

Eight years after the passage of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, people of African, Caribbean and Asian origin in Britain still suffer discrimination in education, housing, health, employment and enterprise. Adding to this, African and Caribbean people are over-represented in all stages of the criminal justice system, while being heavily under-represented in the political system – making up just 2.3 percent of MPs in Parliament.

Under this legislation, public bodies must go beyond 'non discrimination' to actively promote racial equality. Although it is perceived as a powerful law, it is yet to be fully tested. To date only one case has been upheld by the courts under the Act. Even government departments have neglected their duties under the legislation by failing to monitor the ethnic background of their staff and to carry out formal assessments of the impact of their policies on racial equality. The effect of non-compliance is to render this law into a voluntary code.

With only months to go until the government's controversial Equality Bill comes into force, Ade Sawyer asks whether the commitment to tackle race inequality will get lost



INTEGRATING EQUALITIES

can it ever help the race cause?

Despite the limitations of this race legislation, there is now a real fear that the powers enshrined in the Act are now in danger of being diluted with the implementation of the single Equality Bill.

The law itself, when it comes into force, will be more complicated but it may not grasp all the issues involved in race discrimination. Policing the law will inevitably be more complex because race equality issues have been allowed to fester for so long that we are now dealing with a culture of institutional racism.

Some race campaigners strongly believe that a 'one size fits all' broad-brush approach will dilute the race issue.

There are several questions being asked about how this body will effectively work. Will officers be allowed to develop their specialist knowledge of the different groups? Will race impact assessments that have been an important tool to hold public bodies accountable disappear? (successfully used by the Southall Sisters when they challenged Ealing Council's decision to drop their funding). And will the groups with the most

effective lobbies and greater voice unfairly influence the Commission at the expense of those groups without any lobby or voice at all?

There is a real danger that an integrated law will render targets unclear and so equality of opportunity may prove longer to achieve, or it may not be achieved at all.

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