

# BROWN'S NOT GOOD FOR THE BMEs

OVER THE past few weeks, I've found The Voice's surveys of Black Britons to be really interesting. Sometimes, politicians can fall out of touch with those they represent, so I've tried to pay careful attention to what people actually think.

The truth, as is often the case, is perhaps not what we would all hope it might be. It was very distressing to read that 94 per cent of black people believe that racism is alive and well in the UK. My fear is that they may be right.

When members of minority communities (of any kind) feel that they are discriminated against at work, in social situations and by the government itself, we have all failed in our responsibility to create a fair, just and open society.

At heart though, I don't believe that the problem is irreversible. Far from it. I'm optimistic about the future of this country. I believe that we are comfortable with multiple identities and that, with time, we will learn to move beyond the fear and ignorance which drive racism.

There may be widespread racism across society but, as Britain's political leaders, politicians are in a position to make things either better or worse depending upon our actions. If we lead by good example and good public policy, society can be changed for the better.

Unfortunately, even politicians as well respected in the black community as Tony Blair, sometimes add to the problem. In May, the departing Prime Minister claimed that BME communities as a whole



## OPINION

Francis Maude  
Chairman of the Conservative Party

were responsible for the recent spate of gun and knife crime which has affected young black men and women.

In March, the incoming Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, suggested that new migrants be forced into undertake compulsory community service - which was against the advice of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.

Irresponsible and illogical actions like that damage Britain's social fabric. They create suspicion and divide communities. What is needed instead is a calm, measured and fair approach to

issues such as crime, immigration and integration.

In the first survey, a majority (51 per cent) of black voters said they currently plan on voting for the Labour Party. But 68 per cent also believe that their vote is taken for granted. And it's very interesting that the Labour Party have tried so hard to improve diversity in their own ranks, but that it has made so little difference.

In a recent all-female shortlist, they rejected all three BME candidates to stand for the parliamentary election. Claudia Webbe, one of the rejected candidates and vice chair of the Operation Trident Advisory Committee, said that "it's a tough call to penetrate the

machinery of the Labour Party and trade unions." Perhaps it's because the Conservative Party has no overgrown "machinery" or trade unions that we've been able to start selecting diverse candidates. We've selected eight so far, in winnable seats, and I hope that more will follow in the coming months. In last week's survey seven in 10 black Britons said they believe that racism in Britain has remained the same or increased during the past 10 years.

It's very disappointing that in that time the Labour government has talked so much and delivered so little. After 10 years of broken promises and failed initiatives, it seems that Gordon Brown is incapable of influencing the government in the interests of the BME community. His record as

Chancellor, a key adviser to Tony Blair, suggests that he will be no better for BMEs now that he is Prime Minister.

In my last article, I said that the Conservative Party would never take the votes or views of the black community for granted. Not just because we can't afford to, but because we understand how important they are to Britain's social cohesion and what David Cameron calls our general well-being. This isn't about special treatment, social engineering or ethnic quotas. It's about making sure that we do what's right for all of our communities and ensure that everyone's voice is heard. That means making certain that we find ways to improve race relations and break down social barriers. That is exactly what David Cameron and I aim to do.

## 'Britishness' or the Daz whiteness test?

By Tess Finch-Lees

[yourviews@gvmedia.co.uk](mailto:yourviews@gvmedia.co.uk)

HARDLY A week goes by without some Labour MP patronising us with that old chestnut 'Britishness'. What does that mean? I'm Irish. I look and sound the part but that's the extent of my 'Irishness'. I'm not Catholic, I'm several shamrocks short of believing in leprechauns and get drunk on the mere whiff of mouthwash fumes. Who I am is shaped by opening myself up to other cultures and the diversity of people I surround myself with, such as my friend Shama, a Darfuri Muslim refugee. Despite having three children to support on a minuscule budget, I was amazed to see her politely decline a travel card from a stranger at the tube station last week. She did so because it 'wasn't right', gently pointing out the rules on the back.

What unites me with my multicultural friends is not some nebulous concept based on crass stereotypical national identities, but our beliefs in things like integrity, human rights, equality

and democracy. These are not defined by where we are born. To suggest that this level of individual complexity can be put in a box labelled 'Britishness' is facile and frankly, condescending.

Among the gauche attempts at a definition, Gordon Brown has proffered 'fair play' as something uniquely British. Absolutely, if you are one of the privileged few who received an Oxbridge education. Young men at Oxford are educated to run the country (politics, the judiciary, the media, business) and with few exceptions, they do. The great British establishment is dominated and therefore defined by white males for whom power and privilege are considered a divine entitlement. Old boys stick together and a tap on the shoulder is the preferred recruitment strategy. What use is 'fair play' when this perverse form of positive discrimination places the game itself firmly out of bounds for many?

Democracy, we're told, is another hallmark of our Britishness. Yet, while our erstwhile Prime Minister, aptly renamed Tony Blair by The Economist, preaches democracy, he practises dictatorship. Misleading Parliament over Iraq, cover-

ing-up extraordinary rendition, manhandling a dissenting pensioner at the party conference, the Saudi arms debacle, backtracking on the referendum, cash for honours. These are all examples of Blair's 'democracy'. Thanks to 10 years of Blair spin there is less trust in politicians now than ever before, with fewer people engaging in our so called democratic process as a result.

I have lived here for over 15 years and so far have not received an invitation to sit a citizenship test. Just as well, because I'd fail miserably. I would rail against having a distorted account of history shoved down my throat. One that sanitises the role of the British Empire in exploiting the countries we immigrants hail from. The wish to reflect on (not negate) Britain's role in the slave trade and the Irish famine would no doubt be interpreted as dissent, requiring either immediate expulsion or being placed on a Home Office register of 'trouble makers'. But I'm not expecting to sit my test any time soon.

Nor I suspect will my Aussie or US counterparts, all of whom automatically pass the Daz whiteness test.

It's my black and minority ethnic (BME) friends that are yet again being singled out and pressured to prove themselves. It is not multiculturalism that threatens to undermine a sense of civic order, but the abject hypocrisy of a pale, male and stale government that takes an animal farm approach to leadership, i.e. we're all equal but some of us are more equal than others.

Under Labour, the gap

between rich and poor has widened and inequality has soared. Despite being top of her class, Shama's daughter was not offered a place at an independent school. When I asked why, a woman with a 'plummy voice' retorted, "The type of girls we take go on to Oxbridge". Clearly being black and going to Oxbridge is inconceivable. But we had no redress with the central London school, despite the fact that only two of their

pupils are black. Independent schools are exempt from the Race Relations Act. This means they're largely unaccountable for discrimination against BMEs. Is that 'fair play'? How do you explain to a broken-hearted 10-year-old, who believes she can conquer the world, that different rules apply to her and that however hard she works, short of bleaching her skin, she'll never be quite 'British' enough?

Elyon's Heart Foundation & Children's Heart Federation Presents...

In 2006 over 600 people enjoyed this event. This year is going to be even BIGGER and BETTER!

SHOW STARTS AT 12!

# Heart 2 Heart

Bring your blankets and come early for a good spot. Early prize give away's and celebrity performances. Don't miss out on the fun!

## In the Park

SATURDAY 14TH JULY 2007 Midday - 7pm

@ ENFIELD TOWN PARK - Cecil Road, Enfield EN2 6LE

Under 5's FREE // 5 to 15yrs £3 // Concession £2.50 // Adults £5