty. Things

would have been a lot worse without NAFTA, argues Weintraub, director of the Americas program at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The trade agreement with the United States