Immigrant Integration in the United Kingdom in the 1970-1980 Years: The Governmental Strategies

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Abstract: The article studies the problem of strategies used by the British government in immigrant integration that was conducted by the British government in the second half of 20 century. Another question studied in the article is whether the difference between political lines of two main British political parties existed. Besides, various opinions of some British authors concerning these questions are considered. The analysis of the used data showed that, at first, the British government took immigrants from non-European countries only negatively. But then politicians began to realize that it is impossible to change demographic situation in the UK and to return it to the pre-war level. That’s why they gradually turned to approaches aimed to integration of new immigrants in order to transform them to full citizens of the country. To achieve this goal, they adopted an official code of laws in the spirit of American legislative acts against racial discrimination.

Key words: British political parties • Non-European countries • Immigrant integration

INTRODUCTION

Integration is a many-sided process with various actors. The biggest actors are: 1) public and municipal authorities; political entities, members of which enter these authorities; 2) political organizations not belonging to government bodies; 3) individual actors or organizations not taking part in political process; 4) representatives of immigrant diasporas; organizations uniting both immigrants that were born outside the UK and their descendants that were born outside the country. The state policy was determined by two political parties that are two prior forces in the political process of the United Kingdom-the Labour Party and the Conservative Party [Paul, 189]. If we want to understand the orientation of political lines of both parties, we should analyze the situation before 1971. We consider this year a boundary between two development stages of immigrant policy in Great Britain. The authors studying immigration history in the UK, such as James Walvin [2, 117], David Conway [3, 70], Ian Spencer [4, xiv], note that immigrant flow from African, Asian, Caribbean colonies (known as “The New Commonwealth” after they got independence) began to come to the UK since the second half of 1940s. It became a brand new phenomenon, first of all because of its size. Politicians treated this phenomenon as undesirable and fraught with negative consequences for social climate of the country.

There were different reasons for such influx of immigrants. At first, the majority of immigrants, that came to the UK during the war and stayed after it, were: refugees; soldiers of allied troops (for instance, Polish servicemen with their families that didn’t want to return to socialist Poland) [3, 69]; British soldiers from colonies accommodated in the UK that decided to stay after the war; and also the immigrants from European countries with less developed economy that came to the UK in the very beginning of postwar rehabilitation of the British economy with the purpose of improving their financial position.

The postwar Britain experienced an acute workforce shortage. At the same time, immigrants from colonies unequivocally displayed their desire for moving to the parent state for permanent residence [5, 95]. It seems that the authorities responsible for postwar rehabilitation should have approved the voluntary arrival of the large quantity of people searching for job. At the time, Labourites leaded in governing the state. They extended considerably the government intervention in the economy. This manifested itself, particularly, in state
employment programs aimed to hiring for example transport workers [6, 40]). However, the political line in respect of immigrants from colonies, able to fill the workforce shortage in parent state economy, was contradictory.

As Conway notes, despite the workforce shortage the necessity of foreign employees was realized only in 1950s. Then governmental and private organizations began to unfold employment programs in colonies [3, 70]. Just then they worked out the scheme of recruiting people from African and Caribbean countries in London transport infrastructure. Among other employers, there were hotels, restaurants and hospitals and other transportation services.

At the same time, many inhabitants from for example the Caribbean Islands moved to the parent state on their own initiative because, according to Walvin, it was easy to come back to Great Britain as an immigrant from the point of view of legality. The one thing the potential immigrants needed was money for moving [2, 108].

As Spencer notes, documents submitted for consideration of governmental authorities in 1950s clearly show that the British economy undoubtedly gained by arrival of immigrants, because 1) they readily occupied empty places in the British working class structure; 2) they were high-skilled, contrary to the stereotypes (only the minority of, for example, new-comers from the Caribbean Islands could be rated as an unqualified labour force) [4, 41]. Nevertheless, the political line of immigration restrictions took shape in this decade. The British government took this line during the next several decades. In the period described, immigration was mainly coloured. Many authors, who studied this problem, agree, to one extent or another, that the immigrant question was the question of racial relationship or the question of how the British political class treated the arrival of native colonials [2, 119; 4, xiv]. It was the 1950s when they set a course for immigration restrictions from outside Europe. At first, this course manifested itself in more complicated entry procedure.

Spencer described in details the debates conducted in special commission and in parliament circles. As a result, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act appeared in 1962. Many authors [2, 119; 4, 129; 7, 4] consider the first and the most important one among the bills passed by the British Parliament during several decades for gradual formation of immigration routine with extremely constrained rights for citizenship. The analysis of this bill allow us to make a conclusion that it was aimed to limit immigration only from the countries of so called “New Commonwealth” including former British colonies that got independence. These countries were situated in the Caribbean Basin, Africa and South Asia [2, 119]. Since the text of the Act does not contain signs of racism, those who declare its racist orientation note two circumstances: 1) some governmental documents, particularly the correspondence of various public agencies and shorthand records of discussions among British politicians, show that the thought about limitation of immigrant flow from former colonies by passing an appropriate legislative act became popular among the British governing class since the beginning of mass immigration from the Caribbean (the external difference and cultural “otherness” of the immigrants was the problem); 2) they created a voucher system permitting to live in the UK. It was arranged in such a way that “New Commonwealth” inhabitants had fewer chances to get an entry permit than people from Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The latter fact was possible, according to Spencer, because inhabitants of above mentioned countries had a better chance to be included in qualified worker groups than people from the Caribbean Basin due to better industrialization of these countries. They could have specific professions connected with technical service that required a certain skill level. The provisions of the second Commonwealth Immigrants Act passed in 1968 justify this. In Walvin’s opinion, this bill was “outspokenly discriminating”. It was aimed to “keeping coloured colonials out of the country and giving white colonists the opportunity to “come back home” if they wish” [2, 119]. Critics of the bill consider the following paragraph debatable: the entry were forbidden for those who had the UK passports but were born outside the country and didn’t have any British ancestors. It’s obvious that many inhabitants of the “old” Commonwealth had every chance to entry because their ancestors fit into the category “born within the UK”.

It was evident to both Spencer [4, 134] and, long before, Walvin [2, 119] that the 1960s bills had the racist character and British politicians of all parties were convinced in necessity to prevent mass immigration from other parts of the world to Great Britain and in harmfulness of multi-ethnic habitation in one country. In proof of this, both authors adduce the fact that the immigration restriction line remained the same in spite of recurrent change of governing party. Spencer uses various documents concerning debates of the 1940s and 1950s to prove that, in the period before the bill of 1962 was passed, the representatives of both main parties believed mass colonial immigration to be the problem for
the country. The discussants differed on how urgent it was to implement the anti-immigration legislation and the severity degree of the bill).

So, in the above mentioned period, the government tried to prevent immigrant enclaves in British cities because they doubted that people living in these enclaves would be fully integrated into the British society. However, such enclaves did appear. As Conway notes [3, 79], the reason was that immigration restriction laws had an opposite effect.

The attempt to limit immigration opportunities for Caribbean and South-Asian inhabitants resulted in the following: immigrants from these regions refused to go back home and started to call their families to the UK. In his book “The Myth of Return”, Muhammad Anwar describes this consciousness turning point in details illustrating it by the example of a Pakistan commune in one of small British towns and providing an extensive evidence basis.

It is important to note that, as Conway writes, the door closed very tightly by the early 1970s. Great Britain did not experience such a powerful inflow of migrants that took place in previous decades [2, 79]. However, an inevitable question arose: what to do with immigrants who had already domiciled in Great Britain.

It should be noted at the first place, that the most obvious choice for the British government, at the moment, was whether to deport immigrants or not. Thus, they had to decide if a problem of choosing an integration strategy will turn up. It’s notable that the British government had already practiced repatriation campaigns in the past. For instance, the legislators intended to send colonial servicemen quartered in the UK and those who substituted local workers recruited into the army to their own countries after the First World War. After the Second World War the situation repeated but, according to evidences, the campaign wasn’t crowned with success. One of the reasons was the sabotage of local authorities who was responsible for repatriation in certain regions of the country.

Nevertheless, the memory of previous repatriation campaigns fed the minds of the part of British political establishment that was behind the foundation of the so called “Monday Conservative Club” in 1972. The leaders of this political elite wing of the UK were Enoch Powell who became popular after his “Rivers of Blood” speech [3, 79]. In this speech, he declared about the inevitability of disintegration and collapse of the British society during the next decades in case the immigration situation of that moment would be preserved.

However, despite some of the Tory willingly joined the leaders who adopted the idea of immigrant repatriation, the majority of them disapproved this idea. As a result, it was ousted to the ultra-rightist wing of the British political spectrum with the help of the repatriation slogans used by the radical party “The National Front” that was formed in 1967 [10, 87]. The Conservative Club tried to influence the political process but its leaders appeared to be isolated from membership in the general state political process. Powell being a Welsh unionist focused on the electorate of his district that was situated in a small town-Wolverhampton. The population of this town had an impressive percent of immigrants. This fact inspired anxiety in native inhabitants. Although, Powell would never be influential on the parliamentary level.

Eventually, the British people faced the necessity to somehow integrate the mass of immigrants who had come to the country and settled down there. As Anwar showed by the results of his anthropological investigations, the immigrants didn’t want to change their way of living they used to have in their motherland. On the contrary, they demonstrated a fierce desire for preserving the adherence to their lifestyle at the new habitat.

While studying the immigrant integration problem, the British political thought basically used such notions as “ethnic minorities” and “racial relationship”. This distinguished it from, for instance, the French theoretical model of integration that paid attention to giving all inhabitants of the country equal rights and freedoms regardless of their religion and ethnicity. Debates about “usefulness and uselessness” of immigrants were considered bad form [10, 9].

The British legislators acted just in the boundaries of this paradigm when they realized that: 1) the constant dwelling of the vast masses of immigrants is inevitable; 2) a non-tolerant attitude of local residents to immigrants can cause a threat to interracial relations and sociocultural climate in the country; 3) it is necessary to solve the problem described in the second point without use of radical measures such as repatriations, because in the 1950s, according to Spencer, British politicians was worried by preserving the image of Great Britain as the head of the Commonwealth that united nations of the former British Empire [4, 22]. These measures could undermine the reputation of the former parent state among, for example, African members of the Commonwealth. Some politicians adopted a very severe immigration legislation that was called outspokenly racist by many people. At the same time they understood that
it is necessary to mend relations between ethnic and racial
groups of the population not trying to solve the problem
by restoration of pre-war status quo.

The immigrants was in no haste to change their
lifestyle to the British one, in spite of the fact that, as
Spencer notes, the first wave of immigrants consisted of
initiative people with a certain prosperity (at least by the
standards of their country) but not representatives of the
lowest class as they were portrayed by repatriation proponents [4, xiv].

Undoubtedly, there were differences between certain
groups of immigrants in family relations and the status of
different age and gender groups in family. But immigrants
of all groups found the reasons for refusing to adopt local
lifestyle. They continued to practice traditions they had
got used to in their motherland.

South-Asian expatriates, as a rule, planed to go back
home after earning some money. That’s why they
continued to feel themselves members of their families
that lived in India or Pakistan. As far as they considered
their life in the UK temporary, they did not want to change
their way of living, the more so that many typical traits of
British lifestyle were unacceptable for them and could
harm their family basis.

The first step of the implementation of the integration
strategy was made as far back as in the 1960s when the
first national public authority was created. It was destined
to become to control inter alia the fulfillment of the Laws
of Interracial Relations that passed not long before [5,
111]. It’s interesting to note the following thing here: in
the 1960s Great Britain followed its own road in the
question of immigration restrictions by means of border
toughening and entry limitations for some
categories of people. This road differed much from the
development of immigration policy in other European
countries (that didn’t introduce immigration limits yet) and
in such countries and the USA and Australia where, on
the contrary, immigration restrictions for people not from
Anglo-Saxon and “kindred” countries were annulled in
the described decade (people from other countries also
had the right to immigrate but it was much more difficult
to do in practice). As to ethno-cultural climate control in
the country, the British evidently followed the changes
that took place in the 1960s in the USA where they began
to work out and implement a new discourse that would be
called “multicultural” later. The durability of
multiculturalism in the USA is of course disputable. But
there is no doubt that the status of cultures, previously
considered “non-indigenous”, changed in Western
countries including the UK after the 1960s. This happened
inter alia because of the movement for equal rights of
Afro-Americans that were active in the USA during that
period.

The appearance of new influential actors supported
by different stratums of society resulted in the necessity
to change the approaches to resolving ethno-racial
conflicts. Former methods based on marking out some
“privileged” ethnic and racial groups were rejected by
governmental authorities. At least, such a tendency
manifested itself.

REFERENCES

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