

Ch 2. Roots

The Origins and Growth of Racism



The Effects of Imperialism on Black People

If we have to go back to the 1930s to understand fascism, we have to go back much further to understand racism. Racism can not simply be reduced to the prejudiced attitudes — or racialism — of one race towards another. There are many people who are free from explicit racialism, but who help maintain and profit from racism. By racism we mean the whole process of domination and oppression of whites over non-whites which is built into all the major institutions in society — the state, workplaces, housing and so on. Racialism has played a key role in supporting and justifying the racism inherent in these institutions.

In this chapter we will examine the racism of whites against blacks. This racism has its roots in the imperialism of the past and is sustained today by the imperialism of the present. We shall chart its historical development from the early days of plunder and slavery, through the establishment of colonialism to the present neo-colonialism and immigration of black people to Britain. This will lead into a discussion of the racism of the British state and of the white working class. We will show how the images in which black people are presented have changed and that these changes are related to the different ways blacks have been dominated and oppressed.

The British Empire was always racist. While the white colonists of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand were granted representative government,

responsibility for their own affairs, and, finally, Dominion status, black peoples were subjected to the economic and political rule of whites. For blacks, the reality of the imperial connection has been the plunder of their countries' material resources, their people's labour, and the deliberate underdevelopment of their economies by the capitalist west. Imperialism has divided the world into the rich nations and the poor, and the rich are rich because the poor are poor. Resources which belonged to the Third World are siphoned off to enrich the west.

The frequently quoted claim that the European Empires have helped the rest of the world by dragging it into the modern age is a lie. The effect of capitalism on the economies of the third world has been to alter the direction of their development to make it easier to exploit them. For example the railways built in West Africa, and the tarmac roads, were no more than simple feeders linking areas which produced the crops and minerals Europe wanted with the ports on the coast. The British made little attempt to develop communications in such a way that the internal as distinct from the export economy of the colonies would be stimulated. These railways were all directed to the coast, with no links between them, and of different gauges, so that a rationalisation of the railway system of West Africa today is impossible.

Another clear example of the role of imperialism is Britain's encouragement of the opium trade in China which it kept going by fighting wars against those Chinese who saw the link between opium

addiction and subservience to imperialism. Yet another example is India, where British rule reinforced the caste system and the religious beliefs that emphasised the inevitability of poverty and subordination to others. It also led to the effective destruction of the Indian textile industry and its replacement by the textile industry of the north of England.

Overall, the effect of imperialism on the rest of the world was to fix their economies in a role subordinate to the west, both by enforcing through tariffs and taxes one-sided specialisation such as growing a particular crop or mining a particular mineral, and by exploiting the labour of people in their own countries, as gold miners in South Africa or tea planters in Ceylon. And for all those people the experience of western 'civilisation' was an experience of extreme disruption of established ways of life. In some cases, as in the Caribbean, whole peoples were destroyed by diseases imported by the colonists; in other cases, as in North America and South Africa, people were denied the right to their land, which was also the source of their livelihood. And generally, the only beneficiaries of imperialism, apart from the imperialists themselves, were an upper class which filled its pockets with the fruits of oppression and acted as the local police force for western interests. Acknowledging what imperialism has done to black people is the first step in fighting the racist myth that blacks are poor because they are inferior.

The Historical Development of Racism

Early European Imperialism: Plunder and Slavery

Early European imperialism took the form of the primitive accumulation of capital via plunder of wealth, as in the case of the Spanish in South America, and the plunder of people in the slave trade. This capital, together with that gained from the enclosure of land in this country, enabled Britain to industrialise. Thus industrial capitalism was from the start built on the backs of the third world. The readiness of the British government at one point in the 18th century to trade in the whole of Canada to France for the one Caribbean slave island of Guadeloupe, measuring a little over 500 square miles, gives a hint of what was at stake.

From the first, black people were defined as substantially inferior to all Europeans. What was crucial was not blackness, but the meaning given to this blackness. Red hair is also a distinct physical characteristic, but it has never carried any important cultural significance. Blackness had a definite place in European Christian imagery, a place reinforced by the very different religions from Christianity practised by black people. Black equalled evil, death, sin, the forces of darkness, Satan. The slave trade and the plunder of the Aztec and Inca peoples posed obvious problems to the consciences of Christian Europeans. If we were all equal under God, then how come some enslave others and take away their human birthright? The only answer, apart from abolishing slavery, was to declare Africans to be not fully human. To this end the Pope gave his sanction to the Spanish occupation of South America, and the church evolved the doctrine that Africans were descended from a son of Noah's who had attracted to himself God's particular dislike. The definition of blacks as biologically inferior was far more vicious than earlier religious dismissals of them. At least people can change their religion. If the basis of inequality is biological, then it was permanent, reflecting the status of enslavement generation after generation.

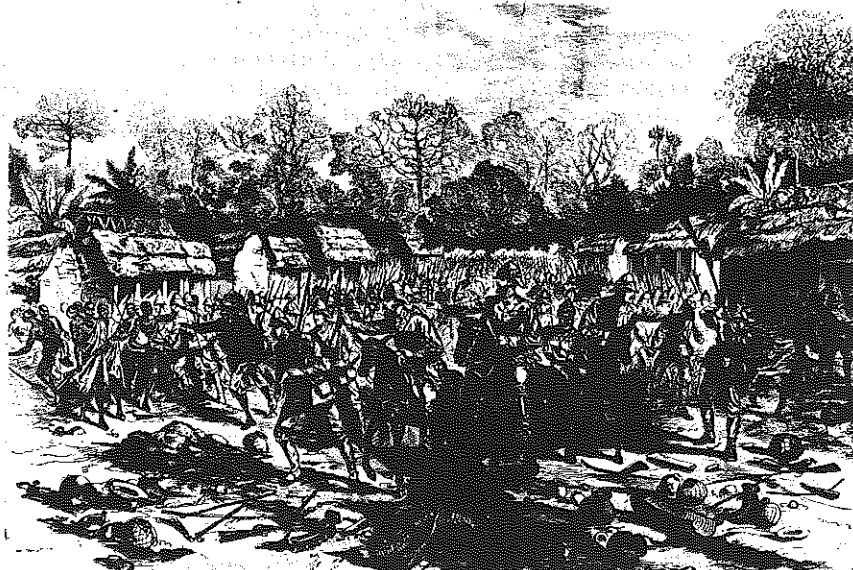
When the slave trade was finally abolished, by Britain in 1807, it was not because of criticisms of the racist justifications for it, but because imperialism's needs were changing. The British West Indian planters already had enough slaves by 1807, and wished to keep this advantageous position over the colonies of other countries by denying them further imports of black African labour. The British navy ruled the seas and could thereby enforce this on other imperialist nations. The same planters were in addition beginning to realise that free wage labour was more efficient, as they were not obliged to feed and house waged workers as they were with slaves. Thirdly, the British could not persuade West Africans to take up palm oil production while paying them more for slaves.

However none of these factors would have ended slavery had the hand of imperialism not been forced by the growing threat of slave rebellions. One of these revolts led to the founding of the free black settlement of Palmares in North Eastern Brazil, and yet another shattered the Dutch colony of Surinam, the slaves founding a state of their own and holding it against the Dutch army. The largest of these revolutions took place in Haiti during and after the French revolution of 1789. The slaves took up the demands of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', only to find there was one law for the French and another for them. They therefore rose, under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, and took possession of the country. Bitter struggles followed in which first the French and then the British armies failed to defeat them.

Although so-called 'humanitarian' arguments were used by the anti-slavery lobby at the time of abolition, they completely failed to challenge the racist view of black people. Wilberforce, the most famous abolitionist, saw Africans as 'fallen men'. By arousing emotions of sympathy, the abolitionists made Africans into objects of pity, which in turn produced contempt.

1884 at the Congress of Berlin to allocate areas of Africa to the domination of particular powers. They were spurred on at that time by the fear of protectionism — that rival imperialist powers would erect tariff barriers around their colonies, prohibiting other nations from commercial activity in them. It therefore became important to grab as much territory as possible before this happened. Another important factor behind the growth of the European empires was the growing militancy of the various working classes at home. All this led to the 'Scramble for Africa' whereby Africa began the 1890s with only 1/10th of its territory under European control and ended that decade with only 1/10th still independent.

The theme of the need for British colonialism was taken up in an unprecedented quantity of racist propaganda contained in the new mass-produced newspapers of the time 'Trusteeship', 'The Civilising Mission' and 'the White Man's Burden' were the catchphrases. Writers took up and distorted Charles Darwin's doctrine of 'The Survival of the Fittest', concluding that blacks were less fitted by nature to survive, prosper and improve their conditions of existence. When, through



British troops entering Kumasi in 1874 during the wars on Asante

Colonialism and the 'Scramble for Africa'

English schoolchildren of the last century were taught to sing: 'Wider yet and wider shall thy bounds be set' in honour of the Empire — a warning that British annexations were not yet at an end. Indeed they weren't, and neither could they be. Capitalism could not function as a closed system, but only through interaction with a realm outside itself — a second or third world to provide a market for capital investment and manufactures. Such considerations were uppermost in the minds of the imperialist powers when they met in

emancipation, slaves were hurled into market relations in a continuously contracting agricultural sector, their plight was taken by Social Darwinists as triumphant proof of the African's inferiority and incapacity to survive in the so-called 'modern' world. Similarly, the ability of Britain to industrialise and thereby acquire a technological lead over the rest of the world led to an arrogant dismissal of societies which were technologically less advanced. The fact that Britain was technologically advanced because it held other peoples in a state of economic underdevelopment was conveniently ignored.

Colonialism was explained on the grounds that the European's 'civilising mission' was to take over the welfare of 'inferior races', to raise them from their present 'misery' by introducing them to the superior culture of the European. For example Lord Leverhulme said at a dinner in honour of the Governor of Nigeria: 'I am certain that the West African races have to be treated very much as one would treat children when they are immature and underdeveloped. . . Now the organising ability is the particular trait and characteristic of the white man. . . . I say this with my experience, that the African native will be happier, produce the best and live under conditions of prosperity when his labour is directed and organised by his white brother who has all these millions of years start ahead of him'.

The White Man's Burden

The fallacy of the notion of a 'civilising mission' is easily demonstrated by the case of India. Before the arrival of British colonialism it had a civilisation and a culture with a very long history. Colonialism not only destroyed the Indian textile industry and condemned the mass of Indians to a cycle of poverty. It destroyed the way of life and cultural activities which had persisted for centuries. The biggest burden of the white man in India was to convince the Indians that it was the white man that had the burden. This was not unique to India. All peoples suppressed by imperialism had a history that was denied them by the arrogance of the colonialists, and many had a rich and well-developed culture that was either suppressed, kept going for the tourist purposes or only able to re-emerge in new forms, like the reggae/calypso culture in the Caribbean, or the blues/jazz culture in the US. New elites were created in the colonies, suitably educated in the western traditions and culture, who became the state officials and the middle management. In Africa they were said to have 'white faces, black marks'.

For all the European's belief in their own 'civilising mission' they were continually forced to be aware that most of the world did not agree with them. Rudyard Kipling's portrayal of most of the world's inhabitants as 'new-caught sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child', shows that their resistance, even if as devilish as their blackness, was still felt. They were not content to be the childish

Sambos of the white imagination. Many of them did not take being colonised lying down. There was the Indian 'Mutiny' of 1857, the Jamaica uprising of 1865, the Boxer rebellions in China of 1899-1901 and many other examples of 'ingratitude' for the blessings of European civilisation. This resistance to colonialism was taken as further proof of its necessity amidst the production of terms of abuse for the resisters — kaffir, savages, barbarians — which still contribute to

present day attitudes.

We have shown in this section how imperialism left a dual legacy to the twentieth century. It established capitalism as an international system in which oppressor nations (all white) systematically exploited oppressed nations (mostly black); and it built the ideology of racialism to explain and justify itself. Modern twentieth century capitalism has seen changes in the form but not in the essence of these realities.



Racism in Modern Capitalism

During this century imperialism has fused with certain twentieth century forces to thereby change the basis of racist oppression. Since the gaining of formal political independence, black people have been oppressed and exploited both by neo-colonialism in the world as a whole and as immigrants in the capitalist countries where many of them live. These

twin forms of oppression, the acceleration and generalisation of black liberation struggles, and the ideology of racialism are all interconnected. The motor force of all these developments has been the worldwide liberation struggles of black people, so it is with that that we start. When we discuss racism we must always avoid the danger of seeing black people as

its passive victims, when in fact they are constantly struggling in a variety of ways against it.

The roots of black nationalism and the movement towards independence were embedded in the colonial situation where attendance at western schools by some, participation in government, and fighting in European wars exposed the

contradictions in the system and dispelled myths of white superiority. The ensuing liberation struggles were recuperated by imperialism in two main ways — 1. Capitalism had to find another way of exploiting blacks, which it did in neo-colonialism; and 2. Racialism had to adapt itself to the new facts of black liberation struggle, black independence and neo-colonialism.

Neo-Colonialism

Third world countries are independent in name only. The one-sided and underdeveloped nature of their economies make them dependent on western capitalism. Political dominance has been replaced by rule through multinational companies and the 'aid' fraud. In a similar way to hire purchase, capital export and the export of goods on credit keeps the third world economies subservient to those of the west. The British government has stated clearly that aid builds up an infrastructure which prepares the way for private investment. The American President of the World Bank was even more specific; speaking in 1965 he said: 'Our foreign aid programme constitutes a distinct benefit to American business. The three major benefits are: (1) Foreign aid provides a substantial and immediate market for US goods and services; (2) foreign aid stimulates the development of new overseas markets for US companies; (3) foreign aid orientates national economies towards a free enterprise system in which US firms can prosper.'

Three quarters of world aid and 64% of British aid is 'tied', which means it must be spent on goods provided by the aid-giving country, even when they are available cheaper elsewhere. Aid is also tied politically and may be withdrawn

after a political disagreement between the two countries. The effect of this aid is to pauperise the third world countries as they build up external debts and some are now paying back more to Britain each year than they receive in aid. The third world is impeded from accumulating capital which would allow the development of its economies because of the transfer of the wealth that is produced back to the western countries through the multinational companies which control much of these economies and because of the unequal way in which goods are exchanged between the third world and the west. Without accumulating this capital the underdeveloped countries are unable to switch to producing goods which need expensive, complex technology to make and which are also the most profitable on the world market.

Neo-colonialism has its roots in the various systems of 'indirect rule' to which imperialism has turned when faced with anti-imperialist struggles. In situations where the independence movement was likely to result in rule by a black oligarchy, Britain and others smoothed its path. A Foreign Office memorandum of 1919 remarked that 'The policy pursued by the Germans in Turkey, Russia and elsewhere before the war has shown how it is possible for a foreign people to exploit the resources of a country of which they have not the political control'.

This strategy was not applicable in all situations, however, either because the anti-imperialist movement was led by revolutionaries or because of the inflexibility of particular colonial regimes. Portuguese imperialism, for instance, found it difficult to apply neo-colonialist principles because its form of colonialism

had created a privileged white settler class in Angola, backed up by a fascist regime at home. Similarly, British policy in Northern Ireland had created the Frankenstein of Loyalism, dedicated to preserving its ascendancy and the status quo. In such cases there have been prolonged guerilla wars between independence movements and the imperialist armies.

Aid

Just as imperialism has tried to recuperate independence struggles by use of 'puppet' classes and neo-colonialism, the ideology of racialism has adapted to the new realities. Neo-colonialism is masked by the ideology of foreign aid, referred to in the US as 'Uncle Sam's Santa Claus Policy'. This has been almost totally successful, hence the importance of making clear the reality of neo-colonialism. Most working class people believe that the west is actually helping the poor countries. This belief, when set along the obvious failure of independent black states to escape from poverty and underdevelopment despite 'aid', leads directly to racialist explanations. The continued poverty of black countries is taken as triumphant proof of their incapacity for self-government: 'after all, when the leaders they produce are clowns like Idi Amin. . . .'. This belief is complemented by the equally erroneous view that Britain 'granted' independence to black peoples. Although a great deal of show was made at the time of presenting the changeover in this way — members of the Royal Family performing the rituals, etc. — the reality was that the only alternative to getting out was to be thrown out.



The portrayal of liberation movements in the third world helps to reinforce racialism in Britain. When they are black 'terrorists' are also presented as barbaric 'savages', and the mass media treat us to frequent doses of 'atrocities' stories. For example the headlines in the British press after the Kolwezi 'massacre' in Zaire during May 1978 proclaimed '44 whites massacred', 'Britons in peril' and 'Rebel chief says "We'll kill all whites"'. This presented the events as a race war, when in fact many more black people died than whites. This press coverage is of immense help to the National Front and others who step in to mount a 'Defend our kith and kin' campaign over Zimbabwe.

Racism and Immigration

Black people are oppressed as immigrants in the capitalist countries, thereby reproducing within a single country the worldwide domination of imperialism. Black immigration has occurred because of the effects of neo-colonialism on the third world, coupled with the changing labour requirements inside the capitalist countries. For many third world peasants, neo-colonialism has meant the loss of their land and enforced migration to the shanty towns around the major cities of their countries and conditions of infamous poverty. Post-independence mechanisation of agriculture – the so-called 'Green Revolution' – has been at the core of these population movements. Meanwhile in western Europe, the loss of lives and damage to plant and transport brought about by the second world war occasioned a labour shortage, particularly in traditionally low-paid jobs. The same thing was happening all over the capitalist world; in the US the extra labour came from the blacks of the deep south, the whites of the Appalachians and from Mexico and Puerto Rico. In France,



Germany, Scandinavia and the Benelux countries, workers came from southern Europe and North Africa. British capitalism preferred to recruit from the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent because the people there were already British citizens and could settle here without the government having to change the Aliens Act. Enoch Powell, Tory Minister of Health, was one of those responsible for the encouragement of black immigration.

Just as the Irish immigrants had come here in the 1840s to provide the labour for the railway boom, post-war black immigration occurred at the behest of capitalism. Indeed, migration is vital to western capitalism, as these figures show:

*Migrant workers
as % of the labour force (1974).*

Belgium	7%
France	9%
Germany	11%
Switzerland	28%
Britain	7%

These workers – 10 million of them – are nearly all drawn from countries underdeveloped by imperialism: Ireland,

Southern Europe, North Africa, India, Pakistan and the West Indies. Imperialism has created the conditions where these workers can choose either to stay in the oppressed nations and barely subsist or migrate to the imperialist nations to do the jobs that white workers won't do.

This immigration has created problems for capitalism – its own racialist ideology has been taken in by the white working class, and has resulted in a hostility to black immigration which ran counter to the system's new need for that immigration. More recently, of course, the needs of capitalism – for severe restrictions on black immigration – have swung back into line with racialism.

The oppression of black immigrants as members of the working class

Black immigrants in Britain suffer from a dual oppression – both as members of the working class and as a racially oppressed group. Immigrant labour differs from indigenous labour in several important respects which British capitalism takes advantage of in order to maintain its rate of profit: firstly, by the provision of cheap labour to do the worst



jobs; secondly, by enabling expansion of shift working; and finally by reducing the cost of social services while making lower demands on those services.

They are over-represented in low-paid public sector jobs — a 1968 survey showed that 22.3% of hospital ancillary staff were immigrants, whereas immigrants were only 5.9% of the economically active population. Similarly, immigrants make a lower demand on social services than the rest of the population, partly because they are on average younger, but also because the cost of bringing up an immigrant worker (the cost of education, health treatment, etc.) falls upon the country from which he or she came, and

not on Britain. This factor becomes less important as an increasing proportion of black people were born in Britain and this is behind the state's moves away from reliance on settler immigration and towards the continental model of migrant contract labour.

Thus the position of blacks in the workforce and as consumers of social expenditure puts them in the vanguard of the struggle against all the main attacks on the working class — wage controls, productivity and rationalisation, cuts in the social wage and unemployment. Blacks are in this vanguard position because they are the most exploited section of the working class, a situation

which is compounded by their oppression via discrimination in housing, health and education, and their over-representation in the ranks of the unemployed.

Racist ideology has succeeded to some extent in explaining the position of blacks at the bottom of society as a consequence of their 'natural' inferiority, and suitability for shitwork, but such justifications run thin in the face of the struggle of blacks against the place allotted to them. This means that racialsists have to actually deny a lot of this discrimination, while simultaneously justifying other aspects of it under the slogan of 'Britons first'.

The State and Immigration Control

Why immigration controls exist

Immigration control is, first and foremost, *labour control* — a means by which capitalism regulates the rights of working class people in line with its requirements for labour. The jobs which immigrants were brought here to do — low-paid, and often involving shiftwork — were being created by the increasingly automated, integrated and capital-intensive production process. Thus the employment of blacks fitted in precisely with the needs of advanced capital, with its capital-intensive work processes which need to be used round the clock to give a return on the capital employed. By the early 60s labour shortages were limited to professionals such as doctors and skilled manual workers. British capitalism's pressing need to increase the productivity of labour reduced the demand for unskilled workers. The little skilled labour that existed in the black commonwealth was recruited, and after 1964 only those blacks whose training was paid for by their home country and with some qualifications for jobs already available in Britain were allowed in. Moreover, as rationalisation was accelerated in the name of productivity, the ensuing structural unemployment meant that British capitalism could generate its reserve army of labour internally and had no further need for immigrants.

These developments were anticipated by capitalism, as is shown by the various policies adopted during the 1960s and early 70s. The context in which these policies were adopted may be summarised as follows: firstly, since the mid-60s there has been no need for black immigration to the UK; secondly, that blacks have, for the most part, citizen rights, and are numerically strong. This makes it politically impossible to make them leave the country. Moreover, they perform crucial roles in several sectors of the economy. Thirdly, the problem for capitalism is therefore how to control those blacks already here so that they do not pose a threat to the system.

The Successive Immigration Acts

The history of the successive Immigration Acts can be summarised



fairly briefly. Up until 1962 there was no restriction on immigration from the former colonial Empire. As a result of successful lobbying from right wing Tory M.P.s and papers like the *Daily Telegraph*, the first Act to Limit Immigration was passed. It eliminated the right of Commonwealth citizens to come to Britain without work vouchers. At first sight it did not seem to be particularly anti-black at all, but both its inspiration and its implementation at ports and airports definitely were so. The Labour opposition swore to repeal it. When Labour came to power in 1964 with a majority of four, it was increasingly aware that it was reckoned to be pro-black, not least by white working class

voters. In August 1965 they renewed the Act they had sworn to repeal, and reduced the number of work vouchers for those coming from the Commonwealth to 8,500 working males per year, their dependants, and the dependants of those already here. In November 1964, Sir Frank Soskice, the Home Secretary, stated, 'The Government is convinced that effective control is indispensable. That we accept and have always accepted'.

The so-called era of 'mass' immigration was over by 1965, but the competition between the main parliamentary parties to be seen to be 'touch on immigration' had begun. Little effort was made to disguise the racist character of immigration controls. Roy Hattersley said in March 1965, 'I now believe there are social as well as economic arguments for control . . . we must impose a test to decide which immigrants are most likely to be assimilated into our national life'. He went on to say such a test would fall most heavily on Pakistanis. In 1968 Labour acted again, introducing another Immigration Act to screw down to 1500 households a year the entry of East African Asians with British passports. Racist agitation over the Kenyan Asians got the bill through both houses of parliament in five days flat!

In 1971 the Tories brought in another Immigration Act which added new and more vicious dimensions to the snowball process. It systematised and regularised all the unpleasant informal practices of Immigration officials over the last ten years. The Act gave the state administrative powers, outside parliamentary checks, to allow in or exclude just as many migrant workers from any one country as it chose. The presence here of migrant workers was made dependent on their keeping their job, so tying them to harsher labour discipline. Automatic citizenship for new migrants from the Commonwealth after five years' residence was cancelled, thereby giving sanction to police raids and harassment of blacks in supposed searches for illegal immigrants and discreet provisions were made for deportation. Most important of all the Act introduced a distinction between two

types of immigrants. There were 'patrials' who had a connection of birth, residence or through their parents with the UK and had the right to enter Britain, and 'non patrials' who would be allowed entry in even more limited numbers but with no right of settlement.

The successive Immigration Acts fall into a number of phases: encouraging and allowing the *external immigration* of the 1950s and early 1960s; imposing constraints and restrictions on immigration through *external controls* from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, so that by the latter date primary immigration (i.e. mainly male workers not involving dependents) had all but stopped; and imposing *internal controls* both directly repressive and ideologically 'deflective', through the 1970s and increasingly in recent years. The 1971 Immigration Act and the present Tory proposals (see Chapter Four, 'Fightback') show the British state casting an envious eye on the system of 'Gastarbeiter' ('guest worker') which operates in other EEC countries. These workers are recruited from southern Europe, North Africa and Turkey with no citizens' rights / right to vote, enter the country freely, etc) and can be simply sent home if a recession comes, or if they become too militant.

'Immigrant' and 'Immigration' have come to be — with the recent addition of 'mugging' — the words summarising and condensing the politics of racism in Britain. Newspapers even talk about 'Immigrant babies born here' — a contradiction in terms, until you realise that 'Immigrant' is usually the term the white British use to avoid admitting that they are *anti-black*. As a term, it focuses on their foreignness, and their 'lack' of an English culture. They appear, as Enoch Powell put it, as 'an unprecedented invasion of the body politic', or, as Margaret Thatcher put it, as 'swamping' our British culture. It is taken for granted that immigration is the problem. The only question is how much it should be reduced by.

Race Relations

During the 1960s and 1970s the state's has been to balance the deep-seated racialism in British society, on the one hand, and the growing strength of the black working class, on the other, in a way which created least disruption of the capitalist economy and political system. It set out to achieve these ends by the 'unifying' strategy of simultaneously promising to the indigenous white population that no further blacks would be allowed in the country except as dependents (and this too would quickly come to an end) and promising to blacks the prospect of justice within the system including possibilities for self-advancement.

The race riots which took place in Notting Hill in 1958 (stirred up by fascist agitators) signalled the emergence into public life of racism. They were followed in 1963 by the sensational election in Smethwick of an overtly racist Tory candidate. The riots of blacks in Los Angeles in 1965 equally signalled the



The welcome given to Ugandan Asians

emergence of blacks as a political force in the advanced capitalist states. In Britain the tone was set by the newly elected Labour Government, which after it had screwed down black immigration still further, introduced the 1965 Race Relations Act. This avowedly set out to redress the grievances of blacks, whilst at the same time educating society as a whole to accept blacks as an essential part of the economic life of the nation. In practice the Race Relations Act has had a negligible effect and the few people who have been successfully prosecuted under it have often been militant *blacks*.

Thus started the state's concerted attempts to counter black militancy by adopting a strategy similar to that which produced a black elite in the old colonies. A whole variety of semi-state bodies such as the Community Relations Commission were established at both a local and a national level. All these bodies had virtually no power. Their main purpose has been to *monitor* development on behalf of blacks, to *deflect* protest through *proper* channels recognised by the state, and thereby to *control* black struggles by a process of *mediation and representation*. This is their overall function and purpose. They have had a certain amount of success but they need to be seen by the black communities themselves as representatives — this they have largely failed.

In addition to the ideological and political role fulfilled by the CRC's etc, the state has, probably with more impact, sought to alleviate the conditions in which blacks found themselves in the 'deprived, inner city areas' where they are concentrated. Thus considerable amounts of state money have gone into urban programmes. Such a strategy serves an important second purpose of providing jobs for those members of the black community who put themselves forward or show militancy of 'leadership capacities'. Thus the state provides a ready channel to places higher up the job hierarchy for aspiring blacks. Along with this go attempts to create and foster a sizeable black petty-bourgeoisie and even bourgeois layer. Even if *some* of the local CRCs have on occasions made useful contributions to the anti-racist struggle, this does not affect the state's original intentions for those bodies. The state's attempts to integrate blacks should be borne in mind when we consider the other side of its strategy — that is repression — to which we now turn.

Living on the Front Line

The developing consciousness of blacks began to manifest itself in the industrial field in the early 1960s. The disputes not only grew numerically, but in the 1970s several of them became national causes — Mansfield Hosiery in

1972, STC in 1973, Imperial Typewriters the following year and Grunwicks in 1976. In these struggles black workers were struggling against the wages and shitwork involved in being a specially oppressed section of the working class, and so inevitably had to fight the racism of the trade unions and of white workers. The strength of these industrial struggles was often that black communities organised around the disputes in the same way that mining villages have traditionally done.

This went hand in hand with an increasingly militant fight against the general harassment by the police, using the sus and immigration laws (in Chapter Three, 'Up Against the Wall', we shall discuss these examples of state racism in more detail). The ensuing mass trials of young blacks — the Cricklewood 11, the

Islington 18, the Lewisham 21 etc. — took on, increasingly, the character of the black community *as a whole* against the police. The older first generation blacks (who have often, mistakenly, been seen as playing a reactionary role) sided strongly with their youth against the police.

The developing black culture has also been a battleground between the state's racism and the black community. The biggest clashes have been at events like the Brixton Reggae festival of 1973, and the police attempt to break up the Notting Hill carnivals of the late 70s. There have been countless other raids on black clubs and parties. Reggae and Rastafarianism have played a key role in giving young West Indians in Britain their own sense of cultural identity and solidarity.

All these three levels — industrial

militancy, resistance to the police, and the struggle for a specifically black culture — together constitute a generalised political resistance, despite the lack of any major autonomous political organisations. Thus, the situation of twenty years ago, when black immigrants, anticipating that they would probably return home before long, were generally 'grateful' for the job opportunities available in Britain, and had various illusions about 'British fair play' has been transformed into one which has no easy resolution for the ruling class. Their attempts to persuade blacks to 'return home' have had little effect. Now more than 40% of blacks were born here and know no other country. This young generation, as the state has long since realised, will increasingly refuse to settle for second class status.

Photo: Peter Slepokura



The funeral procession of Michael Ferreira passing Stoke Newington police station

Racialism in the White Working Class

Some people on the left regard racialism as nothing other than 'false consciousness' which the bourgeoisie has 'conned' the workers into believing. Tariq Ali, for example, has said in *Socialist Challenge*: "There is no real material basis for working class racism in Britain. It is today the accumulated ideological product of Britain's past", and the Revolutionary Communist Group has echoed this in the issue of its journal on 'Racism, Imperialism and the Working Class': "Only the working class, is capable of a relentless and uncompromising struggle against British Imperialism, since it is the only class which has no interest in the maintenance of Imperialism." Both contain elements of the truth: yes, the

accumulated ideological product of Britain's imperialist past is the bedrock on which modern racialism is built, and yes no other class but the working class is capable of reconciling its own class interests with an anti-imperialist struggle, but *not only did the racialism of the working class have a material basis to it in the last century, it still has today.*

Ernest Bevin once said "I am not prepared to sacrifice the British Empire because I know that if the British Empire fell, . . . it would mean the standard of life of our constituents would fall considerably." Indeed, in many cases, the only reason why nineteenth century British bosses were able to pay wage rises was the extra profits they got from

Imperialism. This meant that British workers, though they did so with markedly less enthusiasm than the petty bourgeoisie, tended to side with their bosses and the maintenance of Imperialist exploitation. This is well documented. Exceptions, like the Lancashire textile workers' selfless opposition to the south in the American civil war, indicate only that such class collaboration is not inevitable.

There are also material reasons for the racialism of white workers towards black immigrants in post war Britain. Capitalism encouraged immigration precisely to undermine the bargaining position of workers by creating competition for jobs where before there had been a labour

shortage and this has become even more important with the end of the boom and the growth of unemployment. It was widely believed, although there is no reliable evidence which supports the claim, that the new immigrants were 'green labour', with little knowledge of established working practices in industry, and that the bosses were able to use them to undermine many of the improvements in working conditions which had been won through struggle in the past. Few of the militants saw that if this was indeed a problem, then the way around this was for unions to take on board the fight against racist exploitation of black workers. The sectionalist history of British trade unionism made it unlikely that white workers would suddenly see through the policy of divide and rule.

If immigration threatened in some ways white workers, part of the responsi-

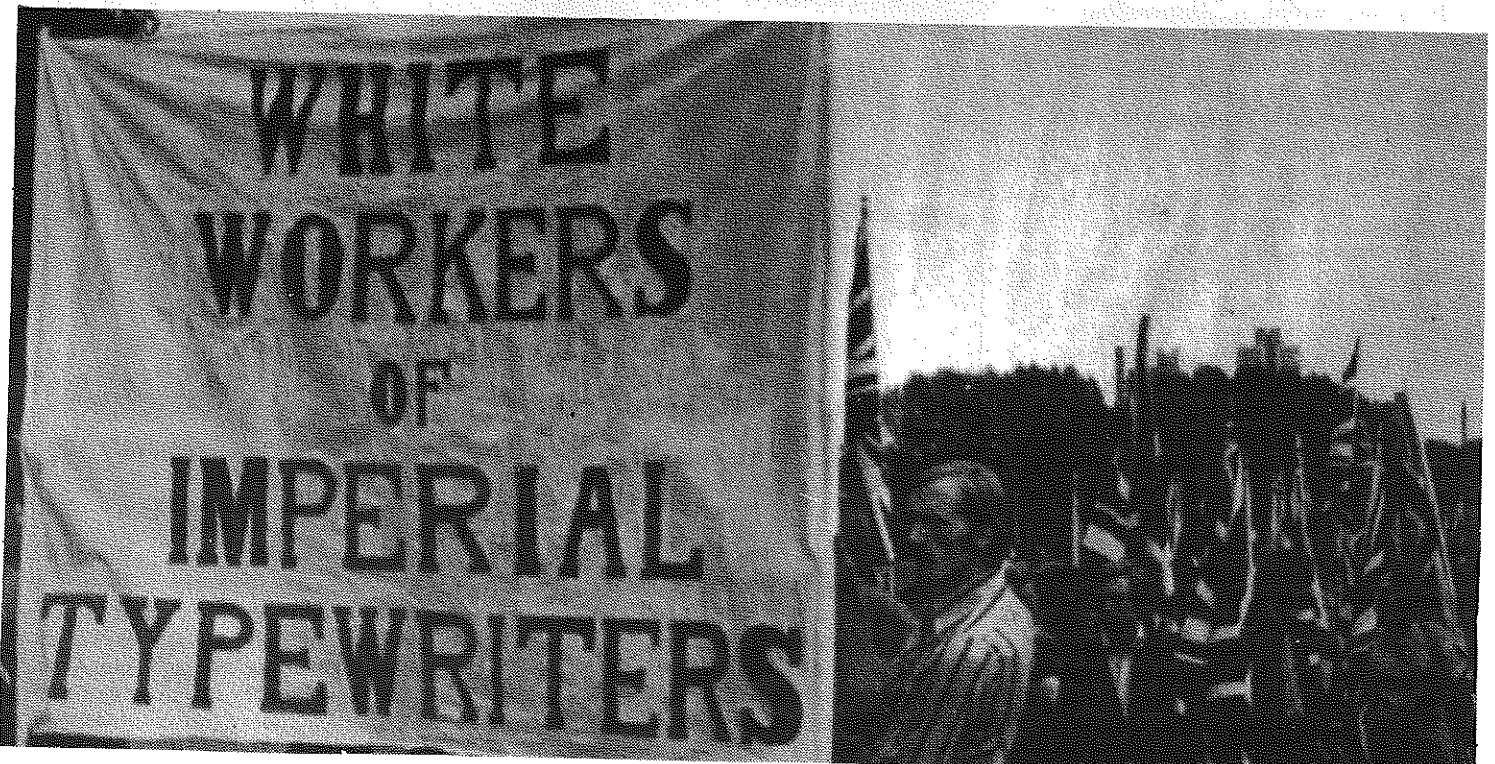
The changes in working class communities

Another reason for racialism has been the changes happening in traditional working class communities. Because of the concentration of job opportunities in certain areas, the low wages paid to black people and their consequent inability to pay the rent on better properties, and the inevitable need of new immigrants for mutual support in a strange land, they have found themselves in some of the worst housing in the country. Given the total unwillingness of the state to increase the already inadequate services and amenities in these areas in proportion to the number of immigrants, inner city whites have also seen their living conditions deteriorate.

Equally important, the communities into which black immigrants came were

didn't know how to use toilets is one example of a story which spread rapidly.

In this climate Enoch Powell was taken up as a hero by many of the working class. 'Powellism' was much more complex than is usually realised and was, in some ways, a rebellion against the establishment and "the middle class." Many working class people felt that they were being judged from on high by liberal and Christian consciences in suburban ivory towers. Indeed, much of the opposition to Powell, and virtually all of it which was given access to the media, was of the 'One race, the human race' variety. This apparent line-up of forces has made it relatively easy for organised racialists to manipulate class hatred and nail us with the image of middle-class do-gooders who 'don't know what it's really like.' The Race Relations Act was seen as a denial of free speech to whites and unfair



bility lies with white workers whose racialism allowed this to happen. Most of the responsibility lies with the capitalists and the media who used racialism as a weapon in the class struggle. *None of the responsibility lies with black workers for coming here.* White workers were soon able to turn the presence of blacks to their advantage enforcing 'apartheid' in job levels, by keeping the better jobs for themselves, and making sure that when there were redundancies it was not them who became unemployed. This meant that when black workers became more militant fighting against low wages, lousy conditions and non-existent promotional prospects, they ran straight into opposition from white workers at Imperial Typewriters. Like their predecessors in the nineteenth century many white workers identified their interests with maintaining their privileges over black workers.

all most of the people in them had ever known. The same families had lived next door for generations, and life revolved around the boozers and corner shops. As those who were able moved out onto the new council estates which were being built, those who remained had new neighbours who didn't speak their language or share their culture. Most of them were too set in their ways to try to understand the newcomers. Many whites began to feel that their areas were being 'invaded' by blacks, and that they were being driven out of all they had ever known. Rumours abounded in such circumstances to fill the gaps in the knowledge of the 'strangers'. Racialism in such situations was often little more than an expression of fear and helplessness, and frightened people can tell some pretty imaginative rumours. Rumours about individuals soon became generalisations about all immigrants. The belief that Pakistanis

discrimination making employers and landlords prefer blacks. Similarly, a large number of white tenants believe that blacks spend a much shorter time on council waiting lists, and it has little effect if we point out that statistics show the opposite — many working class people are quite justifiably sceptical about statistics, especially 'official' ones, since they have so often been used against them.

No 'blaming' black people

Of course black people are not responsible for the decline in inner city areas. The very fact that blacks have moved into these areas is the *expression* of a process which is *caused* by capitalism. However, black people present a much more obvious, and *visible*, target. As we shall see in Chapter Three ('Up Against the Wall') housing is only one aspect of working class life which has got worse

with the crisis and which is attributed to blacks. Rather than blacks reducing the living standards of whites, white workers have often gained from racism as it gives them better access to the housing and other facilities that are available.

This analysis of the material roots of racialism in no way 'blames' black people, nor does it 'excuse' the white working class as right to feel threatened by black workers. What it does argue is that, in a situation of competition for 'scarce' resources, whites do have an interest in keeping blacks behind and below them. But what must be added is that white workers have another, *greater*, interest in rejecting racialism. It is wrong to pose this as a difference between long and short term interests; if it were so all we would have to offer in the here and now is moralism and propaganda about the need for socialism.

It is also wrong to assume that the majority of the working class will inevitably be hostile to any minority of immigrants because they are competing for 'scarce' jobs, 'scarce' housing and 'scarce' welfare benefits. This is to promote scarcity to the status of a natural law, rather than seeing it as a product of capitalism. This is the same as assuming that all those making demands for wage increases are competing for a cake of a fixed size. Just how much you will be able to win depends on how well you are able to fight. Accepting that resources are scarce, relying on waiting lists and the state to dictate the form in which 'services' are provided for you and believing that by fighting you will only lose more are characteristics of a working class forced back on the defensive. If racism is to be challenged successfully ways have to be found to bring whites and blacks together so that it is apparent that by struggling together they are stronger. Simply shouting at people that they have got the enemy wrong, that it is capitalism which is to blame, won't change anything. It doesn't speak to the fears and desires which are the basis of racism.

The consequences of contemporary racism

In this chapter we have argued that contemporary British racism is historically specific. It is not the same thing as American racism, South African racism or even nineteenth century British racism. Imperialism remains its root cause, but its



dual oppression. They have the worse jobs and face the racism of our society. Therefore simple calls for 'Black and White - Unite and Fight' are inadequate character has been significantly modified by black immigration in Britain. It should also be clear both that the racism of the white working class frequently has a material basis *and* that fighting racism is in the interest of *all* the working class.

The divisions within the working class between skilled and unskilled workers; men and women; and whites and blacks include real differences in power and privilege. Black workers suffer from a

because unity usually favours the most powerful. Real unity can only come on the basis of an equality of power and this is why we support the autonomous organisation of black people. Without such unity the working class will always be divided against itself and will never be able to succeed in achieving a society which meets its needs.

Similarly our support for liberation movements in the third world should not be for purely moral reasons, because it is something we 'ought' to be concerned about. The capitalist exploitation of the third world results in super profits and cheap labour with little or no trade union organisation or political rights. An unorganised factory within a multinational company is a threat to all the workers in the firm, whether the factory is down the road or in South Africa. British workers therefore have more than moral reasons for solidarity with third world struggles. Many black workers already see themselves as part of an international working class. Their morale, their willingness to fight, their politics as a whole are significantly influenced by events abroad. It is important that all workers come to feel the same way.

