

## SIDE TRACK SIX

### MULTICULTURALISM

The Prime Minister's [speech on multiculturalism](#), delivered in Munich last week, is said to have been the product of a great deal of thought and discussion.

If this is indeed the case then it is a disturbing reflection on his advisers, for the argument is shallow, contradictory and either naive or calculating.

At the outset of his remarks, Mr Cameron goes to impressive lengths to distinguish Islam as a faith from what he chooses to call 'Islamist extremism.' The latter is a perspective on the world that either manifests itself in violence or accepts 'various parts of the extremist worldview, including real hostility towards Western democracy and liberal values.' It needs to be tackled through 'strengthening the security aspects of our response, on tracing plots, on stopping them, on counter-surveillance and intelligence gathering'.

Such robust policing is however 'just part of the answer.'

More must be done, for 'an important reason so many young Muslims are drawn to Islamist extremism 'comes down to a question of identity.' These young men feel estranged not only from their parents' religious practice but also from Britain and this latter alienation arises 'because we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity.'

Hence the critique of what Mr Cameron calls 'the doctrine of state multiculturalism', under which 'we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream.' Islamist extremism is a product of our having 'failed to provide a vision of society' for these young Muslims while at the same time tolerating 'segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.'

Locating responsibility for Islamist extremism in such a wide cultural hinterland leaves lots of scope for negative action, and the Prime Minister's speech was brimming with ideas when it came to how to clamp down on the Islamists:

- More 'preachers of hate' should be kept out of the country;
- More organisations that 'incite terrorism against people at home and abroad' should be banned;

- There should be an end to forced marriages;
- A stop to extremist groups 'reaching people in publicly-funded institutions like universities or even ... prisons'.
- A refusal to support organisations that are 'showered with public money despite doing little to combat extremism'.

Perhaps some of all this should be done, perhaps not. Much of what is laid out here merely reflects changes to the law already made by Labour (banning of terrorist organisations (2000); an end to forced marriages (2007); an expanded crime of hate speech (2006)) or are plunges into *Daily Mail* speak (all those (unnamed) Moslem extremists 'showered' with our money by political-correctness-gone-mad).

**BUT....**

What has any of this got to do with 'the doctrine of state multiculturalism'?

Mr Cameron seems especially exercised by the fact that Moslems stick together, a fact which serves to 'engender a sense of community, a substitute for what the wider society has failed to supply.' To tackle this 'we must build stronger societies and stronger identities at home'. We need 'a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and a much more active, muscular liberalism'.

After all this build up, the 'clear sense of shared national identity that is open to everyone' which is to compete with Islamic solidarity is a bit of a let-down. It is nothing more dramatic than some citizenship and language lessons, a bit more local pride as well as guarantees of 'freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law, [and] equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality.'

In other words what we have already.

And of course you can have all of these and still mix exclusively with your own tribe quite easily – just look at how (to pick an example at random) elite school children cling together in adulthood. So none of this self-conscious flexing of liberal muscles will tackle the separateness of Moslems upon which the Prime Minister seems to frown so much.

Since all this is so irrelevant to 'the doctrine of state multiculturalism', something else must be going on.

**THIS IS WHERE THE DANGER LIES**

Mr Cameron's call for 'a lot less ... passive tolerance' of multiculturalism is one that has left terrorism and the distinction between good and bad Moslems far behind.

Under Michael Howard, the Tories turned in desperation to a nasty strategist from Australia who had perfected political dog whistling, the art of saying something without saying it, knowing that the intended audience would understand the message being sent under the radar. No wonder the English Defence League celebrate the speech (not least because the Prime Minister also went out of his way to make a comparison beloved of such racists about their not been allowed to say and do things the Moslems habitually get away with).

His call – in Munich! – for Europe 'to wake up to what is happening in our own countries' was pure Nick Griffin.

No doubt there will be more prison officers clamping down on religious worship in the jails and on 'Islamist' prisoners generally, just as there will be renewed efforts to control speech in universities where it seeks to give expression to Moslem or anti-Zionist rage. The renamed and possibly rejuvenated control order regime will be mustered against 'extremists' judged too clever to be caught planning any crimes. Moslem efforts to live the Big Society will be turned away for being too sectarian while the rest of us will be invited to celebrate the latest Royal wedding with spontaneous street parties. All of this will be in the name of a 'muscular liberalism' determined to guarantee freedom by denying it to those who show unacceptable 'hostility to liberal values' (to use one of the Prime Minister's definitions of Islamist extremism).

## A TURNING POINT?

This may be an important moment in our culture.

If the economy is truly on the slide, with low growth, high unemployment and vast cuts in public support for the disadvantaged, we could be in for a nasty period of scapegoat-hunting. All those Moslems with their different clothes and culture and occasional hot-headed preachers (and, sure, terrorist attacks from some of them too) are a juicier target for the Tories than the bankers ever were.

The Archbishop of Canterbury may need to return unapologetically to his courageous and deeply thought out speech in the Royal Courts of Justice of some years ago, so good that he became a hate figure among 'the muscular liberals' for quite some time afterwards. If he does, the Archbishop of Westminster should join him.

This is an issue of solidarity across faiths.

It is also one of human rights: why should anyone give up their identity in exchange for a phantom Britishness believed in only by those whose life experiences are often much narrower and more segregated than many of the people they now so confidently criticise?