
BOOK REVIEWS

Education, Justice and Cultural Diversity: An Examination of the Honeyford Affair, 1984-85, by Mark Halstead, Falmer Press, London and Philadelphia, 1988, pp.viii + 317.

Partial Surrender: Race and Resistance in the Youth Service, by Lincoln Octavious Willaims, Falmer Press, London and Philadelphia, 1988, pp. viii + 194.

The differences between these two studies are at least as eloquent as their similarities in attesting to the depth of racial conflict in late twentieth century Britain. Both works serve to highlight the failures and frustrations of educational policies in this area. Yet they are so far apart in their perspectives on the problems involved as to represent totally distinct, mutually antagonistic approaches.

Halstead focuses on a chain of events in Bradford in 1984-5 that attracted national attention: the 'Honeyford affair'. He discusses the 'campaign' that was waged against Ray Honeyford, the headteacher of Drummond Middle School in Bradford, following his public criticisms of multicultural education. A detailed account of the subsequent events leading to Honeyford's early retirement at the end of 1985 then gives way to a discussion of the issues that Halstead considers underlay the conflict: racism and the schools, free speech and accountability, and the character of multicultural education. Both sections of the book, the 'background' and the 'underlying issues', contain much that is helpful towards an understanding of the Honeyford case in its wider contexts. The author is meticulous in his portrayal of the events as they unfolded, his blow-by-blow account reinforced with an appendix of more than fifty pages devoted to a chronology of local and national developments. His discussion of the issues is equally careful in identifying and documenting different arguments.

On the other hand this attention to detail, this meticulous fairness, also contributes to an important weakness in the book as a whole. Halstead often seems so detached, so determined to be fair to all sides, as to lose sight of, or minimise, the human conflicts involved. This tendency produces an impression of shallowness rather than of depth of analysis, as for example in his statement that 'Some of his [Honeyford's] incidental descriptions of Asians, although intended to be light-hearted, might be considered offensive' (p.58). Nor can one be impressed with Halstead's repeated claims of 'objectivity'. In the sentence just quoted, for instance, it is the author's choice, clearly a subjective one, to interpret Honeyford's descriptions of Asians as 'incidental' and 'intended to be light-hearted'. His general method of approaching the problem, involving the use of every relevant article and as many original documents as possible, does not create an 'objective' account. Rather, it is one defined by the limitations and Characteristics of these sources as well as by the implicit assumptions of the author himself. Reliance on published statements by the parties involved as reported in the media does not produce 'balance'; it does lead to neglect of several important aspects of the affair. Thus the city council and the police come across as being essentially above the dispute, trying to hold the line against 'inevitable conflicts'. In other words the problem is defined as 'social' as distinct from 'political', and the role of established institutions, structures and values is left unchallenged. Honeyford himself remains a very shadowy figure, all the more enigmatic because of glimpses of his 'working class childhood, his changing political allegiances, and his family. Very little emerges about the school at the centre of the controversy, about the effects of the dispute on the children involved, or of the parents except for those actively involved in the campaign against Honeyford.

Thus Halstead's explanation of the Bradford conflict is weak and his commentary only partially helpful. Few solutions to the problems involved also appear to be on offer, restricted as his discussion is to a strictly philosophical approach to particular defined issues. The attempt to be impartial, 'objective', and thoroughly rational somehow leads him to marginalise what should be the most crucial aspects of an examination of this kind of conflict. Lincoln Octavious Williams's book, *Partial Surrender*, never looks remotely capable of falling into such a trap. This book is concerned with a different phase or arena of 'modern education', the youth service, especially in inner London. Its focus is on daily encounters that rarely reach the media, rather than on a sudden and spectacular crisis. But its main difference with Halstead's book lies in the passionate commitment that the author brings to his study, which leads him to depict racial conflict as very much a political phenomenon in which the institutions of the state, the police, local politics, and education are directly implicated.

Williams discusses the responses to the youth service to the needs of black young people, mainly males, in terms already made generally familiar in neo-Marxist theories of resistance. He sees the youth service as having a mainly reproductive role imposed by the state, but insists that it is also 'a potential site of struggle from which strategies for counter-ideology and practice' can be forged (p. 5). Historically, he argues, the youth service has failed to meet the needs of white working-class young people, being principally concerned to maintain social control and existing class relationships, and it has been even less successful in meeting the needs of black people. Even so, there are 'gaps' that can be 'exploited' especially by voluntary and largely autonomous youth workers in the 'struggle' to 'oppose attempts on the part of the state, the media and society at large to marginalise, contain and criminalise' black young people (p.32). He is therefore critical of Althusserian fatalism, but his preferred alternative, belying his political hopes, is the double-bind that Paul Willis has made famous: resistance leading to a confirmation of established social patterns and differences. This analysis lends itself very well to an understanding of the dilemmas of everyday life. Indeed, probably the best chapters in the book are those devoted to this theme: chapter five, on an attempt to implement an official anti-racist policy, and the last few chapters in the book, which follow the fortunes of a small group of black young people on the fringes of the youth service. When applied to political initiatives on a larger scale, Williams's approach explains the failure and disappointments of radical attempts at policy change in the inner London area, and also the continued existence of 'institutional racism' behind policies of 'equal opportunity'. It leads him to propose a policy of 'equal outcomes' to take the place of 'equal opportunities', on the grounds that 'Equal Opportunities becomes just another weapon with which those in power maintain their power' (p. 121). And yet it does little to suggest practical proposals or realistic prospects for fundamental reform.

In fact, neither of these books is really helpful on how to address the problems of racial conflict and exploitation at the level of educational policy. Halstead tends to shrink and Williams to magnify the characteristics of such problems in ways that make attempts at reform seem either unnecessary or dangerous. While race relations continue to fester and worsen, it is this marginalisation of policy, and the paralysis that results, that now need urgent redress.

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