

Impact of migrants on british economy

Economics



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Introduction

Historically Britain has been economically dependent on migrants to maintain itself as a leading world economy. Labour shortages in Britain were often a problem for capitalists, hence migration was encouraged. However from the onset migrants who tried to improve their economic and employment status, often suffered prejudice and were deemed biologically inferior. Classic examples were Irish migrants who came to Britain to escape political unrest, this marked the start of Irishimmigration, “ which was connected to economic change, urbanisation and class formation in British society” (Solomos 2003: 37). According to Reeves, 1983, Rich, 1986 and Brody, 1998, “ Images of the racial or cultural inferiority of the Irish were based not only on particular ideological constructions of the Irish but also on the definition of Englishness or Anglo-Saxonculturein terms of particular racial and cultural attributes” (cited in Solomus, 2003: 39). Likewise these ideological constructions were also imposed on Black communities; both racial prejudice anddiscriminationwere common. Britain had colonised the world in particular Africa in order to maintain economic power, and in the process had exploited its people in the slave trade. White’s behaviour towards blacks was cruel and brutal, sheer physical force was used to control them, Black people were regarded as subhuman. In order to justify the treatment of these newly colonised groups of people, supposed scientific racial theories were developed by scientists such as De Gobineau (1816-1882). De Gobineau drew upon Charles Darwin’s work (1809-1882) who proposed a theory of evolution, occurring by the process of natural selection. Darwin theorised that, “ The animals (or plants) best suited to

their environment are more likely to survive and reproduce, passing on the characteristics which helped them survive to their offspring” (see: [www.](#)). However Darwin’s theory was never intended to influence theories of ‘ race’, nonetheless De Gobineau took it upon himself to adapt it to the human race. He argued that, “ Humans are separated into noticeable ‘ races’ which are innately unequal” (). In addition to this, “ Gobineau noted the superiority of the white race above others who had no chance to improve themselves through social organisation because they were somehow ‘ programmed’ to be ‘ inferior” (). He concluded that there were three different races “ white (Caucasian), black (Negroid) and yellow (mongoloid). But most significantly he claimed that, “ the white race was superior to the black race.” (Giddens, 2006: 485). The inferior characteristics that Europeans bestowed upon Africans; enabled whites to maintain power over the black race.

However by the late 1800’s new economic changes were occurring, the slave trade was finally abolished owing to public outcry. Britain’s economy of agriculture was superseded by an industrial economy, funded by the profits of the slave trade. This era described as the ‘ Industrial Revolution’ was one of invention, enabling items to be produced on a larger scale. Whilst Industrialists profited from this new economy, socioeconomic factors of the new working class had become a cause for concern. Many workers had moved from the peripheries in search of work, they expected to find a better quality of life. However on their arrival they found overcrowded living conditions, long work hours and poverty, the distinction between rich and poor was apparent. Towns such as Liverpool which had been significant in the slave trade had now been outmoded by the ‘ Industrial Revolution’.

Whilst manufacturing had a positive effect on Britain's economy, Liverpool's geographical position was no longer appropriate. Social problems were more severe in Liverpool owing to a larger population, enhanced by migrants and their descendants. It was proposed that growing migrant communities were the cause of social problems, although there was no evidence to suggest this. Harris argues that, " Social decay was supposed to be connected with the presence of a ' Negro' population...and so on who constituted an almost insignificant percentage of the population of the sea-port towns" (Cited in Solomos, 2003: 44).

This was set to change as post war Britain witnessed an increase in Black communities. " In 1945, Britain was recovering from the Second World War and was in need of immense reconstruction" (Lavalette & Pratt, 2006: 91). Reserves of labour power, usually of White European origin were exhausted," They (White Europeans) were given preference over Commonwealth citizens because, among other reasons, there was considerable prejudice against the recruitment of black colonial workers" (Small & Solomos, 1994: 284).

Nonetheless it was general consensus between the main political parties in Britain, that the Ministry of Labour should exploit commonwealth immigrants as labour reserves. " The result was for Britain, a unique scheme, with the British State undertaking to meet all the costs of recruitment, travel and repatriation on behalf of capitalists who were short of workers" (Solomos, 2003: 50). Decolonisation assisted Black colonial immigrants to migrate to Britain, high unemployment and inadequate welfare assistance in their countries of origin, gave them natural aspirations to migrate. Black migrants were able to enter Britain via the ' British Nationality Act of 1948'; allowing

any person who had resided in the British colonies, to live and work in Britain. Furthermore South Asian communities including Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis entered Britain, East Africa had gained its independence and those who held British passports fled to Britain to avoid political unrest. On their arrival in Britain the majority of immigrants shared similar experiences in forms of racist practices. “ Stigmatization, inferiorisation, exclusion and/or discrimination in arena’s such as employment, education, housing, media, the criminal justice system, immigration apparatus, and the health services” (Brah, 1996: 97). These forms of institutional racism would eventually lead to solidarity, between different racial groups in their fight for equality.

In 1958 ‘ race’ riots occurred in Nottingham and Notting hill, Black immigrants were held responsible for riots. Black communities were used as scapegoats by the media for social unrest, “ The media denied that the unrest was not the result of racism and instead attempted to criminalize the unrest, by claiming it was the product of a ‘ black’ criminal underbelly within society” (Solomos, 1988; Gilroy, 1987, cited in Cole). In 1959 the Conservatives were elected into government and sought immigration controls to limit the flow of immigrants entering Britain. In 1962 the Conservative government implemented the ‘ Commonwealth Act’; this was intended to achieve the desired effect of restricting the flow of immigrants. In effect “ this piece of legislation was racist it removed the right of entry into Britain from all British passport holders, who did not have a parent or grandparent born in Britain” (Miles & Phizacklea, 1984: 60). In 1964 Labour won the General Election and had promised to rethink its strategies on

immigration. Consequently in 1965 they implemented the ‘ Race Relations Act’ to appease previous racist legislation, protecting existing immigrants and prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of colour, race and ethnic origin.

Furthermore the policy of ‘ Assimilation’ was introduced by the government to prevent immigrants from feeling excluded. It was the government’s intention to encourage immigrants to, “ abandon their original customs and practices, moulding their behaviour to the values and norms of the majority” (Giddens, 2006: 497). Nonetheless many policies which intended to integrate immigrant communities were essentially undermining. Immigrants would often want to retain their own cultural values; this was perceived as reluctance to integrate into British society. Assimilation was followed by the concept of integration; British society was educated regarding different cultures.

By the late 1960’s, Britain was in social and economic decline “ housing, unemployment and crime was linked by the government to rising immigration” (Solomos, 2003: 500). The number of visible minorities was increasing in Britain; this had not been anticipated by the British government. Black communities were growing as a result of chain migration and often endured low socio-economic status.“ Immigration served to provide a ‘ cheap army of labour’ but access to the welfare services, particularly housing and education, was neither planned for or often denied” (Williams; 1989: 7). Minority groups did not share the same opportunities as white working class, As Pierson (2001) notes, “ the compromise represented a ‘ rapprochement between capital and a white, male, metropolitan and

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organised working class,' which had been secured largely at the expense of other groups of workers" (p: 77).

Moreover in the 1960's, the Black community in Britain became more politically aware; they were motivated by the ongoing civil Rights Movement in America. Britain's Black communities were able to identify with their American counterparts. " Black consciousness was rooted in the idea of there being a corporate black history and identity which is accessible only to individuals by virtue of their experience of being black" (Shukra, 1998: 41). Increased political activity by ethnic minorities was potentially a threat to British society. Problems relating to Britain's new multicultural society had to be addressed and successive governments enacted measures to combat discrimination. There were repeated implementations of the Race Relations Acts and Human Rights Acts, to promote race equality and stem the hostility of the White working class. White working class held immigrants for the failure of the capitalist system, as unemployment and housing shortages rose. Politicians fuelled prejudice and hostility towards migrant populations also, Enoch Powell warned,

Increased immigration was to blame for their wives were unable to obtain hospital beds on childbirth, their children were unable to obtain school places, their homes and neighbour-hoods were changed beyond recognition for the British population (Lavalette & Pratt, 2006: 92).

This statement was hypocritical as the British government had advertised for migrant workers, to satisfy labour shortages in post-war Britain. The 1970's witnessed further economic recession and encouraged Fascist organisations.

“ These right wing organisations adopted a similar style as Enoch Powell by exaggerating a supposed threat to the British way of life posed by “ immigrants with alien cultures” (Brah, 1996: 37).

Racism and racial discrimination have been a feature of British society, however original theories of race were no longer held. theories of race began Early theories placed race as being characterised in relation to the theory of evolution placing importance on appearance. Later, as discussed earlier theories were mainly focused around socio-economic and political context, with the constant notion of ‘ us versus them’ with the addition of fear and pollution of disease, as was stereotyped with the Irish. Popular theories such as Marxism and Weberian sociology may be outdated but they provide accounts on the development of the new theories of race, racism and racial discrimination. Robert Miles (1988), a Marxist, states “ on the one hand the need of the capitalist world economy for the mobility of human being, and on the other, the drawing of territorial boundaries and the construction of citizenship as a legal category which sets boundaries for human mobility” (cited in Solomos and Black, 1996: 9), relates to the potential for global capitalism if migrants are included, but those excluded have problems with citizenship. With reference to race and racial discrimination it can be said that immigrants in Britain faced inequalities that Marx stated in his theory of proletariats being exploited by the bourgeoisie, as the only forms of employment that were available to migrants were unwanted by the dominant white population. Marx described the capitalist society and employment structure, as having no form of social upward/downward mobility.

Conclusion

Weberian theory consists of class, status and power, with more agency and more possibility of change. Contemporary Weberian sociologists such as Rex and Tomlinson cited in Solomos and Black (1996) integrate both status and party in relation to class by describing the underclass were conceptualised in terms of their disadvantages compared to their white peers. “ Instead of identifying with working class culture, community and politics, they formed their own organisations and became effectively a separate underprivileged class.”