

ONE OF THE OBJECTIONS to immigration is that immigrants introduce disease. This view is much exaggerated. The government white paper *Immigration from the Commonwealth* stated: "Immigration has not created a serious public health hazard; and such problems as have arisen in the areas where immigrants have settled have been due in the main to difficulties of adaptation to new conditions, and to disease being contracted after arrival rather than brought in."

Immigrants do sometimes arrive with disease, but more significant is their greater susceptibility to disease once they are here, due to malnutrition, change of climate, bad housing conditions, depression, and language difficulties. Immigrant children accustomed to sunshine often suffer from rickets when they come to Britain. Poor and overcrowded housing accommodation fosters stomach disorders and respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis, which is particularly common among Asian immigrants. Men who are in strange surroundings and separated from their families easily become a prey to venereal disease; deprivation in order to send money to dependants at home may lead to harmful economies in food and heating. Immigrants who know little English, and who are perhaps not accustomed to working with machinery, take longer to train than natives and are more likely to suffer industrial accidents. Ignorance of the native language is also a hindrance to successful treatment, for not only are posters, leaflets, and other useful information wasted if they cannot be read, but the difficulty of communication between patient and doctor may result in misinterpretation of symptoms and incorrect diagnosis.

These special health problems associated with immigration should be taken note of not only by the medical profession but by society in general. A warmer welcome by the local community, improvements in housing and instruction in the English language will all help. In addition, it seems entirely reasonable for a country in which certain diseases have been virtually stamped out to insist on health checks for immigrants from areas where those diseases may be less well controlled. Diseases that affect the immigrant only are his own business, and it is up to him to apply to a doctor soon after arrival, but some diseases are infectious or contagious, and these are everybody's business. It is common sense to try to ensure that no such disease is allowed in unnoticed, and to this end all immigrants should be medically examined on entry.

Such medical checks are not inconsistent with free immigration. If immigration is free, and entry to an intending immigrant in need of treatment cannot be refused, the necessary treatment should be given and the immigrant formally admitted when he is well. The only problem is how the treatment is to be paid for, and this is best looked at in the wider context of welfare benefits as a whole.

In order to qualify for sickness, unemployment, maternity and widow's benefits, or for a retirement pension, an immigrant has to fulfil the same conditions as a native, and these include the payment of twenty-six

Health, Welfare Education

BY A. J. CARTER

national insurance contributions (156 for pension and widow's benefit) before any benefit can be claimed at all. There are, however, no qualifying conditions for medical and dental treatment under the National Health Service, or for certain other benefits. Immigrants are eligible for free medical attention as soon as they arrive, even though they have paid nothing at all in taxation or national insurance contributions, and many people regard this as unfair.

The getting of something for nothing is not confined to some welfare benefits. Why, it may be asked, should immigrants enjoy peace, an impartial system of justice, lighted roads, police protection, or free education for their children? If objection is to be made to the availability of some welfare benefits, then, logically, objection must be made also to the availability of any facilities provided out of either national or local taxation.

Under the scheme of taxation now in existence the amount of tax paid by an individual is determined by his income, the size of house in which he lives, and the type of goods he buys; under a land-value tax it would be determined by the value of the site occupied, which reflects the *availability* of services. In neither case is there any direct connexion between what a man pays and the services that he actually receives. There is no such connexion in any system of taxation, for when payment is related to the use made of a particular service—as it is, for example, with gas and electricity supply—it becomes a charge or price and ceases to be taxation at all. In this respect, therefore, general taxation is similar to national insurance, which would clearly be superfluous if the contribution and the benefit were always equal.

It is thus inherent in any system of taxation and national insurance that many people will use services and receive benefits the cost of which exceeds the amount they have paid in. (Conversely, many people will use services and receive benefits the cost of which is less than the amount they have paid in.) Once this fact is accepted it must be accepted for natives and immigrants alike, for there is no line of demarcation. An immigrant who has just entered employment in this country may contract a serious illness at the end of the first week and receive free treatment in hospital for six months; but so may a young native who has just left school. The immigrant may return to his country of origin as soon as his treatment is completed; the native may emigrate. There is no logic in objecting to an immigrant who has

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contributed £5 receiving £100 if there is no corresponding objection to a native who has contributed £10 receiving £500. The contention that the father of the native has himself made contributions, whereas the father of the immigrant has not, is valid in the case of benefits enjoyed by the child before he starts earning, since if the bills for these had to be paid privately it would be the father not the son who paid them, but when the son goes out to work he assumes responsibility, in theory at least, for paying his own way. He then becomes entitled to benefits in his own right, whereas previously they were benefits accruing to his father.

Furthermore, once the fact that benefits and payments are not commensurate is accepted, the size of the benefit received in relation to the payment made cannot alter that acceptance. If it is justifiable for a man to receive benefits worth £500 when he has contributed only £499, it is justifiable for equal benefits to be enjoyed by a man who has contributed £498, £400, £40 or 4d. It could perhaps be argued that there is a dividing line between some contributions, however small, and no contribution. But those who object to the eligibility of immigrants to receive some benefits without paying anything at all would hardly be likely to withdraw their objection if immigrants were asked to pay a nominal 4d. on entry. The objection is deeper than that.

The objection, since no distinction can be made between different ratios of benefits to payments, can in reality be treated only as an objection either to the whole principle of the incommensurability of payments and benefits (without which there could be no taxation and no government) or to the application of that principle to welfare benefits. As there could not in any event be immigration control if there were no government, the first alternative may be disregarded. To object to the eligibility of immigrants for welfare benefits, therefore, is to object to the welfare state as such.

The reason for the welfare state is the poverty of the people. It is the natural concern of individuals to provide for themselves and their families in accordance with their own freedom of choice, and it is the material inability to do so that has resulted in the delegation of this function to the state. The remedy for poverty is to restore a healthy and expanding economy in which the resources of land, labour, and capital are put to their optimum use and the wealth produced is distributed equitably.

To cure poverty for natives is to cure it for immigrants also. At present an influx of immigrants who are poor and have a large number of dependants may cost the country more than their contribution to production (though it must be remembered that in due course many of the dependants will be producing too), but when everybody is able to earn a good basic wage this will no longer be so. Immigrants can then be welcomed as people who will help us, not as people who will live off us.

One of the most valuable of the services enjoyed by immigrants is that of free education for their children, and problems arise here quite apart from that of receiving a benefit not paid for. The majority of subjects can be taught to immigrant children side by side with natives and create no difficulty. Even subjects specially for immigrants, such as a useful period or two on English customs, are best taught to whole classes together (English and immigrant children who can laugh together are unlikely to grow into racial fanatics). A number of local authorities have produced literature specially for immigrants, and the BBC is presenting programmes in Hindustani for Indian and Pakistani immigrants, but no immigrant who cannot speak English is going to get very far unless he learns it, and this is the most urgent priority in the education both of child and of adult immigrants.

At present, parents of schoolchildren in classes containing a high number of immigrant children feel with justification that their children's progress is retarded because immigrant children with little knowledge of English are much slower to advance. More serious consideration should be given to the possibility of running intensive classes exclusively for immigrants with little or no English so that they can learn the language before being integrated into the educational system. The education committee of at least one local authority has set up a reception centre where immigrant children will go for up to a year to learn English, and measures of this kind should be adopted more widely within schools themselves. Any headmaster who mixed children who had spent several years at a subject with others who were new to it would be thought idiotic if the subject were anything but English. To give separate tuition to immigrants with little or no English is not to give them "special treatment," but on the contrary to treat them in just the same way as native children who were lacking in a subject. If it is fear of being charged with practising racial discrimination that has prevented this experiment from being tried more widely, that fear is misplaced, for some immigrants already speak English as their native tongue and would have no need of separate tuition. The charge that there was a colour bar would not stand up for a moment: white Italians would be with brown Indians, and brown Jamaicans with white English.

Separate classes is not necessarily the only possible solution—it may be that a few hours intensive teaching accompanied by otherwise complete integration would be of equal use in some schools—nor should such sep-

aration extend to social activities in the school, but it is absurd to ignore such an obvious proposal.

Given that the difficulties of language are overcome, there is no reason to suppose that immigrant children are any slower to learn than native children, but the social backgrounds and customs of the various immigrant nationalities may differ from one another and from those of the English. To a large extent this can bring variety and interest to school life, but if there is a high proportion of immigrants in one school, particularly if they are predominantly of one race, the native children may take the lead from the immigrants rather than the immigrants from the natives. This will clearly be a serious obstacle to the assimilation of immigrants and will tend to perpetuate racial separatism. For this reason, the circular issued by the Department for Education and Science, exhorting local authorities to restrict the proportion of immigrants in their schools to one in three did not deserve the overwhelming criticism it received. There may be some dispute about who exactly are immigrants for this purpose (what about the Irish), and any set figure is bound to be arbitrary and subject to local variation, but the circular represented a brave if limited

attempt to tackle the problem and was a step away from the former attitude of "do nothing" which has allowed difficulties and tensions to build up to dangerous levels.

The circular's defect was not that its principal aim was improper, but that it could be regarded at best as only a short-term expedient, since if local education authorities accepted its advice to re-arrange catchment areas or send immigrants to other schools by bus some of the consequences would be socially harmful. "We take the view," said an Inner London Education Authority sub-committee report, "that there is grave objection to any scheme that artificially injects into a school a large group of children from outside the neighbourhood, that divorces the child-in-school from his home surroundings and his local playmates and that would frustrate the authority's policy of encouraging parents to take an active part in school life—an important element in the integration of immigrant parents."

The correct solution lies in the dispersal of immigrants from the ghettos in which, all too often, they are huddled together—and this in turn, as was mentioned earlier, depends on other problems being tackled successfully.

Why Council Housing? —and Why Flats?

By T. O. EVANS

I OFTEN WONDER why no one ever questions the need for local authorities to build houses at all. It is understandable that in the absence of a more fundamental approach to poverty, those who cannot afford a house or flat of their own should be assisted in some way, but why should local authorities build houses and flats themselves?

Leaving aside for the moment the fact that many people in need cannot get a subsidised council house or flat and that many who do, have not the need of a subsidy, why cannot aid be given in such a way that people can, armed with their purchasing power, go into the open market for their housing needs? It would cost no more in the long run.

It may be thought that local authorities can build houses cheaper, yet in most cases the actual task of building houses and flats is left to private enterprise anyway. What, then, is the function of the local authority, apart from that of deciding on the nature of the accommodation to be built, who is to live in them, and what rents are to be paid? Do local authorities revel in the power given to them in planning and controlling council houses or would they be glad to get the whole worry off their shoulders?

The people to be housed have little choice of the manner in which they shall live. According to a survey carried out by Opinion Research Centre, the present housing wants of people are being completely ignored.

The Sunday Times, May 21 reporting on the survey, stated that one in six of the homes now being built by local authorities in Britain are flats in tall blocks of ten stories and upwards. Yet only one person in a hundred wants to live in a block that high. Further, only one person in seven wants to live in a flat at all. People in Britain, according to the survey, want to live in houses. Of actual council tenants, nine out of ten want to live in a house!



Two thirds of the people in Britain would like to be owner-occupiers. The odd thing is that according to the survey, 64 per cent of the people are in favour of councils building houses for sale. Says *The Sunday Times*: "Most people, in other words, are prepared to consider a radical extension of government commitment in the field of housing—perhaps ultimately bringing housing on a par with education as a Government-controlled service."

Housing subsidies have undermined independence. Because local authorities provide cheaper accommodation, they presumably have the right to do the choosing. A survey into the reasons for the high cost of land for housing and the reasons for high taxation and the constant decline in the buying power of money might go a long way towards taking the housing problem off our hands altogether.