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## **A Veil Descends on England**

By Douglas A. Sylva

A mounting debate over the Muslim veil has begun to expose a great deal about modern British civilization. It all started with Jack Straw, a leading Labour Member of Parliament, who apparently grew so exasperated when attempting to speak to Muslim women so draped that he kindly and politely began to ask them to show themselves.

Straw, a stalwart member of the British political elite that has spent the last few decades imposing multiculturalism on the British people, finally reached his own limit of tolerance, with what is called the niqab. Described as a “veil” in press accounts, it is really a full-body sheath with a slit for the eyes. And the slit itself may be covered with a thick cloth mesh, if a husband considers his wife’s eyes too alluring, or the niqab too immodest.

Straw justified his actions with the kind of commonsense reasoning that is now entirely uncommon, uncommon because it has been replaced by the very ideology that he and his colleagues have so long embraced: “Communities are bound together partly by informal chance relations between strangers, people being able to acknowledge each other in the street or being able to pass the time of day.” Apparently, Straw finally recognized that a slit covered by mesh is not a warm invitation to polite chit-chat.

British Muslim leaders, long-accustomed to complete deference, even capitulation, on the part of influential people like Straw, reacted with shock and well-rehearsed outrage: One found it “astonishing” that Straw would “selectively discriminate on the basis of religion.” Another asked the rhetorical question: “Who is Jack Straw to comment on negative symbols within a religion that is not his own?” Notice how well they play the game of their adopted society, by using arguments that they do not believe, demanding rights for themselves that they never seem to bother to demand for religious minorities in places like Saudi Arabia or Pakistan.

Now sensitive to the power of words (forgetting that the Imams of London routinely call for the deaths of Jews and infidels), these Muslim leaders claim that a single instance of alleged intolerance - a woman’s veil was torn off - can be linked back to Straw. According to one, “I put the blame squarely and without any hesitation on Jack Straw.” It doesn’t seem to matter to them that the attack was immediately labeled a hate crime by the authorities, and that the police met with the aforementioned “leaders” to grovel, or as the BBC put it, “to hear their concerns.”

Next, the multicultural thought police had to be consulted, to see if Jack Straw had himself strayed into realm of discrimination. Surprisingly, the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality admitted that, “the defensiveness of some in the Muslim communities has hardened into a sensitivity that turns the most neutral of comments into yet another act of persecution.” But lest his own burst of commonsense appear insensitive, the chairman followed it up with this absurdity: “On the other side of the trenches we have those who want a fully fledged auto-da-fe [burning at the stake] against British Muslims in which anything any Muslim does or says must be condemned as a signal of their willful alienation and separation.”

Never mind the fact that many British citizens, who do not care enough about the God of their nominal religion to grace a Church door, or the leaders of their inherited political system to grace a polling booth, could never rouse themselves out of the stupor of their own apathy (or that, to their credit, they did not respond to the Muslim bombings in London with any violence of their own). In the effort to be “fair” to a culture with an obvious streak of intolerance and violence, such attributes seem to have to be found and condemned in British culture at large.

And at the same time, holders of the traditional beliefs upon which British society was so successfully founded recede into true minority status. A woman was recently suspended from her

job at British Airways because she wore a tiny cross, “smaller than a ten pence piece.” Astounded, she said that, “I will not hide my belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. British Airways permits Muslims to wear a headscarf...Only Christians are forbidden to express their faith.”

If she is right, how much different is London from Cairo right now, and what will it be like five years from now? All of this counts as the fruits of forty years of multiculturalism. We shall see if the likes of Jack Straw analyze beyond the feelings in their bones that the niqab can never be anything but un-British, and come to realize that teaching native citizens that there is nothing British worthy of pride, and immigrants that there is nothing British worthy to aspire to, is in fact nothing more than societal suicide. All vacuums are eventually filled, even civic ones.