

THE RIGHT TO OFFEND?

In the second part of our debate on whether political correctness has gone too far, Phil Frampton says it's necessary to bring back manners and respect through the law

A year ago, a work colleague of mine challenged his director for referring to a black man as a 'spade'. His director's response was to call him 'one of the PC brigade.' Very soon after, my colleague's post was declared to be redundant.

As Ian Newton's article last week displayed, the PC debate is confused, with many of those in the 'anti-PC brigade' - including racists and sexists - clinging onto their supposed right to offend. In my experience, the same people usually go scurrying for compensation whenever their own interests are threatened.

In the past we used other words for being PC such as manners and respect, but there were still police chiefs who declared that police officers calling Black people 'Black bastards' was acceptable.

Ian, to me, sounds rather like the guy in his fifties who's told to clean the toilet after he's used it, and protests at being asked to be domestically correct: 'Stop nagging! What you telling me that for! I never have. That's the way I was brought up.' Such people don't like the fact that society has to offer manners and respect to people discriminated against for centuries.

Many of those declaiming against so-called political correctness remind me of the woman I heard being interviewed on the radio who said it wasn't right that you could no longer call your dog Nigger. When I was four, the neighbour had a big black dog and he called it Nigger, and when he bellowed: 'Nigger', I was frightened, not for the dog but for me.

However, it is irritating that they are assisted by heavy-handed insensitive methods used by some organisations in the name of being PC. Take the recently celebrated case of the Malvern Three, where, following a complaint, West Mercia Police raided a shop and confiscated three gollywogs sitting in the shop window, holding them in the station for two weeks. The anti-PC Brigade made much of this clumsy police action, though I'd rather believe that West Mercia Police were acting on a tip-off regarding illegal immigrants.

Many organisations have changed their

rules to make them appear PC, but this is mainly to protect themselves against the law rather than a determined effort to eliminate discriminatory behaviour. Management that seriously wishes to eliminate discrimination needs to fully explain and campaign regarding the reasons behind the changes. Otherwise staff will only be upset by edicts that they can't say 'duck' or 'lasses' or 'me lover' or 'handicapped'.

Indeed, there should be a law against banning words. In this much I agree with Ian Newton. We do not need to restore the Inquisition to defeat discrimination, but we need a society that cares and tries to

“Especially in areas where only small ethnic minority communities exist, Blacks and Asians have often felt the wish to whiten themselves up and avoid abuse and discrimination”

understand and welcome diversity.

We should get uptight about the use of words, not the words themselves. Take the word 'Bastard', I was born one, but my illegitimate birth doesn't mean to say I am going to be a bastard to everyone I meet. Young white people rapping along to a tune may hear and repeat the word: 'Nigga' but you don't hear them all going around using the term. Most realise when they are causing offence and know how to avoid doing so. A word in itself is not offensive, it depends on what it is being used to communicate. I personally find poverty to be offensive, especially my own, but banning the word will not do away with my condition.

There is a stupid element that now

believes that particular words such as gollywog can't be said but bastard can. Yet I and many Black people, and millions of white people had gollywog cuddly toys as kids. I collected the labels. I have never objected to either the toy or the word. I did object when I was called gollywog, just as much as when I was called 'nigger' or 'wog' or 'Black Sambo'. In the 90s I was visiting a Preston council estate on business, and I was followed by a group of six-year olds chanting: "Nigger, nigger!" Where did this gem of working class culture come from? The same place as when I heard those chants as a kid coming from people much older than me.

My book, *The Golly in the Cupboard*, is about my childhood experience of being mixed race and in the care system. One 'radical' Liverpool bookshop has it on their shelves, but they put a wrap around cover over it declaring; "We apologise if anybody is offended by the title or cover of this book". That made me laugh. Even the porn magazines don't appear in a brown paper bag in Britain anymore. It must have been the only book in Britain to have the privilege.

What made me laugh is that the bookshop managers, acting as so-called agents of political-correctness, found themselves causing offence to black people by using the wrap around.

Sadly, sections of the BBC said that they could not talk about the book because of its title, but when BBC Radio Merseyside had me presenting a programme based on the book, it won the national Race in the Media Award from non other than the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE).

I was told by some that: "You are not allowed to say that word." Well what if you are in the work's canteen and asked what toys you had as a kid? Can you tell your friends that you had a gollywog? Should you be worried? Frankly, any organisation that disciplined a worker for mentioning gollywog in their list of childhood toys would not have a leg to stand on, and the PC scaremongers like Ian know it.

Ian writes that being PC is an attack on working class culture and humour. What