CABINET

COLONIAL IMMIGRANTS

NOTE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT AND MINISTER FOR WELSH AFFAIRS

The Cabinet invited me on 14th June to set up an inter-departmental committee of officials to prepare, in a form suitable for publication, a report on the growing influx into the United Kingdom of coloured workers from other Commonwealth countries and of the social and economic problems to which this was giving rise. (C.M. (55) 14th Conclusions, Minute 4).

2. I attach, for the consideration of my colleagues, a copy of the Report of which the Appendix is in a form suitable for publication.

G.LL.-G.

Home Office, S.W. 1,
18th August, 1955.
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARISING FROM THE GROWING INFLUX INTO THE UNITED KINGDOM OF COLOURED WORKERS FROM OTHER COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

The Committee were instructed to report—

(a) Whether any, and if so what, economic and social problems arise from the immigration into the United Kingdom of persons from other parts of the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland.

(b) What administrative measures would be feasible if any control over the entry and settlement of such persons were thought necessary.

(c) What interference with the traditional ties between this country and other parts of the Commonwealth would be involved in any such measures.

The Committee understand that they are to present a statement on the subject in a form suitable for publication, and on that understanding they have prepared the draft appended hereto. They have drafted this statement in such a form as to avoid creating difficulties for Ministers in carrying through any policy on which they may later decide. They would also draw attention to the following points.

2. The Committee have included nothing in this statement which they do not think can be supported by evidence if need be. They have refrained from mentioning matters which are based on suspicion or which, while they may have potential importance, are of slight statistical importance at present. For instance, there is some suggestion that there is a high incidence of venereal disease among West Indians but no statement to that effect could be supported by figures. On the other hand, figures could, if necessary, be given to support the statements in paragraph 8. The omission of reference to problems which are so far only potential might be taken to imply that such problems do not exist and it is recognised that the statement may in some respects give the impression that the position is less serious than it is likely to become.

3. It will be observed that, while paragraphs 1 to 3 of the statement deal with general considerations, a transition is made in paragraph 4 to the problem in terms of the influx of coloured people, and that, apart from the incidental references, the rest of the statement deals only with that aspect of the matter. (Ministers may take the view that the reactions, e.g., in India or elsewhere, to a statement in terms of "coloured people" are likely to be much greater than to one in terms of West Indians alone but a discussion in terms of West Indians alone would be inadequate.) There are no figures which would give an idea of the extent of immigration into the United Kingdom of people from the "Old Dominions," but such immigration whatever its extent has never given rise to difficulties. Citizens of the Irish Republic are mentioned in the Committee's terms of reference but there is no evidence readily available on which the Committee could give a balanced statement of the economic and social consequences of the immigration of such people into Great Britain. Considerable enquiry would have to be set in hand before such a statement could be provided and the Committee have been asked to submit this report as a matter of urgency. It is common knowledge that the Irish influx into Great Britain has been very heavy since the war. The Roman Catholic Church Authorities have stated that it has totalled at least 750,000, and we know that during the twelve months ended 30th June, 1955, 58,700 Irish from the Republic entered into insurance for the first time. There has always been some tendency for the Irish to congregate in certain quarters of big cities, but there is no reason to suppose that a high proportion of the Irish who have come here since the war have concentrated in such areas. Many of the Irish are accustomed to living in their own country in conditions which English people would not normally tolerate and are accordingly less discriminating in their choice of accommodation here. There have been a number of complaints from local authorities that they live in condemned premises and by so doing establish a prior claim on the local authorities' resources of accommodation. When all this has been said, however, it cannot be held that the same difficulties arise in the case of the Irish as in the case of the coloured people. For instance, an Irishman looking for lodgings is, generally speaking, not likely to have any more difficulty than an Englishman, whereas the coloured man is often turned away. In fact, the outstanding difference is that the Irish are not—whether
they like it or not—a different race from the ordinary inhabitants of Great Britain, and indeed one of the difficulties in any attempt to estimate the economic and social consequences of the influx from the Republic would be to define who are the Irish.

4. The Committee have assumed that it would not be thought proper to deal in a published document with all the political aspects or with the details of the legislation which would be necessary—more particularly since the terms of the necessary legislation have not been settled—or of the administrative problems. They feel, however, that they ought not to omit from this report a reference to the following points which have been dealt with in previous reports:—

(a) A case for legislation giving power to restrict immigration can be made out on general grounds, and the absence of such a power in a world in which countries with similar or better standards of living universally exercise such powers places the inhabitants of this country in a position of disadvantage which is hard to defend. On the other hand, the introduction of any such legislation at the present time would be criticised by some as amounting to colour discrimination, since it would be said that it was the fact that the immigrating West Indians are coloured which had led to the introduction of the legislation. It might be suggested that this would be contrary to the spirit of international declarations to which successive United Kingdom Governments have subscribed. Some play would be made of the point that restriction could not be justified on employment grounds at this time.

(b) The Commonwealth Relations Office fear that, if legislation on this subject applied to the entry of all British subjects, either British subjects whose entry it is not desired to prevent would be excluded, or the administration would be subject to criticism for discriminating between different categories of British subjects. The Home Office and the Colonial Office do not think that insuperable difficulties will arise on this score.

(c) If, after restrictive legislation had been introduced, large numbers of coloured people persisted in coming to the country, there would be much additional work for the Immigration Service and also for the Home Office and Ministry of Labour. There would in any case be a considerable increase of work for United Kingdom passport offices in other Commonwealth countries.

(d) It would be very desirable to give Commonwealth and possibly some Colonial Governments prior notice of any statement such as is proposed, together with as much reassuring explanation as the circumstances permit.

(e) No approach has been made to the local authorities as regards housing problems although some of the local authorities affected have made representations to the Government. Paragraphs 10 and 11 of the draft statement are based partly on these representations and partly on published material. With regard to the suggestion in paragraph 16 of the draft statement that a prospective immigrant might if necessary be required to show that he had suitable accommodation to go to before he was allowed to enter, officers of the Local Authority Associations in England and Wales who have been consulted privately have expressed the view that local authorities would probably be prepared to co-operate to prevent further housing difficulties arising although they have naturally emphasised that they were speaking in a personal capacity. Accommodation which a local authority would be prepared to certify as suitable would be very difficult to find in the areas in which the present difficulties exist. Many prospective immigrants who could obtain the offer of specific jobs in the present employment situation would, therefore, probably fail to obtain certificates of suitable accommodation and in consequence considerable pressure might be brought to bear on local authorities who might weaken in their administration. Employers anxious to import coloured workers might in any case take special measures to provide accommodation for immigrants on arrival, e.g., in hostels, an arrangement which might well be used in such a way as to facilitate evasion of the controls, which it would be impossible to prevent unless there was an efficient follow-up scheme. Any such scheme requiring
immigrants to continue in certified accommodation would be difficult to administer and local authorities would not in the opinion of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Department of Health for Scotland be suitable or possible agents for the purpose.

(f) Citizens of the Irish Republic present a very difficult problem in that their exclusion from the scope of a Bill applying restrictions to the entry of British subjects would be open to obvious criticism on political grounds. However, the Irish not only provide much-needed labour, but have always done so, and any restoration of the immigration control on the traffic between Great Britain and Ireland would be tiresome to the hundreds of thousands of passengers who travel each way during the year and would mean a considerable increase of the Immigration Service and the carrying of passports or other identity documents by citizens of Northern Ireland who would much resent it. The Working Party have previously pointed out that the only way out of this dilemma would appear to be to argue boldly along the lines that the population of the whole British Isles is for historical and geographical reasons essentially one and, except during the special circumstances of the war when Eire was a neutral state though still within the Commonwealth, has always been treated as such, and that there is every reason on grounds of common sense and expediency for not departing from that principle in the present connection. Under the terms of the Bill which has been drafted but not yet submitted to Ministers the control would not have applied to the Irish normally resident in Ireland. The Irish resident abroad or in other parts of the Commonwealth would have been subject to control equally with British subjects from overseas.

(Signed) W. H. CORNISH, Chairman.

Home Office,
3rd August, 1955.
APPENDIX

DRAFT STATEMENT ON COLONIAL IMMIGRANTS

Reports of the arrival in this country of thousands of immigrants from the West Indies have given rise to public concern about the immigration of British subjects into the United Kingdom from other parts of the Commonwealth. All British subjects are free to come to this country and there is no power in United Kingdom law, and never has been, to prevent them from entering or to require them to leave. This is in contrast with the position in most independent Commonwealth countries and all British dependent territories, which have for many years controlled the entry into their territories not only of aliens but also of British subjects as it has always been accepted that it is the right of a receiving territory to do. That the United Kingdom has not hitherto seen fit to exercise this right may be taken as reflecting the special position in the Commonwealth which she occupies but it must be remembered that until lately the pattern of migration within the Commonwealth has not been such as to raise for serious consideration the question of restricting the immigration of British subjects to the United Kingdom.

2. There are no official statistics which distinguish between categories of British subjects arriving in or leaving this country. Moreover the pattern of movement is naturally a complex one. British subjects entering the country from overseas may be genuinely temporary visitors or may be contemplating prolonged but not necessarily permanent residence, or may be persons whose associations are essentially with the United Kingdom, returning after a period of residence overseas. In the circumstances it is impossible to reflect in statistics the extent of the immigration of British subjects into the United Kingdom. But some idea of the background against which recent trends can be considered may be derived from the following figures.

3. At the 1951 Census some 347,000 persons were enumerated as resident in Great Britain but born in other Commonwealth territories, as compared with some 237,000 in 1931. The main elements in the 1951 figures were 137,000 born in the Indian sub-continent or Ceylon; some 129,000 born in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa; some 35,000 in the Mediterranean colonies; some 17,000 in African territories other than the Union of South Africa; some 15,000 in Asian territories other than the Indian sub-continent and Ceylon; and some 16,000 in the West Indies. The Census figures do not take account of race or colour but it may be assumed that a large number of the 347,000 recorded as born in the Commonwealth overseas were of United Kingdom descent and in particular the figure of 137,000 born in the Indian sub-continent or Ceylon must have contained a high proportion of such persons. The recent influx of coloured persons from the West Indies, which may amount to 20,000 in 1955, is clearly a new development.

4. An estimate of the number of coloured British subjects in the country was made in 1953 and it then appeared that a conservative figure would be something over 40,000, of whom about one-fifth were students, compared with a figure of about 7,000 before the war. Some of this increase could be attributed to the continued residence in the United Kingdom of coloured people who came to this country during the war, many to the Armed Forces or as merchant seamen, but it was evident that a steady increase of the coloured population was taking place by immigration, estimated to be then proceeding at the rate of about 3,000 a year. Since then there has been a rapid increase. The comparable figure for 1954 was about 10,000. The number of coloured immigrants to the United Kingdom from other parts of the Commonwealth in 1955 will probably amount to some 30,000 if there is no diminution in the number of Indians and Pakistanis settling here which has in recent months been at the rate of 8,000 a year.

5. British subjects from overseas are eligible for social service benefits in Great Britain on the same terms as United Kingdom residents and there is no kind of local discrimination against them and no hindrance to their taking work and
accommodation in this country if they can get it. In the conditions of full employment which have prevailed in recent years coloured workers have had little difficulty in finding work. Even the large number who have come in recent months appear to have found jobs easily and to have made a useful contribution to our manpower resources. A recent check at employment exchanges showed that there were less than 2,900 coloured British subjects unemployed at the time of the check, most of whom had been out of work for a short period only. It should be added that the job which an immigrant has obtained may not always have been the type of work which he hoped to find, or for which he regarded himself as qualified, when he left home. It would appear that some workers classified as "skilled" in their own territories would not necessarily be regarded as equally skilled by the standards of this country, and they may have been unacceptable here in their former occupations for that reason. In some cases prejudice, real or imagined, on the part of white workers may have led an employer to refuse to employ a coloured worker.

6. There is no evidence that coloured people are making undue demands on National Assistance. The local offices of the National Assistance Board do not keep regular records of coloured recipients of assistance but a check made in July showed that about 500 of them were receiving national assistance grants at employment exchanges: these were men and women who were fit enough to be required to register for employment. Some others, believed to be very few, will have had to be assisted because of old age or sickness. In addition coloured men are occasionally put up at reception centres for persons without a settled way of living, i.e., vagrants. In 1952 the London County Council, as the Board's agent, set up a small reception centre at Stepney to cater specially for destitute coloured men arriving in London in search of work and accommodation. This centre was closed in January 1955, the Council's Welfare Committee having represented that it had outlived its usefulness.

7. So far as the National Health Service is concerned there is insufficient evidence to suggest that coloured immigrants are a greater problem than some other groups.

8. The immigrants from overseas are for the most part law-abiding, though there is evidence that coloured men play a large part in the illicit traffic in Indian hemp, which is the type of illicit drug traffic at present giving rise to most concern in this country, and they account for a disproportionate number of the convictions in London for living on the immoral earnings of women.

9. While there have been examples of colour prejudice—and there is no doubt that it exists—some coloured workers have made a favourable impression on the public, for example in the transport industry. It cannot be said that the coloured immigrants have been assimilated, but apart from one or two isolated incidents there has been no evidence of what might be described as racial tension.

10. The most serious problem arising at present from coloured immigration is undoubtedly in the field of housing. The bulk of the coloured immigrants have congregated in relatively few areas, mainly in London and the Midlands, where there is already an acute housing shortage. The existence of a big demand for unskilled labour naturally attracts the immigrants and they seek accommodation in districts where friends or relatives are already living. Once begun the process is a continuing spiral. Coloured workers often find it difficult to get accommodation in houses occupied by white people and there appears to have been considerable exploitation of this situation by landlords, frequently coloured immigrants themselves, who have bought or leased defective property and let it off in single rooms, in conditions of scandalous overcrowding, several single people or even families sharing the one room. This has created a grave problem for the housing authorities concerned. Their resources are quite insufficient to enable them to undertake rehousing on the scale required and they would in any case be seriously embarrassed by having to give priority on the basis of need to these newcomers over long-term residents who have had their names on the housing list for many years.

11. To some degree this problem arises in respect of all immigrants from overseas, e.g., citizens of the Irish Republic, but it is much aggravated in the case of coloured people who may at home have been accustomed to standards of accommodation which would not be considered adequate in this country. That is not to say that they do not resent the grossly overcrowded conditions which may be all that is obtained here but that, bad as those conditions are, they may not...
appear relatively so intolerable as they would to immigrants with a different background. Apart from the spiral process by which one worker introduces others, account must also be taken of the fact that so far most immigrants are believed to have come alone, although a few have had their families join them since. Many more are, however, known to have family commitments and to be hoping to arrange for their families to join them in due course. Should any large-scale influx of families take place, over and above the entry of workers arriving by themselves, the situation, already sufficiently grave in the areas concerned, might quickly become critical.

12. As long as the present prosperity continues it seems unlikely that there will be any significant change in the situation described in the preceding paragraphs so far as the general economic aspects of the problem are concerned. It is, of course, impossible to pronounce about the future with any confidence. There are indications that organised workers are concerned as to the prospects if the employment situation should deteriorate. It may be that rather than racial prejudice has been responsible for some of the objections which have been raised to the employment of coloured people in certain industries and services, and if a situation should arise in which it is necessary to lay off large numbers of workers there might be very strong pressure that the first to be discharged should be immigrants.

13. It is also questionable whether race relations would not deteriorate if there were a significant increase in the coloured population. A considerable natural increase in that population must be expected in the not distant future, quite apart from any further increase by immigration. There appears to be no reason to suppose that the present rate of immigration will drop in the foreseeable future. It may be that the tendency of coloured people to congregate in certain areas helps to reduce causes of friction, but a further significant influx into areas of unsatisfactory housing might well lead to developments in which it would be difficult to avoid racial problems arising.

14. As has been mentioned, there is no power to prevent any British subject, whatever his origin, from entering the United Kingdom, and no power to require him to leave, however he may misconduct himself. It is therefore not possible to impose any control on the entry and settlement of British subjects from overseas by administrative action alone. To make such control possible an amendment of the law would be required.

15. The basis of any such legislation would be the right which any country must claim, and which most other Commonwealth countries exercise, to control immigration from outside in the interests of its own citizens. The theoretical case for taking such powers to protect the inhabitants of this densely populated island is obvious. Legislation for this purpose could be drafted (a) so as to bring within its scope without exception all British subjects not belonging to the United Kingdom, including citizens of Commonwealth countries, inhabitants of British Colonial territories, British protected persons and also citizens of the Irish Republic who are not British subjects but who are by our law to be treated as such; or (b) so as to apply only to certain specified categories. It would not, of course, discriminate between persons or categories on grounds of race or colour.

16. Whichever form of legislation were adopted it would presumably be applied so as not to interfere with the genuine temporary visitor from the Commonwealth but so as to restrict immigration for permanent residence to those whose settlement here was most likely to be beneficial to the country. There would presumably be some form of control of entry by a system of employment permits, to some extent on the lines of that applying to aliens, and also a control designed to prevent aggravation of the housing difficulties which have already arisen. There would be little difficulty in administering a scheme concerned only with restricting eligibility to enter for employment to those who have specific jobs awaiting them, and if local authorities were prepared to co-operate arrangements could be made under which a prospective immigrant could if necessary be required to show that he had suitable accommodation to which to go. It would appear, however, that such controls would not be fully effective unless supported by powers, which it might be very difficult to operate in practice, to make continuance in approved employment or continued residence in suitable accommodation a condition of continuing stay.
17. Enforcement of any system of control of entry could be carried out by the Immigration Service, though some enlargement of the Service would be necessary. Even so, a control would involve some additional delay for British travellers at ports, though the degree of this would depend to some extent on the scheme of control adopted.

18. If it were thought desirable to institute any control over the entry of British subjects not belonging to the United Kingdom, it would no doubt be thought right to give power as already exists in the case of aliens to bar entry to those known to have criminal records and to those whose entry would be undesirable on medical grounds, and also to provide for the deportation of undesirables.

19. Some measure of regulation and control of migration within the Commonwealth need not prejudice the widespread practice among peoples of all parts of the Commonwealth of visiting this country for study, business and recreation. Nor need it be inconsistent with a policy of encouraging two-way migration between the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries. The United Kingdom is in a special position in that many Commonwealth citizens, including numbers of persons not of European descent, feel a strong personal attachment to Britain. This is one of the strongest bonds of our Commonwealth association, and it might well be weakened unless an assurance could be given that legislation of the nature described in paragraphs 15 to 18 above would not in practice affect it. Such an assurance could, however, be given without prejudice to the essential objects of legislation designed not to exclude British subjects from overseas, but, in their own interests and that of this country, to regulate their entry for permanent settlement.