

# Inner Character

## Letter to a national newspaper, summer 2022

Diverse origins and skin tones; inner character and outward actions; due regard and measurable objectives; Equality Act 2010; intolerable wrestle.



Nesrine Malik's recent article ('There are Tories of diverse origins and skin tones. What they need now is real difference.' *The Guardian*, 15 July 2022.) has painful implications for the Labour Party.

To its credit, it was Labour that was principally responsible for the equalities legislation developed in Britain between 1965 and 2010. But also it was Labour that acted with careless disregard for principles of good governance when it set up the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007. Nor, after 2010, did Labour in opposition adequately scrutinise and challenge the Cameron, May and Johnson governments with regard to their collective failure to implement the Equality Act of 2010.

For example, Labour did not rigorously challenge successive hostile environment policies targeting refugees and other migrants; or the Windrush scandal; or the Trojan Horse and Prevent injustices; or the disparities in health outcomes inflicted by the Covid-19 pandemic; or claims that concern for human rights, due process, due regard and equal treatment are mostly no more than so-called wokery and political correctness.

'Here', said an Englishman about 100 years ago in EM Forster's *A Passage to India*, referring to someone who was Indian, 'is a native who has actually behaved like a gentleman; if it was not for his black face we would almost allow him to join our club'. A hundred or so years later, as Nesrine Malik points out, a white face is no longer de rigueur for admission to 'the club', for example the UK Cabinet.

It's as important as ever, though, to focus not only on a club's outward appearance, its faces and features, but also on its inner character and culture. Further, and even more importantly, it is essential to consider the effects and impacts in wider society of a club's actions, and inactions.

One requirement now is that the Equality Act's concepts of due regard and measurable objectives should be revisited and clarified. This will require, to quote TS Eliot in another context, an 'intolerable wrestle with words and meaning'.

Yes, and as Nesrine Malik in effect proposes and urges, bring it on.

Robin Richardson

## Notes

In a slightly shorter form, this letter was published in The Guardian on 23 July 2022. For fuller information see ['Education and Equalities in Britain, 2010–2022: due regard and disregard in a time of pandemic'](#).

For a more recent and more hopeful consideration of Labour Party policy see [Labour reaffirms pledge to fight structural racism amid disparity figures](#) by Aletha Adu, The Guardian, Wednesday 28 December 2022