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Race, class and the state: the black experience in Britain

For Wesley Dick — poet and prisoner
In some answer to his questions

Within ten years Britain will have solved its 'black problem' — that is the message of the White Paper* — but 'solved' in the sense of having diverted revolutionary aspiration into nationalist achievement, reduced militancy to rhetoric, put protest to profit and, above all, kept a black under-class from bringing to the struggles of the white workers political dimensions peculiar to its own historic battle against capital. All these have been achieved in some considerable measure in the past decade and a half — through immigration control and social control — and the process has already thrown up the class of collaborators so essential to a solution of the next stage of the problem: the political control of a rebellious 'second generation'. And it is to this exercise that the White Paper addresses itself.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF IMMIGRATION

The laissez-faire era

But to understand the politics of the White Paper, to see what it tells us about state power in one particular aspect — black labour — but

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* The Government White Paper (September 1975) and not the Race Relations Bill is central to this discussion. The Bill is the instrument of legislation, the White Paper is its philosophy.

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an aspect which, like a barium meal, reveals the whole organism of the state and relates black experience to white struggle — one must first reappraise the Immigration Acts. Britain, after the war, like most Western European countries, was faced with a chronic shortage of labour. This shortage was in some measure alleviated by the half a million or so refugees, displaced persons and prisoners of war who were admitted to Britain between 1946 and 1951. But even so, the Ministry of Labour found it necessary to systematize the recruitment of workers from other parts of Europe. Between 1945 and 1957 there was a net immigration of more than 350,000 European nationals into the United Kingdom.[1]

Unlike most other European countries, however, Britain was in a position to turn to an alternative and comparatively uncompetitive source of labour in its colonies and ex-colonies in Asia and the Caribbean.* Colonialism had already under-developed these countries and thrown up a reserve army of labour which now waited in readiness to serve the needs of the metropolitan economy.** And it is to these vast and cheap resources of labour that Britain turned in the 1950s.

At first the supply of labour from these countries was governed by the demand for it in the metropolis. Except for a few thousand workers who were recruited directly into London Transport and the British Hotels and Restaurants Association from Barbados (from 1956), no effort was made to relate employment to vacancies. Instead it was left to the free market forces to determine the size of immigration. And this on the whole, as the excellent study by Ceri Peach shows, worked very well.[2] Thus periods of economic expansion led to a rise in immigration, periods of recession to a decline — and this sensitiveness of supply to demand characterized the whole 'stop-go' period of the 1950s.

But if the free market economy decided the numbers of immigrants, economic growth and the colonial legacy determined the nature of the work they were put to. It was inevitable that in a period of full employment the indigenous worker would move upwards into better paid jobs, skilled apprenticeships, training programmes, etc., leaving the dirty, hard, low-paid work to immigrant labour. Although, that is, the shortage of labour was general, the more dynamic and attractive sectors of industry were able to draw the best qualified labour from both the non-growth industries as well as the immigrant labour force. The non-growth sector (including the public services), on the other hand, had only

* Though France and Holland had similar sources, they were comparatively meagre.

** To put it more graphically, colonialism perverts the economy of the colonies to its own ends, drains their wealth into the coffers of the metropolitan country and leaves them at independence with a large labour force and no capital with which to make that labour productive. And since all the capital is now in the 'mother country' it is to her — and at her behest — that this labour is drawn.

the new entrants to the labour market to turn to. (In practice, though, prejudice decreed that qualified immigrants were more available to the latter than to the former.) Thus the jobs which 'coloured immigrants' found themselves in were the largely unskilled and low status ones for which white labour was unavailable or which white workers were unwilling to fill — in the textile and clothing industries, engineering and foundry works, transport and communication, or as waiters, porters, kitchen hands.

And since the opportunities for such work obtained chiefly in the already overcrowded conurbations, immigrants came to occupy some of the worst housing in the country. The situation was further exacerbated by the exorbitant rents charged by slum landlords. Attempts on the part of the newcomers to break the landlords' hold by buying their own homes were often frustrated either by the difficulties of obtaining loans from regular sources or by the prohibitive rates of interest charged by the irregular ones — or even by the refusal of owners to sell to 'wogs' and 'nig-nogs'. When immigrants eventually managed to buy their own property and were able to house their fellows, they were accused of overcrowding — sometimes sleeping five and ten to a room. (That there was excellent precedent for this in the dormitories of Eton and Harrow went unnoticed and unremarked.) In the course of time the 'immigrants' became ghetto-ized and locked into the decaying areas of the inner city. And a ghetto, in the words of Ceri Peach, 'is the geographical expression of complete social rejection'. [3]

Everyone made money on the immigrant worker — from the big-time capitalist to the slum landlord — from exploiting his labour, his colour, his customs, his culture. He himself had cost the country nothing. He had been paid for by the country of his origin — reared and raised, as capitalist under-development had willed it, for the labour markets of Europe. If anything, he represented a saving for Britain of all the expense involved in feeding and clothing and housing him till he had come of working age. For, as André Gorz has pointed out, 'the import of "ready-made" workers amounts to a saving, for the country of immigration, of between £8000 and £16000 per migrant worker, if the social cost of a man is estimated for Western European countries as between five and ten years of work'. [4] And the fact that in the early years of migration, the 'coloured' worker came to Britain as a single man — as a unit of labour — unaccompanied by his family meant an additional saving to the country in terms of social capital: schools, housing, hospitals, transport and other infra-structural facilities. A fraction of the saving made from the import of these ready-made workers — let alone their active contribution in labour and taxes — could have served to increase social stock and improve social conditions if the government had so willed. But capital and the state were concerned with the

maximization of profit, not with the alleviation of social need.

By the late 1950s, however, the contradiction between the social and economic needs of Britain, *thrown up* — not caused — by immigration, became more defined. The shortage of workers, as Ceri Peach shows, made immigrants economically acceptable; the shortage of housing made them socially undesirable. 'The colour prejudice of landlords and landladies coupled with the shortage of houses made the crowding, and in some cases the overcrowding, of much of the accommodation available to the migrants inevitable and this, in turn increased their image of undesirability.' From being refused accommodation on the grounds that they were coloured, they were now refused houses on the grounds that they would overcrowd. 'It is surely an ideal system', concludes Peach, 'in which prediction produces its own justification.'[5]

Ideal, that is, for capital — for it gets labour without the overheads (so to speak), profit without pain, gain without cost. Having already deprived one section of the working class (the indigenous) of its basic needs, it now deprives it further in order to exploit another section (the blacks) even more — but, at the same time, prevents them both from coming to a common consciousness of class by intruding that other consciousness of race. It prevents, in other words, the horizontal conflict of classes through the vertical integration of race — and, in the process, exploits both race and class at once.

To put it differently, the profit from immigrant labour had not benefited the whole of society but only certain sections of it (including some sections of the white working class) whereas the infrastructural 'cost' of immigrant labour had been borne by those in greatest need. That is not to say that immigrants (qua immigrants) had caused social problems — Britain, after all, was a country of net emigration — but that the *forced* concentration of immigrants in the deprived and decaying areas of the big cities high-lighted (and reinforced) existing social deprivation; racism defined them as its cause. To put it crudely, the economic profit from immigration had gone to capital, the social cost had gone to labour, but the resulting conflict between the two had been mediated by a common 'ideology' of racism.

Prelude to control

That same 'ideology' detonated the race riots of 1958 — and revealed to the state that considerations of social need had now to be weighed against considerations of economic gain. Racism, though economically useful, was becoming socially counter-productive. And the state, which had hitherto acted in the economic interests of the ruling class, was now compelled to modify that role and assume its other function of appearing to act in the interests of society as a whole — in the 'national interest'. The first step was to slow down

immigration, thin out the black presence, the second to manage racism, keep it within profitable proportions — relief for the depressed areas, urban aid, would follow. The economy in any case had, for the time being, absorbed all the unskilled labour it could (though it still required skilled and professional workers). Additional units of labour applied to existing (outworn, outmoded) plant would not yield the returns that would make such addition justifiable. On the other hand, automation and new technology — capital intensive production — would help Britain to compete with the rest of Europe in markets made more competitive by the loss of its colonies. That same 'loss', however, would make it possible for Britain to renege on its Commonwealth ties and look to the Common Market for the labour it required — when the time was ripe. The stage was set for immigration control.

To end immigration altogether would have been one answer. But given the periodic labour shortages characteristic of the capitalist countries of Western Europe, given the structural needs of late capitalism for the import of foreign workers, it was no answer at all. Migrant labour, precisely because it was migrant — seasonal and contractual, filling in the labour gaps in times of expansion and being fired in times of recession — served to absorb the shocks of alternating booms and depressions. And by virtue of the fact that it was foreign, 'migrant labour yielded extra profit to the employer.[6] Most of Western Europe had worked out a migratory mechanism combining both these functions. Labour, on short-term permits, on contract, ensured the buffer function; and the fact that it was foreign, recruited from the underdeveloped southern extremities of Europe, ensured that it would not — by virtue of nationality laws freely agreed to — have the same rights as the indigenous worker and could therefore be discriminated against. And to discriminate is to exploit, to derive a surplus value larger than that afforded by the exploitation of the native worker.[7] Together they, contract labour and nationality laws, fulfilled a third function — a political one: they prevented the integration of migrant labour into the indigenous proletariat and thereby mediated class conflict.

Britain, still outside the European community but periodically knocking at its door and gifted with a vast reserve of labour in the colonies and Commonwealth, was loth to let go of either and tried to hang on to both. Initially it recruited migrant workers from Europe on a permit basis. Between 1946 and 1951, 100,000 European workers had entered Britain. But the availability of labour in the colonies and ex-colonies and its sensitivity to demand made labour on contract unnecessary.* And as for a discriminatory mechanism, in place of

* '... The rate of immigrants into this country', said Gaitskell to the Commons in the debate on the 1962 Act, 'is closely related and, in my view at any rate, will always be closely related to the rate of economic absorption ... There has been over the years ...

nationality laws there was the fact of race. Black labour was inherently 'discriminatable'. It was alien per se — and automatically excluded from integration into a racist white working class.

It had suited Britain, therefore, to import the workers it needed from its colonies and ex-colonies: it was the quickest way of getting the cheapest labour at minimum (infrastructural) cost — and without the fuss and bother of barriers. It worked, in effect, like any internal migratory movement: a movement of population from the periphery to the centre as and when the need arose. And in that sense it was unrestrained, laissez-faire. But to characterize the laissez-faire period of immigration as an essay in British absent-mindedness — the sort of aristocratic whimsy that gathers and loses empires on the spin of a wheel — or as a conscious 'open-door' policy designed to benefit the poor orphaned children of empire as befitted a once and only mother country — an aspect of British high-mindedness — is a load of bull-shit.* They were the sort of 'concepts' that led to a whole output of 'left' literature, not least by the Institute of Race Relations, which portrayed the Tories as die-hard immigration controllers and racists and Labour as the good guys who, despite themselves and Gaitskell, were compelled by facts — i.e. the presence of black people (if only the buggers were not so visible ...) — to abandon their 'traditional belief in the universal brotherhood of man' and go Tory. So ingrained were these views among radical analysts that when, over the 'Kenyan Asian' affair (in 1968), Labour went even more Tory than Tory, the 'experts' instead of abandoning their analysis, mourned instead the death of Labour idealism or, more concretely, the passing of 'the liberal hour' — and of Roy Jenkins, its finest flower.**

The fact of the matter was that laissez-faire immigration and laissez-faire discrimination had thrown up social problems which, after the riots of 1958 and the growing militancy of a black under-class, were taking on political proportions that the government — irrespective of party — could not ignore. It had to put an end to 'coloured immigration' and yet have recourse to a reserve pool of labour when required. The crux of the problem, therefore, was not migration, but settlement — and not discrimination but *racial* discrimination. For the purposes of exploitation, it was labour and not colour that had to be discriminated against — and that could be done on the basis of citizenship, of nationality, rather than of race.

an almost precise correlation between the movement in the number of untitled vacancies, that is to say employers wanting labour, and immigration figures' — House of Commons Official Report. (Vol 649, Col. 793, 16 November 1961).

* 'Through the 1950s Britain acquired a coloured population in, so to speak, a fit of absence of mind.' Dipak Nandy in the Foreword to *The Multi-Racial School*, by Julia McNeal and Margaret Rogers (Hardmonsworth, Penguin, 1971). For the high-minded school, see, for instance, the writings of P. Mason *et al.*

** See the writings of the Labour left but especially those of Anthony Lester, Nicholas Deakin *et al.*

And since nationality laws by definition distinguished between citizen and alien, foreign or migrant labour would be automatically subject to discrimination. To change British nationality laws so as to put Commonwealth citizens on a par with aliens was the most obvious solution — and it had the added advantage of debarring settlement as a matter of right. But, on the other hand, it would spell the end of a historical relationship which ensured the continuing dependency of the colonial periphery on the centre. (No one, bar the tear-stained liberals, believed the sentimental bull about mother-country obligations.) The aim, therefore, was to move gradually towards the European model of contract labour (and a European configuration with the poor south as its periphery) without foregoing the 'Commonwealth' relationship.*

This meant, in concrete terms, that immigrants from the Commonwealth countries, though remaining British subjects under British nationality law, would be debarred from entering (and settling in) Britain except as and when required by the British economy. Thus the formal links with the Commonwealth would be maintained but the right of individual citizens to automatic entry would be denied. In terms of British nationality law, this would mean that a British citizen was not completely a British citizen when he was a black British citizen — somewhat on the lines of the American constitution which once decreed that a 'Negro' was three-fifths of a person. Nevertheless it would be a solution to black settler immigration: if it did not end settlement altogether it would at least reduce the numbers.

From status to contract

Accordingly the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 restricted the admission of Commonwealth immigrants for settlement to those who had been issued with employment vouchers.** The vouchers themselves were chiefly available to those who had jobs to come to (A vouchers) and to those with skills and qualifications 'likely to be useful in this country' (B vouchers). A third category, C vouchers, for unskilled workers gradually disappeared and became a dead letter by September 1964.† And, as though to compensate for the discrimination now institutionalized in the Immigrants Act, a Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council (CIAC) was set up to advise the Home Secretary on immigrant welfare and integration.

* Eventually the Commonwealth relationship would have to be subordinated to the European relationship — and then the nationality laws would need to be tidied up — but for the time being a solution had to be found that did not require such a change.

** This article is concerned with immigrant workers admitted for settlement, not businessmen, students, dependants, etc.

† It is significant that at the time the Immigration Bill was being debated Britain was negotiating for entry into the Common Market.

When the Labour government came to renew the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in the White Paper of August 1965, it made further restrictions on 'coloured' immigration — reducing the number of vouchers in the A and B categories to a ceiling of 8,500 per year and doing away with the unskilled category C altogether. It also reduced the categories of skill and qualifications required of B voucher applicants to doctors, dentists, nurses, teachers and graduates in science and technology. The policy was now firmly established that immigration from the black Commonwealth should be geared to the requirements of the British economy.* And since the manpower needs of this period were infrastructural — the schools (including medical schools), hospitals, houses, etc., that the state had decided not to invest in during an earlier period — it was to the skilled and the professional that employment vouchers were increasingly issued. Over 75 per cent of the vouchers issued in the first half of 1966 alone were to such personnel, whereas for the whole of 1965 the figure was 55 per cent. Or take another statistic: of the 3,976 B vouchers** (A vouchers accounted for 306) issued to India in 1966, 1,511 went to doctors, 922 to technology graduates, 667 to teachers and 469 to science graduates (and 407 to others).[8] Any lingering pretence that the employment of Commonwealth immigrants aided the Commonwealth was dispelled by a system which creamed off the most skilled and professional personnel from these countries while keeping out their unskilled.

It was also a system which took discrimination out of the market place and gave it the sanction of the state. It made racism respectable and clinical by institutionalizing it. But in so doing it also increased the social and political consequences of racism. And to counter these the state set out to develop a more coherent policy of integration. Thus the White Paper replaced the CIAC with the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI). In fact, the announcement of other legislation to deal with 'racial discrimination in public places and with the evil of incitement to racial hatred' preceded the White Paper. But an examination of the politics of integration (as opposed to the sociology of integration) belongs to the second half of this paper. Here it is intended to pursue the investigation into immigration policies to see how they effected

* The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 had left no one in doubt as to which part of the Commonwealth (white or black) control was applicable.

** Already — by 1965 — 40 per cent of all junior hospital medical staff were from the New Commonwealth and nearly 15 per cent of all student nurses. Without that help some hospitals would have had to close just as without Commonwealth immigrants London Transport would be disrupted (See Lord Stonham, Lords *Hansard* 10 March 1965, Col. 96). And David Ennals told the Commons some days later that in 1963 'immigrant teachers, nurses, professional engineers and chemists numbered only half as many as their British counterparts who left for other parts of the world' (*Hansard* 23 March 1965, Col. 393).

the transition of Commonwealth (and therefore British) citizens from the status of citizens to labourers on contract.

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 is not essential to that investigation — except in that the circumstances which necessitated its enactment high-lighted yet more the contradiction between British nationality laws and the Immigrants Acts and once again pointed to the passage of the Commonwealth citizen from status to contract.

In 1967, following on the Africanization policies of the Kenyatta government, British Asians in Kenya, who had not opted for Kenyan citizenship at independence (1963) and had stayed loyal to the 'mother country', were granted only temporary residence. They were in effect asked to go home to Britain. Already in 1965 and 1966 six thousand Asians, possessing British citizenship, who were not subject to immigration control, had entered the UK. But after the Kenyan legislation of 1967, the numbers increased and the British (Labour) government, with an eye to all those other British Asians and British Chinese whom Britain had used and abandoned on the darker shores of the once empire, decided that they were not as British as their passports warranted. They were only as British as Commonwealth citizens. And since they were liable to the voucher system, the British Asians in Kenya would also be liable to the same procedure for admission — but would be allocated special vouchers as distinct from work vouchers.

Given the devaluation of British citizenship in 1962, the distinction between Commonwealth citizens and Kenyan British Asians was only a legal nuance* — except that, unlike the former, the Kenyan Asians had nowhere but Britain to go to: they were potentially stateless. And this aspect plus the fact that they were more middle-class and British than the normal run of immigrants particularly outraged British liberal opinion. But the blacks, post-1962, had seen the Act merely as the correction of an anomaly in the policy of reducing all black British citizens to the lowest common denominator of contract labour.

As usual, new anti-discriminatory legislation and integrationist policies went hand in hand with the new Immigrants Act — but these again will be dealt with in the next section.

The 1962 and 1965 Immigrants Acts had ensured the supply of skilled and professional workers from the black Commonwealth; for the seasonal unskilled jobs Britain turned to 'foreign workers'.** The

* The 1962 Act had applied to citizens of Commonwealth countries and colonies, not to UK citizens holding British passports issued by or on behalf of the UK government. The 1968 Act now extended the area of control to citizens of the UK and Colonies except where one of their parents or grandparents had been born, naturalized or adopted in the UK — which meant citizens of the white Commonwealth. Holding a British passport was no longer important.

** In an answer to a written question asked by Lord O'Hagan in Parliament in December 1970 — about the figures for the entry of alien workers — the government

Kenyan Asian episode had temporarily swelled the number of settlers beyond immediate employment needs (the voucher system, in this case, was a device to phase-in the Kenyan 'exodus'). And the 1968 Act had in effect brought 'coloured' UK passport-holders within the provisions of the Immigration Acts. Black settler migration was firmly under control, but it was still settler and not migrant. Once in, the black 'immigrant' could remain in the UK indefinitely — and after five years he had the right to British citizenship. He was still not a fully-fledged '*gastarbeiter*'.

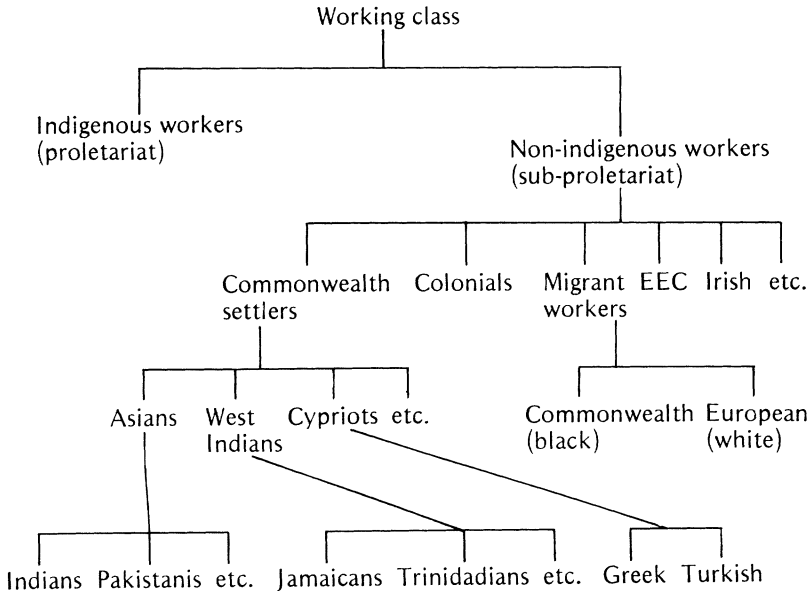
That situation was remedied by the Immigration Act of 1971 which put him, finally, on the same footing as the foreign worker: he could only come in on a permit to do a specific job in a specific place for an initial period of not longer than twelve months. He could not change his job without the permission of the government — which meant that he was dependent on his employer for recommendation: he had to be a good little wage-slave. He may, like any other alien, apply for UK citizenship at the end of four years, provided that he has been 'of good behaviour'. On the other hand, he could, if the Home Secretary so wished, be deported on the ground that it was 'conducive to the public good as being in the interest of national security or of the relations between the UK and any other country or for other reasons of a political nature'.

The immigrant was finally a migrant, the citizen an alien. There is no such thing as a 'Commonwealth immigrant' anymore. There are those who came from the Commonwealth before the 1971 Act came into force (January 1973) but these are not immigrants; they are settlers, black settlers. There are others who have come after the Act; they are neither settlers nor immigrants, they are simply migrant workers, black migrant workers. And the migratory mechanism — the combination of contract labour and discriminatory nationality laws — which ensures that the *gastarbeiters* of Europe are no more than second-class production factors yielding surplus surplus value as well as acting as a buffer, a shock absorber, between boom and depression now applied to migrant workers from the 'Commonwealth', except that time and distance and fares and race made them less accessible to the British labour market than their European counterpart. Then there are the workers, since Britain's entry into Europe in 1975, from the European *community* with free access to work in Britain. And there are aliens and colonials and patrials and non-patrials and white Commonwealth ... All of which makes a mess

replied that 'in recent years the annual entry of foreign nationals for employment has been between 40,000 and 50,000, of whom about half came for seasonal employment' ('Some groups at risk' by Lord O'Hagan, *Race Today*, March 1971).

'In 1968, 62,267 work permits were issued to aliens. In 1969 this had increased to 67,788' (*The New Immigration Law* by Ian MacDonald, London, Butterworth, 1972). The work vouchers issued to Commonwealth citizens in these years were 4,353 and 3,512 respectively (*Facts and Figures 1972*, London, IRR and BCC, 1972).

of nationality laws and discrimination less tidy — and for those reasons must claim the government's attention in the near future. But all of which also leaves the divisions and sub-divisions within the non-indigenous sector of the working-class — apart from the divisions between them, a sub-proletariat, and the native workers — looking something like this:



Britain now had two main reserve pools of labour: in the under-developed south of Europe and in the under-developed Third World — one for unskilled and /or seasonal labour, the other for skilled and professional — one, to put it crudely, to do the dirty work, the other to provide the infrastructural facilities (transport, hospitals, welfare) needed to keep the workers working — but neither exclusively so.[9] In a sense, Britain was now a neo-colonial power with two peripheries. And if migrant labour helped to perpetuate both these dependencies, the older was also anchored in that other history of colonialism.

THE POLITICS OF INTEGRATION

From institutional racism ...

Thus the state had achieved for capital the best combination of factors for the exploitation of labour while appearing, at the same

time, to have barricaded the nation against the intrusion of an 'alien wedge'. It had atomized the working class and created hierarchies within it based on race and nationality to make conflicting sectional interests assume greater significance than the interests of the class as a whole. It had combined with the trade union aristocracy to reduce the political struggle of the labour movement to its bare economic essentials — degraded the struggle to overthrow the system to the struggle to be well off within it — and in the process had weaned the trade unions from the concerns of the labour movement to the concerns of government. And when the black proletariat threatened to bring a political dimension, from out of their own historic struggle against capital, to the struggles of the working class, state policy had helped trade unions to institutionalize divisive racist practices within the labour movement itself.

But racism is not its own justification.* It is necessary only for the purpose of exploitation: you discriminate in order to exploit or, which is the same thing, you exploit by discriminating. So that any other system of discrimination, say on the basis of nationality, would — if available — do equally well. During the *laissez-faire* period of immigration, racism helped capital to make extra profit off black workers (extra in comparison to indigenous workers) — and the state, in the immediate economic interests of the ruling class, was content to leave well enough alone. But in the 1960s the state, in the long term and overall interests of capital (as against its temporary and/or sectional interests), entered into the task of converting immigrant settler labour to migrant contract labour. One of the benefits of such labour, as has been shown, is that it is automatically subject to discrimination on the basis of nationality laws and inter-state agreements. The British government, however, had — for reasons outlined earlier — no wish to change the nationality laws in order to stop 'coloured immigration' — some of the Caribbean countries were still colonies anyway.** Hence it resorted to a system of control which, in being specifically (though not overtly) directed against the 'coloured' Commonwealth, was essentially racist.

The basic intention of the government, one might say, was to anchor in legislation an institutionalized system of discrimination against foreign labour, but because that labour happened to be black, it ended up by institutionalizing racism instead. Instead of institutionalizing discrimination against labour it institutionalized discrimination against a whole people, irrespective of class. In trying to banish racism to the gates, it had confirmed it within the city walls.

* Psychologically it might be — but this is of no interest to capital unless there is profit in it. Socially, it is counter-productive.

** Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago achieved independence in August 1962, Guyana in May 1966, Barbados in November 1966. Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and other small islands became 'non dependent states' in 1967.

The whole thing was particularly untoward because once immigration control had helped to minimize the number of blacks settling in Britain, the 'black problem' itself would have become more manageable. And the lessons of America had not been lost on Britain. Hence in order to counter-act the consequences of the Immigration Acts and to stop black militancy from infecting the body politic, the government embarked on a programme of 'integration'.

The Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council of 1962, however, was no more than a gesture towards integration: its function was to advise the Home Secretary on matters of immigrant welfare. But with the White Paper of 1965 integration began to assume the proportions of a philosophy. In fact the government had, in introducing further controls on immigration, pointed out that the purpose of reducing the numbers coming in was to improve matters for those already within — to improve race relations. 'Without integration', opined a future minister, 'limitation is inexcusable; without limitation, integration is impossible.' [10] Accordingly the government replaced the CIAC with the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI), with lots of money and staff and local liaison committees — and, to vest the effort with sanctity, set the Archbishop of Canterbury at its head. It was an independent body, however, free of government control, but linked to it through a minister in the Home Office with 'special responsibility for immigrants'. The Committee's brief was 'to provide and coordinate on a national basis efforts directed towards the integration of Commonwealth immigrants into the community'.

The government also introduced the first piece of anti-discriminatory legislation in the form of the Race Relations Act of 1965, but this was a half-hearted affair which merely forbade discrimination in 'places of public resort' and, by default, encouraged discrimination in everything else: housing, employment, etc. The incorporation, in the Act, of a clause to 'penalise incitement to racial hatred' turned out to be more useful in imprisoning blacks (and right-wing extremists) than in arresting the exalted nativism of the Rt. Hon. Enoch Powell, Ronald Bell Q.C. and others of their ilk and silk. The discrimination provisions of the Race Relations Act were to be implemented by the Race Relations Board and its local conciliation committees.

But the concern of integration during this period related more to the Asians than to the West Indians. The latter, it was felt, had 'largely been brought up to regard themselves as British', whereas 'Pakistanis and Indians ... showed almost no interest in being integrated'. [11] The Asians, with their different cultures and customs and language and dress, their extended families and sense of community, and their peculiar preference to stay with their own kind, were a society apart. But they were also a people who were

industrious and responsible, anxious to educate themselves, prepared to work hard and move up the social and economic ladder, honest, diligent, 'politic, cautious and meticulous' — all the WASP* virtues which shored up bourgeois society. Besides they too had their creeds and their castes and their classes. They may not be assimilable, but they were certainly made for integration — a parallel society to be accommodated in a pluralist set-up. All that was required was an acceptance of the principles of cultural pluralism on the part of the 'host' population. And it was not as though Britain had not had a tradition of accommodating other cultures and other peoples — only, this time, they happened to be a little more different and a lot more visible. Hence the precision with which the Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, defined integration in May 1966: 'not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'.[12]

The West Indians, on the other hand — it had been assumed — were a part of British culture, an aspect of it, a sub-culture. They spoke the same language, wore the same clothes, followed the same religions. They were not a society apart — only their colour was different. They could be assimilated (though the word used was 'integrated') into the mainstream of British society.** All that was necessary to make them acceptable to the 'host' society was to banish colour prejudice, outlaw racial discrimination.

The NCCI and Race Relations Board, however, did not succeed in even getting that programme off the ground. The Board was virtually a non-starter, so feeble and narrow were the provisions of the 1965 Act. The National Committee discovered discrimination everywhere it went but was frustrated into educating people out of their attitudes. 'Education in school and out of school, education of adults as well as children, education of newcomers as well as the indigenous population, education through conferences, through committee work, through social activities, through the Press ...' dragged on its first annual report in the tones of a forlorn manifesto. Hence in 1966 both bodies jointly commissioned the PEP (Political and Economic Planning) to investigate the extent of racial discrimination. Its report, published a year later, produced evidence to show what everybody knew: that racial discrimination varied in extent from 'the massive to the substantial.'

The profound effects of racism were already showing in the growing militancy of the West Indian community. At first it was only

* WASP = White Anglo-Saxon Protestant — an Americanism.

** In a speech supporting immigration control, Roy Hattersley MP (Labour) remarked that it was now 'necessary to impose a test which tries to analyse which immigrants, as well as having jobs or special skills are most likely to be assimilated into our national life'. This would, he added, favour the English-speaking West Indians as against the Pakistanis (See Sheila Patterson, *Immigration and Race Relations in Britain, 1960-67*, London, OUP for IRR, 1969).

civil rights and Martin Luther King that had claimed their attention.* The Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), set up in December 1964 after Martin Luther King's visit to London in transit to Sweden to receive the Nobel prize for peace, was composed of West Indians (militant and 'normal'), Asians (mostly 'normal') and whites (liberals and radicals). Its task was to fight discrimination by lobbying Whitehall, by asking the government — but in tones so strident as to pass for passion — to be nice to the blacks. But increasing police harassment, particularly of West Indians, mounting discrimination in employment and housing and the relegation of West Indian children to ESN (Educationally Sub-Normal) schools sparked off militant struggles in the Caribbean community. The black rebellion in America gave fillip to black nationalism. And Stokely Carmichael's visit in 1967 signalled the high water mark of revolutionary black politics. CARD, like the proverbial house of cards, folded under the impact, leaving it to the *Times* news team to conclude that 'the ominous lesson of CARD ... is that the mixture of pro-Chinese communism and American-style Black Power on the immigrant scene can be devastating'. [13]

The state was faced, against all its convictions, with an unassimilable black community. The West Indians were not a part of British society after all. They even proclaimed that they had a culture and a tradition and a history of their own. They rejected British values and British culture. And worse, especially for the educationalists who had suddenly come upon the discovery that the West Indian child could not/would not speak English: they rejected the English language itself. Once, as slaves, when they had been forced to accept the white man's language, they had corrupted it so skilfully as to make it unintelligible to the slave-master. Now they sought to 'blacken the language, suffuse it with their own darkness and liberate it from the presence of the oppressor'. [14] And out of that assertion of themselves was springing an anti-capitalist ideology and a politics of revolution. They posed a problem from within British society — they posed the problems of it. They could not be assimilated and they could not, like the Asians, be integrated. They were a canker in the body politic. The body politic itself was threatened. The need for integration and for anti-discriminatory legislation had assumed a new urgency.

But as the government was contemplating fresh legislation, the 'Kenyan Asian' storm broke — and led to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of March 1968. In April Enoch Powell warned his people that 'their wives [were] unable to obtain hospital beds on childbirth, their children unable to obtain school-places, their homes

* Although the Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS), a militant all-black (allegedly black Muslim) group was set up about the same time as CARD, it did not come into prominence till later.

and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition'. In May the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, responded by promising an urban programme which would give substantial aid to local authorities 'in special need'. In October the Race Relations Act became law.

The 1968 Act extended the scope of the 1965 Act to include discrimination in employment (with some exceptions), housing (with some exceptions), credit and insurance facilities and places of public resort. But the breadth of its concerns was belied by the unenforceability of its provisions. The Board would have to rely almost entirely on conciliation to obtain redress. It had no powers of enforcement but could resort to the courts, in extreme cases, to obtain an injunction restraining the defendant from further discriminatory practices. It could order the payment of special damages and damages for the loss of opportunity.* All penny-pinching stuff. Basically the Act was not an act but an attitude.

But then it was never meant to be anything else. Anti-discriminatory legislation was not meant to chastise the wicked or to effect justice for the blacks. If it was, the government would have had no difficulty in making its intention felt in the administration of the law. Its sole purpose, however, was education — the education of the lesser capitalists in the ways of enlightened capital. Racial discrimination was a short-term expedient to exploit a section of the working class, and now that immigration laws were turning immigrants into migrants — and migrants from Europe would soon become available — it was necessary to count the social and political cost of racial friction.

... to domestic neocolonialism

The purpose of the Board as far as the state was concerned was to carry that lesson to employers and local officials. And it was a lesson to be taught not in anger or in punishment but in sorrow and conciliation. The very structure and personnel of the Board and its conciliation committees, marked by the presence of local firms and interests (and token blacks) and the absence of black workers from the factory-floor, bear witness to the point and purpose of the Act.

And yet there have been protestations that the Board has failed. Failed for the masses of the blacks, yes. But it succeeded in what the state meant it to do: to justify the ways of the state to local and sectional interests — and to create, in the process, a class of coloured collaborators who would in time justify the ways of the state to the blacks. One has only to look at the successful cases handled by the Board to see how much of it relates to the alleviation of marginal and often middle-class discrimination. In the year April 1969 to March

* In 1974 the median settlement was £23.50 (*White Paper on Racial Discrimination*, London, HMSO, September 1975).

1970, for instance, the highest percentage of successes recorded related to discrimination in clubs: 50 per cent, the lowest to dismissals in employment: 4 per cent. Or take a look at the Board's journal, *Equals*, not just for the 'black' columnists who rage on the page they are paid for, but to see how the blacks are making it in the system. Sewa Singh Sodi can now play darts for his local against a club that once operated a colour bar. Mr Trevor MacDonald is 'the first black staff reporter to present news on British national T.V.', Mr Yunus Chowdry is the first black man to reach the National Executive of his union, the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, a veritable trade union aristocrat with his own little fiefdom. There is also a first black mayor somewhere in Wales, a first black woman deputy mayor in Camden, and of course there is the black black Lord, Lord Pitt — not the first, but close. And all within the last couple of years.

The 1968 Act also re-formed the existing organization, the NCCI, to create the Community Relations Commission — in order to complement the work of the Race Relations Board. The Commission's task as defined by the Act was to 'promote harmonious community relations', to co-ordinate national action to this end through its local community relations councils, to disseminate information about matters affecting minority groups and to advise the Home Secretary.

In theory, the Commission attempted to combat racial discrimination, the Board to penalize it. In practice, they were both educational and advisory and tended to overlap each other. In effect, they were to one degree or another both instruments of mediation — between sections of the ruling class, between the sectional interests and the blacks and, on the national level, between whites and blacks.

In its seven years of existence, the Commission has succeeded in saturating the key areas of society with information, advice and literature explaining West Indian and Asian peoples to white groups and individuals in positions of influence and power — employers, police, political parties, churches, local authorities, voluntary groups, educationalists, trade unions, the media. It has held conferences and seminars, often jointly (but in an elder capacity by virtue of its specialized and/or statutory position) with bodies such as the NUJ, ILEA, LA, DES* — to in-form the future holders of power: trainees in youth work, community work, teaching, policing, etc. Only in matters of employment and labour relations and the sophistry of statistics has it seemed to rely on the efforts of that 'independent' body, the Runnymede Trust.

In the structure of its local community relations councils, the Commission revealed the success of its local, grassroots effort. In the main appointed by the statutory body, the Commission, and paid by

* National Union of Journalists, Inner London Education Authority, Library Association and Department of Education and Science, respectively.

the local authority, but always governed by Councils which are an exact replica of the local power structure (businessmen, police, political parties, trade unions, headmasters, clergy ...), the office of the Community Relations Officer defines, exactly, 'integration' as the absorption and negation of black discontent: the accommodation within the local status quo of factors that threaten the status quo, the expansion of the status quo itself to accommodate such factors.

But most important of all, the Commission took up the black cause and killed it. With the help of its 'black' staff and its 'black' experts, with the help of an old colonial elite and through the creation of a new one, it financed, assisted and helped to set up black self-help groups, youth clubs, supplementary schools, cultural centres, homes and hostels. It defined and ordained black studies; it investigated black curricula; it gave a name and a habitation to black rhetoric. And finally, almost in a last blaze of glory, the Commission, funded for this purpose by the Gulbenkian Foundation, brought together at a residential conference in an opulent hotel in January 1975 a cross-section of black activists, gave up the platform to the most militant blacks and itself sat in the aisles, servicing the black people.* Aptly, in view of the new dependent relationship that the black community was entering into, the Conference was named 'Black People: The Way Forward'. And out of that conference has emerged a new black committee one of whose functions will be to advise the Gulbenkian Foundation (shades of Ford) where to put its money** — in itself an indication that the black programmes can now be safely left to private enterprise.

The Commission's task is over. The Race Relations Bill (February 1976) sees that its work is good and that its work is done. It has taught the white power structure to accept the blacks and it has taught the blacks to accept the white power structure. It has successfully taken politics out of the black struggle and returned it to rhetoric and nationalism on the one hand and to the state on the other. It has, together with the Board, created a black bourgeoisie, especially West Indian (the Asian bourgeoisie was already in the wings), to which the state can now hand over control of black dissidents in general and black youth in particular. Britain has moved from institutional racism to domestic neo-colonialism.

* At about the same time the Home Office announced the granting of Urban Aid to 'urban areas facing special social problems' to the tune of £7,000,000. Some of the black self-help groups to be aided were: Harambee Accommodation Project, London (£281,000), Southall Education and Community Project (£250,000), Pakistani Association Youth and Community Centre, Liverpool (£79,216), Leeds Asian Institute (£68,000), Brixton Neighbourhood Centre (£60,000), Melting Pot Accommodation Scheme, London (£51,000), George Jackson House Trust, Manchester (£32,000) (Home Office, *Urban Programme Circulars*, Nos 11 and 12, January 1975).

** Its other function is to set up a National Black People's Organization which will presumably represent black people on the new Race Relations Commission.

In terms of the larger picture, what has been achieved in half a decade is the accommodation of West Indian militant politics within the framework of social democracy. The Asians had already settled into the cultural pluralist set-up ordained for them by the state as far back as a decade ago. They had their own TV and radio programmes, their mosques and their temples, their shops and cinemas and social centres. More importantly, they had thrown up leaders and spokesmen who spoke to and worked with the state. They had remained parallel in terms of culture, they had merged in terms of class. Only in regard to the Asian working class was there any trouble. Their strikes at Courtauld's and Woolf's and Mansfield Hosiery and Imperial Typewriters had threatened the system as few strikes did — for they were subsidized and supported by the community, united across divisions of labour and possessed of a genius for organization and obstinacy against all sorts of odds (including trade union ones). But these strikes were mostly one-off things that a combination of Asian leadership and trade union racism had prevented from growing into a movement.* In the outcome they fell prey to the system — or to the roseate politics of international socialism.

The strategy of the state in relation to the Asians had been to turn cultural antagonism into cultural pluralism — in relation to the West Indians, to turn political antagonism into political pluralism.** The process, in the case of the Asians, was first to free them from cultural oppression so as to help them 'modernize' their own class hierarchies and social structure — and then slot them into mainstream society. The West Indians, however, had to undergo a different process — for they were an aspect of British culture and society and yet outside it, even antithetical to it. Their similarities might have arisen from a master-slave history into which they had been locked in deathly embrace, but that same history had produced a culture and a politics that were mortally anti-white and anti-capital. The task, therefore, was to separate their antagonisms: to leave them anti-white but make them pro-capital. The task was to free them from the dishonour of racism so that they could honour the blandishments of capital. They had to be allowed to move upwards within the existing system so that they would not threaten to transform it into a different system.

But there was still 'the second generation'. All the other blacks had been found a place within the system, but the young blacks stood outside it. As though to confirm the dialectics of history they, the British born, carry the politics of their slave ancestry. And so it is to

* The British Asians from Uganda who fled to Britain in 1972 are, by and large, an entrepreneurial class — and have with their landlordism, super-markets and chain stores largely replaced the small-time grocer and landlord who were supportive of the strikes.

** Cultural pluralism and political pluralism are both accommodations made by the system in the superstructure so as to consolidate the economic base.

them that the state now turns its attention in the Race Relations Bill of February 1976 and the White Paper that heralded it.

THE POLITICS OF THE WHITE PAPER

Listen to the voice, the anxieties of the state:

the character of the coloured population resident in this country has changed dramatically over the decade. Ten years ago, less than a quarter of the coloured population had been born here: more than three out of every four coloured persons then were immigrants to this country ... About two out of every five of the coloured people in this country now were born here and the time is not far off when the majority of the coloured population will be British born.

Some of these the state has already mobilized by affording them places in universities and colleges of higher education, others it has taken care of — in borstals, mental homes and prisons. But some, in a completely unprecedented new phenomenon, have picked up the gun — not of course in the organized manner of a revolutionary political party or even as a movement (for as one small fragment of a very small minority, black youth qua black youth cannot have a mass base) but as self-ordained soldiers of the people.* That is not to romanticize their futile ambition to lay siege to the state but to acknowledge, even while acknowledging the romanticism of the act, the deep dark concern out of which their commitment springs. It is to acknowledge their gesture as a new language of resistance — and to refute the definition which the state through years of indoctrination has persuaded the black under-class to accept as the language of gangsterism. It is to refute that the ideas of the ruling class are the 'only rational, universally valid ones'. [15] It is to refute, in the particular, that other romanticism of anti-organization blacks which holds that unemployed black youth or, rather, anti-employment black youth are 'gunning for a wage'. [16] It is, in other words, to refute the 'ideology' of these political romanticists that if every dissident section of society did its own thing, capitalism would lie down and die — it is to refute the politics of spontaneism which Gramsci equates with opportunism. And it is to assert that 'the union of spontaneity and conscious leadership, or discipline is the real political action of subaltern classes, in so far as this is mass politics and not merely an adventure by groups claiming to represent the masses'. [17]

For, the anxiety of the state about rebellious black youth stems not from the rhetoric of professional black militants (whose dissidence it can accommodate and legitimize within the system) but from the

* A significant case is pending and cannot be discussed here in the specific.

fear of the mass politics that it may generate in the black under-class and in that other discriminated minority the migrant workers and perhaps in the working class as a whole — particularly in a time of massive unemployment and urban decay.

Almost a decade earlier the Home Secretary had warned the country against the future depredations of the second generation and argued for timely attempts at 'civilised living and social cohesion'. Now in the White Paper the same Home Secretary pointed out the 'politically grave consequences' of continued racism.

If ... job opportunities, educational facilities, housing and environmental conditions are all poor, the next generation will grow up less well-equipped to deal with the difficulties facing them. The wheel then comes full circle, as the second generation find themselves trapped in poor jobs and poor housing. If, at each stage of this process an element of racial discrimination enters in, then an entire group of people are launched on a vicious downward spiral of deprivation.

Thus the Bill's intention is not just to outlaw discrimination but to carry the fight against discrimination into every area of society — housing, education, employment, trade unions, local government, vocational training bodies, etc. And more significantly, it means to *enforce* the law. The law is no longer an instrument of education; it is an instrument of compulsion. More, it will redress the balance of discrimination in some areas by discriminating in favour of the disadvantaged blacks; for it acknowledges at last that although 'they may share each of the disadvantages with some other deprived group in society ... few other groups in society display all their accumulated disadvantages'. 'It is no longer necessary to recite the immense danger, material as well as moral, which ensues when a minority loses faith in the capacity of social institutions to be impartial and fair.' And that is why the Government believes that 'it is vital to our well-being as a society to tap these reservoirs of resilience, initiative and vigour in the racial minority groups and not to allow them to lie unused or to be deflected into negative protest on account of arbitrary and unfair discriminatory practices'.

Hence the new Race Relations Commission which will replace both the Board and the Commission 'will have a major *strategic* role in *enforcing* the law in the *public interest*' (emphasis added).

However that interest is defined — as 'the public interest' or the national interest or, unashamedly, the ruling class interest — it is certainly the interest of capital. For capital requires racism not for racism's sake but for the sake of capital. Hence at a certain level of economic activity (witness the colonies) it finds it more profitable to abandon the idea of superiority of race in order to promote the idea of the superiority of capital. Racism dies in order that capital might survive.

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