

*Enoch Powell was born in 1912. After an education specializing in the classics (Greek and Latin) in Birmingham and at Cambridge, he first became an academic before joining the army in 1939. After the war he entered politics, becoming MP for Wolverhampton from 1945 until 1974. As well as being a politician (he was Minister of Health from 1960-63 before quarrelling with the Conservative Party leadership), he is the author of numerous works on political, literary and religious subjects. His intellectual honesty and refusal to compromise, even when he was wrong, led him into several extreme positions, on immigration, Europe and Ireland. The influence of this immigration speech, made on Saturday 20 April 1968 to the Annual General Meeting of the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre at the Midlands Hotel, Birmingham, was decisive for the direction discussions were to take over the following years.*

### **Enoch Powell "The Birmingham Speech"**

*In the 1950s and 60s immigrants arrived in Britain in considerable numbers and congregated in particular areas of the country. The politician Enoch Powell, the Member of Parliament for an area with a high proportion of immigrants, was accused of inciting racial hatred when he warned against the consequences of what was happening in a notorious speech he made in Birmingham on 20 April 1968. – Enoch Powell, *The Birmingham Speech*, reprinted in Brian MacArthur (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 377f., 383.*

5 In fifteen or twenty years, on present trends, there will be in this country three and a half million Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants. That is not my figure. That is the official figure given to parliament by the spokesman of the Registrar General's office. There is no comparable official figure for the year 2000; but it must be in the region of five to seven million, approximately one-tenth of the whole population, and approaching that of Greater London. Of course, it will not be evenly distributed from Margate to Aberystwyth and from Penzance to Aberdeen. Whole areas, towns and parts of towns across England will be occupied by different sections of the immigrant and immigrant-

10 descended population. [...]

15 It almost passes belief that at this moment twenty or thirty additional immigrant children are arriving from overseas in Wolverhampton alone every week – and that means fifteen or twenty additional families of a decade or two hence.

Those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some fifty thousand dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. So insane are we that we actually permit unmarried persons to immigrate for the purpose of founding a family with spouses and fiancées whom they have never seen. Let no one suppose that the flow of dependants will automatically tail off. On the contrary, even at the present admissions rate of only five thousand a year by voucher, there is sufficient for a further twenty- five thousand dependants per annum ad infinitum, without taking into account the huge reservoir of existing relations in this country – and I am making no allowance at all for fraudulent entry. In these circumstances nothing will suffice but that the total inflow for settlement should be reduced at once to negligible proportions, and that the necessary legislative and administrative measures be taken without delay.

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30 As I look ahead I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'. That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed, it has all but come. In numerical terms, it will be of American proportions long before the end of the century. Only resolute and urgent action will avert it even now. Whether there will be the public will to demand and obtain that action, I do not know. All I know is that to see, and not to speak, would be the great betrayal. *Giles, Daily Express, 27 February 1968*

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## Vocabulary

**funeral pyre** (n.): a pile of wood for the ceremonial burning of a (dead) body - **spouse** (n.): a wife or husband - **fiance** (n.) (fem. fiancée): /f the person to whom one is engaged (to be married) - **voucher** (n.): (BrE) a kind of ticket for a special purpose, (here) quota - **ad infinitum** (adv.): (Latin) without end - **reservoir** (n.): a large supply - **fraudulent** (adj.): done by fraud, illegally - **negligible** (adj.): too small to be worth any attention - **foreboding** (n.): a feeling of coming evil - **intractable** (adj.): (formal) very difficult to deal with - **volition** (n.): choice, without being forced

## Explanations

**Commonwealth:** Originally designed to be an association of independent states within the British Empire, the British Commonwealth could be described as a 'club' of independent countries sharing the heritage of British culture from the time of empire. Most former colonies of the Empire still belong to this association, which originally gave special rights of entry into the U.K. Sometimes, as here, the word is used to mean the 'New Commonwealth', i.e. those countries which became independent after World War II, whose citizens were mostly black or Asian. Special rights of entry from the Commonwealth ended when Britain entered the European Community (European Union). - **Registrar General's Office:** government department in charge of compiling population statistics - **Margate, Aberystwyth, Penzance, Aberdeen:** towns in, respectively, the southeast of England, West Wales, southwest England and northeast Scotland - **Wolverhampton:** town in the West Midlands, northwest of Birmingham. Enoch Powell was MP for a Wolverhampton constituency. - **Those whom ... make mad:** "Whom Fortune wishes to destroy she first makes mad." Publius Syrus, *Moral Savings*, 1st century B.C. - **the River Tiber foaming with much blood:** "Bella. horrida Bella, et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno." (I see wars, horrible wars, and the Tiber foaming with much blood) Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, 86. This quote ensured immediate notoriety for Powell's speech.

## Immigrants and Dependants

From: *The Lonely Londoners*:

"All of we come, Tolroy," Ma say. "This is how it happen: when you write home to say you getting five pounds a week Lewis say, 'Oh God, I going England tomorrow.' Well Agnes say that she not staying at home alone with the children, so all of we come."

"And what about Tanty?"

"Well you know how old your Tanty getting, Tolroy, is a shame to leave she alone to dead in Kingston with nobody to look after she."

The conditions the immigrants found were often totally different from those they had been led to expect, and their arrival in increasing numbers led some British people to talk about 'being swamped'.



### **Awareness**

- 1** Find out about racially motivated violence in your country in recent years. What seems to have caused it?
- 2** Why are individual immigrants often welcomed, while numbers of immigrants cause concern?

### **Comprehension**

- 3** How does Powell arrive at his figures for the year 2000?
- 4** What sort of immigrants is Powell most concerned about, and why?
- 5** What dangers does he warn against?
- 6** What is his solution?

### **Analysis**

- 7** Language can be primarily factual, or primarily emotional. Try to establish where in the speech words have been used in an emotional way.
- 8** Look up the word 'occupy' in the dictionary. What meaning(s) does Powell expect his listeners/readers to associate with it?
- 9** What exactly does Powell mean by "that tragic and intractable phenomenon" ? What assumptions is he making?
- 10** Try to analyse what features of the text are typical of a speech and why they are effective for that purpose.

### **Opinion**

- 11** Comment on Powell's conclusion that "to see, and not to speak, would be the great betrayal".  
What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of expressing an opinion in this way?
- 12** If a politician called for a complete halt to the entry of foreigners, how would you react? Compose a letter to a newspaper giving your opinion.
- 13** Powell's speech implies that dependants should not be allowed entry. What do you think about treating families in this way?

### **Projects**

- 14** Compare the situation of immigration and political statements about it in Britain with that in *your* own country.
- 15** How much immigration is permitted into Britain now, and from what sources? How are potential immigrants and visitors from other countries treated in the U.K.?
- 16** Find out more about Enoch Powell. Could he be described as a 'fanatic'?
- 17** Compare this speech with speeches made on racial matters by Nazi leaders in the 1930s and '40s, or with speeches by other European politicians.
- 18** Powell draws comparisons with the U.S. Find out more about racial tension there at present and at the time of Powell's speech.