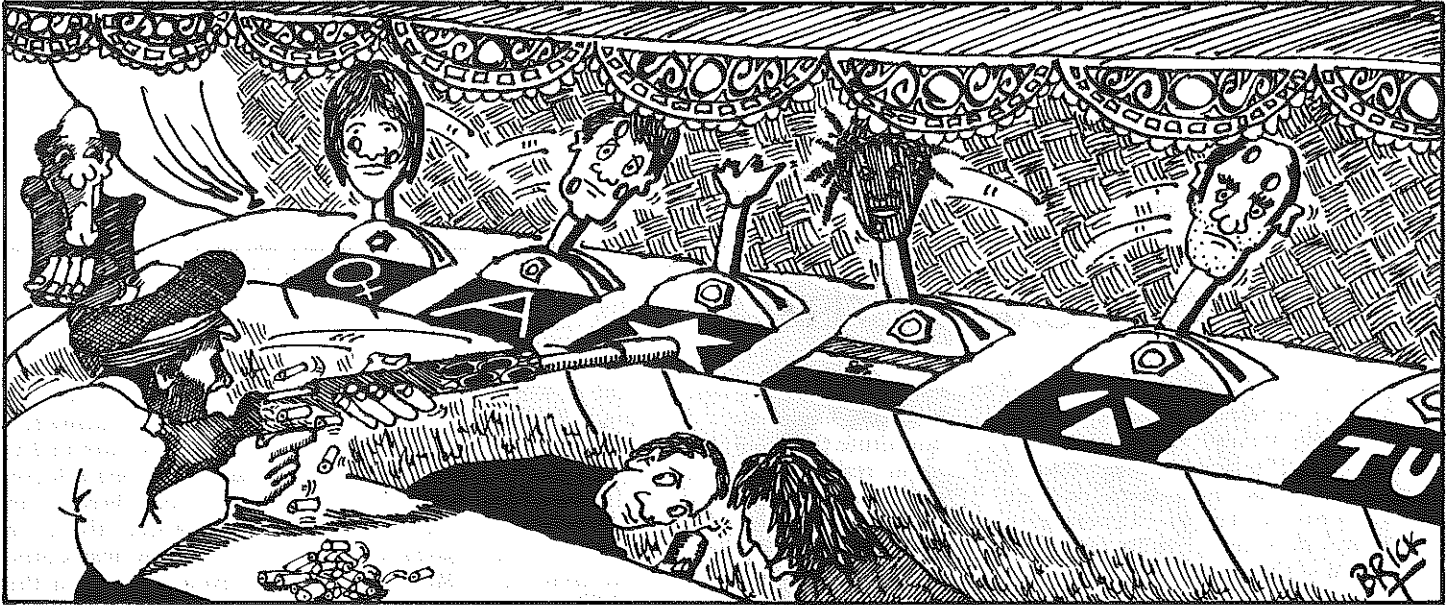


Ch 3. Up Against the Wall

The Crisis and Racism and Fascism



The Impact of the Crisis

The first two chapters have given an account of the historical development of fascism and racism. We now have to examine their role in Britain today. To simply refer to 'the crisis' is not enough to explain their resurgence. We have to analyse what it is about the present crisis which creates the space for fascism and racism to grow. This chapter takes in turn various aspects of the crisis and discusses them with this in mind. It looks at changes in the nature of work, how the crisis affects women, changes in the family and sexual relations, the right wing backlash in ideas and morals and their connections with the rise of fascist groups and the increasing racism of the state and the main political parties. We are considering racism and fascism together because it is important to see their connections. However, it is also important to emphasise that they are distinct problems, and the dangers they represent are not the same. The final chapter will show that the strategies necessary to fight fascism and racism are different.

The current crisis of British capitalism is very different from that in the 1930s. There is no question of a 'return to the thirties', because the economic and political problems, as well as the 'solutions' being attempted by capital, are not the same. Too often anti-fascist propaganda restricts itself to describing the events of the 1930s and labelling modern extreme right groups as Nazis. It is also vital to develop an analysis which explains the present crisis and the rise of fascism and racism today.

It is a feature of capitalism that it continually goes through periods of crisis. What is at stake is much more than purely 'economic' difficulties with the rate of profit. Crises affect the whole capitalist system; they concern the balance of power between classes. They are periods in which the capitalist class attempts to regain the initiative by attacking the position of strength workers achieve during periods of economic growth. This means not only a reduction in working class living standards; but also renewed attempts to convince people that the way things are today is the best, indeed the only possible way they can be. At the same time as capitalists look for a solution to the crisis the differences between them come to the surface. All manner of different explanations of the crisis and remedies for it replace the apparently consensus politics of the preceding boom. The growth of racism and fascism has occurred in the context of a crisis which is simultaneously an economic crisis, a political crisis and a crisis of ideas.

The changed nature of work

The most frequently used remedies to crises have been incomes policies, cuts in public expenditure and the restructuring (or reorganisation) of the process of production. Changes in the labour process include the introduction of new technology, reductions in the numbers of workers, speed ups, tougher disciplinary measures and so on. This restructuring reinforces two tendencies in modern

capitalism: the deskilling of work and structural unemployment. These are far from being totally new developments, but with the crisis they have become more widespread and severe.

In the early stages of capitalism production was largely performed by artisans who retained control over how they did their job. Since then there has been a gradual deskilling of work. Jobs have been divided up into a series of limited tasks carried out by different workers which makes them easier to replace. The precise manner in which the work is done is dictated by management, while simultaneously control over workers becomes increasingly indirect through the demands on them by machines. The process takes its most advanced form in high speed, continuous flow, assembly line production as in the motor industry, but it has not been totally uniform. We should not forget that craft skills survive in many fields such as engineering.

Structural unemployment is another feature of the contemporary working class. Unemployment is used as a deliberate tactic by the State in the crisis. With the introduction of new technology like microprocessors it will increase even more. Thus large numbers of people, particularly the young, will find themselves unemployed for long periods. The resulting hardship and boredom leaves many resentful and open to simple explanations for their plight, such as 'It's the Blacks who have taken our jobs'. For those still at school with only the dole queue to look forward to things appear much the same. The effect of cuts in

spending on education is to make school even more boring, repressive and irrelevant. For some children and their parents the obvious explanation for the crisis in education is the presence of black children in the schools.

Women and the crisis

The crisis does not only affect people at work, but in every aspect of their lives — at home, in the community, health and social services, etc. It is here that the workers are nurtured, cleaned, housed and fed and generally made ready for work. Most of this 'servicing' is done by women and they have been particularly hit by the crisis. During the post war boom women were drawn into waged

work in the expanding economy. They had advantage to capitalists that they could be paid less and were traditionally less militant (although, as with black workers, this is now rapidly changing). The right of women to waged jobs is much less widely accepted than that of men. Therefore with the crisis they have often been the first to lose their jobs. The pressure on women to return to the home has been reinforced by cutbacks in pre-school nurseries and statements from famous politicians and trade union leaders supporting the claim that it is 'a woman's place'. As living standards have fallen the claim that they were only working for 'pin money' has been exposed as a cruel joke.

Women also feel the crisis as unwaged, domestic workers. With less money to feed, clothe and entertain the family, their worries increase and they have to work harder to make ends meet. When the welfare state is cut — when school meals become more expensive and less nutritious, when hospitals close or when prescription charges go up — then it is women who have to try to pick up the pieces. They end up taking care of the sick, cooking more, finding the extra money.

The Psychosexual Crisis

Changes in the nature of work, in the communities in which they live, in relations in the family and in attitudes towards sexual issues have resulted in serious psychological confusion for many people. This confusion makes them potentially more receptive to racist and fascist ideas.

The masculine role of the breadwinner

Perhaps the most important material change which has fostered this personal insecurity is the decline in the masculine role of the breadwinner. For skilled craftsmen their work has always been an enormous source of pride and identification. They have been brought up to the ideas of 'doing a man's job' and 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay' and taking as an insult the suggestion that they are workshy or a slacker. Deskilling is undermining this pride in work and threatening male identity. The new mass worker sees the workplace only as somewhere he is controlled and subordinated, while those without a job sometimes totally lose any sense of identity. The traditional male role is further threatened by the growing organisation of women and their achievement, at least on paper, of some 'equal rights' with men. Men can no longer see themselves as the providers when women are often earning a considerable proportion of the family income.

Changes in the nature of working class housing parallel those at work. In the past there were tightly knit communities where those engaged in the same 'craft' lived together, as in the coalmining, steel and shipbuilding industries. With bombing in the war and post-war rehousing many of these communities have been destroyed. Living in substandard housing or in alienating high rise estates is another pressure which increases insecurity.

Crisis in the family

Strain is also apparent in the family with increased violence against women and children, more suicide, more divorces and so on. For many it is the family which is

the antidote to the daily trauma of work and the exploitative relationships that constitute their daily lives. Even though it never reaches the dizzy heights of love and tranquillity portrayed in the romantic magazines, the family is often the one place where men, women and children can expect and receive comfort, affection and understanding. That the family is also a focal point for people's anger and frustration and is the institution in which they pass on their stunted emotions in the name of love, only proves that the best guarded cave is not a complete refuge from the terrifying experience of capitalism.

The relationship of men to their sons has changed. They are no longer able to pass on a skill to them and feel they lack the respect of their children. They can't understand the purely instrumental view of work many of the young have ('I'm only in it for the money'). Their wives going out to work and the more independent lives women are leading today threatens them. They feel their masculinity is at stake. Some men withdraw into themselves, while others try to assert themselves more to obtain the power and

attention they lack at work, which can lead to violence. On top of this many feel sexually frustrated. From *Playboy* to *The Sun* great stress is laid on sexual achievement, but for most people there is no escape from the grim fact that it's not as good in real life as in the magazines. Many blame themselves rather than the rigid sexual stereotypes imposed by bourgeois society.

The family has come under challenge from various directions by those who are not persuaded that a mortgage, fitted carpets and a Ford Escort are all that life can and should offer. Radical elements in youth culture, from the Beats to the Hippies to the Punks, question the basis of the capitalist work ethic. Openly naming the capitalist system as sick they refuse to attach the conventional value to work, family or success. A more fundamental challenge which is less open to commercial reappropriation comes from the women's and gay movements. They involve a thorough reappraisal of your personal history, your family and, for many, of the whole society in which you grew up and which is stopping you from becoming what you want to be.



The right wing backlash

The 1970s have seen a significant movement in the climate of ideas to the right. There is a widespread belief that 'British society is coming apart at the seams.' The threat is seen to come from 'the enemy within', those radical and alien groups which are 'undermining the British way of life'. There are increasing calls for a return to a 'law and order' society. This crisis in ideas and morals has produced a series of moral panics, that is scares when all social problems are attributed to a particular social group.

The group singled out most frequently is black people, and the major panic has been the threat of 'muggers'. This has brought together fears about crime and youth as well as race. The mugging scare reached its climax with massive press coverage and savage deterrent sentences. However, fears about mugging are only one aspect of the right wing backlash. There have been many others including: the campaign against social security scroungers and the whole concept of social welfare; the attack on progressive education and the call for a return to standards and discipline; opposition to the 'permissive society' and attempts to reverse previous reforms on abortion and capital punishment.

Racism and crisis

There are numerous possible responses to the fears, anxieties and insecurity we have described. Fundamentalist religion has been a long standing solution with its propaganda which typically leads with questions like 'Depressed? Lonely? Worried?' More modern religions like Divine Light, the Moonies and Transcendental Meditation offer the same comfort for young people that fundamentalism provides for the old. Then there are the 'chemical' solutions: 10 million tranquillisers and anti-depressants taken daily, 7 million of them by women; the ever increasing incidence of alcoholism and heroin addiction; etc. All these solutions affect the self in abstraction from any social context. Another organised response is to join one of the groups of the extreme right, but before we deal with fascism there is the much more widespread response of racism.

Racism provides plausible explanations and apparent remedies to the problems which trouble people. Challenging racism simply by denouncing it as morally wrong is unlikely to be very effective when the problems they face are real. Of course they are misperceiving those problems, but it isn't that they are being unusually dense in blaming the blacks. The major forces that affect our lives aren't immediately obvious, but present themselves to us in ways which partially conceal and distort them. Misperception is inherent in the nature of capitalist social relations themselves and not simply false consciousness. Therefore racist explanations are deeply entrenched and will only



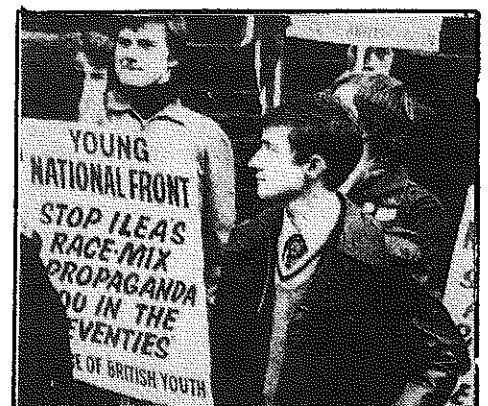
be abandoned if alternative explanations provide some immediate assistance in overcoming their problems.

Making another group the scapegoat is frequently a way of projecting your own fears and anxieties onto a hated other. Concern about the sexual potency of another racial group may relate to your own sexual worries. Many of the older generation are worried about the young who seem to reject all their values. Rather than admit the gulf between them and their own children, they externalise the problem and denounce black youths as lazy and good for nothing.

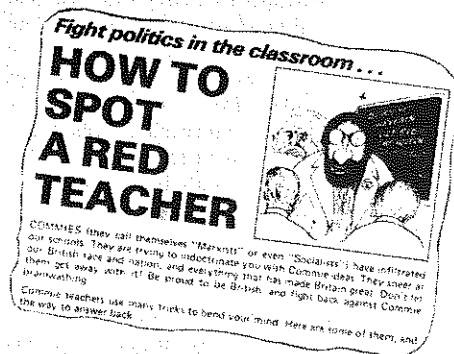
In many ways racism is an extension of the culture of male working class kids. For youth the crisis means unemployment and cuts in expenditure on facilities for them. They have little to do apart from roaming the street looking for excitement. Great emphasis is placed on masculinity. You have to demonstrate your toughness by responding to any challenge or you lose face. The other side of great loyalty to a group of mates is suspicion and hostility to outsiders. To make the area around your home your own territory you engage in aggressive displays against rival gangs. Given what was said in Chapter Two ('Roots') about the way lack of familiarity and understanding of those with a different culture can turn to hostility, it is easy for the divisions between rival gangs to be racial ones and to be justified by racial stereotypes. Here there are differences between attitudes towards West Indian and Asian kids. West

Indian kids are usually respected for their toughness whilst Asian kids are often targets because they are seen as weak and cissy and Asians are generally regarded as rich and successful. This is another example of feelings of racism and class hatred being deeply intertwined.

The crisis has reinforced all the factors leading to racism in the white working class which were discussed in Chapter Two ('Roots'). With unemployment rocketing competition for the remaining jobs becomes even more desperate. With massive cuts in state spending the availability of housing, health services and welfare benefits is further reduced. Moreover under the Social Contract of the Labour government a climate of austerity was created where 'scarce resources' were accepted as given. It is then inevitable that resentment is directed at your fellow competitors.



The Appeal of Fascist Ideology



If racism is a common response in the crisis, how many people go further and see fascism as providing the solution? What is it about fascist ideology that attracts them? Many analyses of fascist groups focus on the background and intentions of their leaders without considering the motives of the ordinary members. They are seen as deluded and pawns in the hands of the leaders. Or alternately we are given a vulgar materialist explanation which entirely ignores their motives. It is enough to say there is a crisis which creates certain living conditions which automatically lead to the 'sick and crazy' ideas of fascism. However, there can be no proper understanding of the growth of fascism unless it includes the aspirations and fears which fascist ideas meet in the minds of those who support it. One reason why the Nazi party was able to create a mass movement in Germany was that it met, in a totally mystified way, the psychological needs of significant layers of German society. To dismiss fascism as 'irrational' fails to grasp the mixture of ideas, emotions and mysticism which gave it the ability to speak to the 'inner cores' of men and women, young and old in a capitalist society in crisis.

We have to see how extreme right wing groups in Britain today such as the National Front explain and provide answers to the crisis as we have described it. More effectively than the left, fascists have understood the deep fears and worries of people outside the workplace, in their personal lives. They also provide answers: the family crisis is solved by the restoration of traditional roles, in particular the patriarchal father; the crisis in education by bringing back discipline; the crisis in housing and the community by repatriating black people, and so on. analysis of the material roots of these problems is, of course, false; but in the absence of a socialist movement offering real solutions on a mass level, they are bound to make gains.

Nation and race

As we showed in Chapter One ('All Our Yesterdays') the basis of fascist philosophy is the race and the nation, and

these notions are used by fascists today. Some people have drawn a direct parallel between Jews in Germany in the 1930s and blacks in Britain today. But as David Edgar argues 'the slogan "Hitler blamed the Jews, the Front blames the blacks" is an oversimplification, in that, strictly the NF blames the Jews for the blacks' (*Racism, Fascism and the Politics of the National Front*, p. 120). It is not the blacks who are seen as the main threat. The presence of black people in Britain and the consequent 'depletion of our racial stock' is attributed to the Jews. 'All those who oppose multi-racialism should attack the politicians who promote it, not the immigrants, who are merely its victims' (*Spearhead* July 1977). Blacks are not seen as active initiators, but are essentially passive, either followers of blind instinct (muggers and rapists) or the innocent victims of professional agitators (in industrial disputes like Imperial Typewriters and Grunwick).

It is not necessary here for us to refute the NF's arguments about nation and race, but we have to examine their enormous psychological appeal. The loss of empire is still of enormous significance to many

people in Britain. Every school student is taught that 'Britain was once great' and knows that we are now the poor relations of countries in Europe and the Third World we once dominated. The psychological kernel of nationalism, in its fascist form is that the nation stands for manhood. The loss of the empire and the low status of Britain today is equivalent to the Englishman's loss of his virility. John Tyndall, Chairman of the NF, has quoted approvingly an American neo-Nazi who equates liberalism with weakness and contrasts it with 'the inexorable movement of Time, Destiny, History, the cruelty of accomplishment, sternness, heroism, sacrifice, super-personal ideas... Liberalism is an escape from hardness into softness, masculinity into femininity' (*Spearhead* March 1977). The fear of weakness says much about the anxieties and insecurities of fascists.

The 'natural role' of women

On sexual issues modern fascists again reiterate the positions of their predecessors. Gays are perverts who have no place in British society when it is made into 'a land for decent people to live in.' The



Photo: Community Press



natural role for women, according to them, is bear and look after children. They assert that the characteristics of women are biologically rooted. The NF has published an article by a member of the French extreme right which claims that these characteristics are 'submission, passivity, sensibility, tenderness and intuition' (*Spearhead* January 1978).

One quarter of the membership of the NF are women. How are we to explain its appeal to them? The fascists attribute to women the role of the main source of the well being of the family. This can strike a real chord with the many women who are denied any other potential opportunity

for emotional fulfillment. The virtual deification of woman as mother can give a new confidence and pride. Fascist propaganda also addresses itself to women's fears of mugging and rape. The message of *National Front News* is contained in headlines like 'Immigrant crime: white women are muggers' main targets.' The South London Women Against Racism and Fascism Group have analysed a leaflet put out by the NF candidate, Helena Stevens, in the 1978 by-election in Lambeth Central, which demonstrates how effective this message can be. Unlike the impersonal tones of anti-racist propaganda, it adopted the style of a problem

page and spoke directly to the problems women faced. This does not mean the way their problems were explained was correct (muggers being identified with black youth), but accounts for their appeal.

The emphasis on the 'natural role' of women makes men the undisputed head of the household. It restores to them the dignity and power, which as we have seen earlier in this chapter, they have lost. The trappings of fascist groups — uniforms, drums, marching, flags — and the attacks on Jews, blacks, gays and socialists, all restore to men confidence in their masculinity.

The Role of the Extreme Right

We have shown that there are elements of fascist ideology which will make fascism attractive to some people. We still have to answer the question: how many people will be drawn towards it? The membership of the largest fascist group, the National Front, is about 18,000. It has stood candidates in Parliamentary elections, its best performance being an average 3.2% of the votes in the constituencies where it stood in February 1974. The question which immediately comes

to mind is — can the NF go on to become a mass movement and threaten to take over state power as the fascists did in Germany and Italy in the 1930s? There is no magic checklist of factors which tells us under what circumstances this can happen, but what we can do is point out some of the key differences between the situation now and in the thirties. No simple predictions can be given as the future depends on people and how their struggles develop, not any neat laws of history.

Can it happen here?

There is very little reliable information about the class composition of the NF, which makes comparisons with the social base of the fascist movements in the thirties difficult. What we can say is that the size of the peasantry has continued to decline in Europe (in Britain it disappeared long ago); and while the petty bourgeoisie and 'new middle class' may complain about the effects of the crisis

on them, they are not under anything like as intense pressures as in the 1930s. Many of the latter have even joined white collar unions like ASTMS, APEX and TASS. As for the NF its nostalgia for the past is very different from the Nazi party's confident vision expressed in its art and architecture. Hitler once said that the mass of people can never be mobilised under the banner of defending the status quo, you must conjure up a new and better future.

The most important differences concern the capitalist and working classes. Under the spectre of the Russian revolution the capitalist class did not have the confidence to make concessions and significant sections of it backed the rise of fascism. Today parliamentary democracy is extremely well established in Europe (particularly in Britain) and there seems little necessity for capitalists to take the risk of fascism, which has a momentum of its own. Finally while the British working class has failed to counter the capitalist offensive of the seventies, it has by no means suffered the defeat working classes in Europe experienced around the years of the Depression. Taken together all these factors make it extremely unlikely that the NF will succeed in taking over the state. This still leaves us with another question: What will be the role of fascist groups in the immediate future?

The threat from the NF

One of the main reasons the NF gains support is its racism. But it doesn't regard the issue of immigration as an end in itself, it uses it as a means of attracting people towards its Nazi ideas. This prevents it from taking full advantage of the extent of popular racism. There are many who resent blacks for taking 'their' jobs and houses, but don't accept the full argument of blacks being genetically inferior. They see the blacks as the main enemy and find the whole theory of the Zionist conspiracy difficult to swallow. Much of the NF's support comes from



the young, but again its fascist ideology tends to undermine its potential appeal. On the one hand a Young National Front leaflet has described schoolkids as 'probably the most oppressed section of British society'. On the other the NF places great emphasis on the need for discipline and a former chairman, John Kingsley Read, has stated 'If the National Front came to power we would whip juvenile delinquents until the skin comes off their backs.' Despite the NF's attempts to organise Rock Against Communism gigs there is an immense gulf between some of the punks it attracts and its staid, puritanical leadership. All these contradictions, as well as the success of anti-fascists in making the label 'Nazi' stick to the NF, make it unlikely that it will grow significantly in the near future.

Even if the number of members of fascist groups remains at the same level,

this doesn't mean that they are not a serious threat. Firstly there will be continuing attacks on blacks, gays and the left as this is an essential part of developing a fascist cadre. This requires the black community to organise its self defence and others to take adequate precautions to protect their marches and events. Secondly although those drawn to the left and to fascist groups usually come from very different backgrounds, there is a danger that people dissatisfied with the present political system will turn first to the NF because it appears to offer a radical alternative which involves a smaller break with the dominant ideology and culture than the left groups. Finally racism remains one of the main factors dividing the working class and groups like the NF enable it to continue to thrive. In particular they exert a pressure which encourages the Labour and Conservative parties to adopt ever more racist policies.

Racism in British Culture

If what was said in the previous section is correct, then the main danger in Britain today is not fascism but racism. The remaining sections of this chapter will detail the all encompassing nature of contemporary racism, looking in particular at racism in the main political parties and the state. Racism permeates every aspect of British culture from jokes to school text books, from children's stories to the very language we use. Two areas stand out: theories of education and the mass media.

'Scientific' racism

In the last ten years since the Black papers on education liberal educational ideas have come under increasingly severe attack. Part of this trend has been the work of psychologists like Eysenck and Jensen who have claimed that intelligence is genetically inherited. 'Intelligence Quo-

tient' tests are said to prove that black children are less intelligent than white children. Racists, in particular the National Front, have used this work to try to substantiate their views on the racial superiority of white people.

The results of IQ tests can be disputed on a number of grounds. The questions asked favour those from a particular cultural background (the advanced capitalist countries, middle class, white), but a full critique goes further than a call for questions without cultural bias (even if this were possible). Intelligence is not some abstract thing people possess prior to specific situations in which they apply it. Mental skills are constantly being constructed and transformed by the situations they are in. Thus the whole idea of IQ tests 'measuring' some given property of the testee is problematic. There are other reasons to explain why

large numbers of black children apparently 'underachieve' at school. Many West Indian youths reject the terms the schools set for success. Their peer group solidarity leads them to resist collectively the discipline which would fragment them into individuals competing against each other.

Racism in the media

There is no deliberate conspiracy to present black people on television and in the press in a derogatory way, but any programme involves the selection of information and images through a particular set of assumptions. The less these are consciously examined the more likely it is that these will be the taken for granted racist categories widely held in British society. Thus in light entertainment programmes all foreigners are made to appear funny, all cultural differences



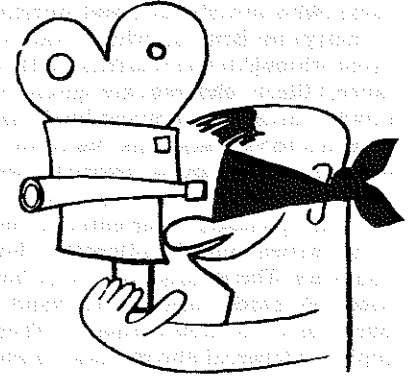
the basis for ridicule. Black people are presented in terms of stereotypes — as stupid, lazy scroungers and so on.

Racism in the treatment of news is less obvious than drama, but just as pernicious. Headlines like 'Gang of black youths attack elderly lady' draw attention to the race of those involved when it is of no relevance. Whenever blacks appear in news items they are invariably the starting point of a problem. Usually the problem is immigration. The

way it is posed is as a question of numbers ('how many immigrants are there?') which excludes any other issues. After immigration the next most common type of story concerns violent crime. The word 'mugging', which is so common, has been applied to such a wide variety of offences that the only meaning it has left is a street crime committed by blacks.

Very rarely do you see black people on current affairs programmes. Even if the issue involves race, then there is usually only one black, invariably an establishment figure, amongst a host of white politicians, police and 'experts'. Increasingly NF and other extreme right wing leaders are interviewed on television, airing their racist views in a confident and relaxed manner. Compare this with the hard ride given socialist or black militants on their rare appearances on the screen. Hugh Green, the previous governor of the BBC, stated that you can't be neutral between racism and anti-racism. His successor Michael Swan regards the extreme right as part of the spectrum of

debate and uses the highly dubious justification that exposing their views may cause them to change their minds. Instead this coverage can only serve to increase their importance and respectability. Following the logic of the BBC's notion of 'balance' the more vocal and extreme the far right becomes the more attention it is given.



Race and the Labour and Conservative Parties

Tories

The positions being taken by the two main political parties demonstrate the ideological shift to the right in Britain. In the case of the Conservative party this has been a response to the failure of the Heath administration to control the unions and stay in power. Race has been a key issue in moving the party to the right with the popularity of Enoch Powell and the rise of the NF. The present position of the Tories was most clearly expressed by Margaret Thatcher on the *World in Action* programme in January 1978: 'People are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture . . . We must hold out the clear prospect of an end to immigration.'

Tory policies are not simply a cynical exploitation of racism, but a return to the principles of free enterprise capitalism. They reject the two-pronged strategy described in the previous chapter ('Roots') of combining ever tighter immigration laws with measures to improve 'race relations'. The Tories believe it is up to immigrants to adjust to the customs of their 'country of adoption.' The new Conservative government has come into office pledged to further strengthen immigration controls and to review the 1976 Race Relations Act.

Labour

The previous Labour government attempted to head off rebellion by black people with various schemes to co-opt the black petty bourgeoisie (Commission for Racial Equality, Race Relations Board, etc) and various short term employment projects. That this apparently more 'liberal' strategy is nevertheless racist is confirmed by various statements from Labour MPs. The Home Secretary Merlyn Rees was asked on *Weekend World* in

February 1978 'What you really mean is that immigration control is a device to keep out coloured people?' He replied 'That's what it is . . . I don't think we should hide it and that's what people are concerned about.' Sid Bidwell, left Labour MP, wrote to *The Guardian* in March 1978: 'It has always been worth a try to take coloured immigration out of the cock pit of the two-party conflict in the interests of race relations. If during the next General Election, it appears that a Tory Government would be more realistic on this issue than a Labour Government, I think this would be a major matter leading to a Labour defeat.'

The various policies designed to improve 'race relations' provide no real antidote to racism as they serve only to

manage unemployment and discrimination rather than challenge them. But if the Labour leadership accommodates itself to racism, what about the party as a whole? The 1977 Labour Party Conference passed a strongly worded anti-racist motion and several left Labour MPs have given their support to the Anti-Nazi League. However, one reason for this support is the fear of the NF taking Labour votes. The Labour left has been much less vocal in its support for anti-racism compared with anti-nazism. Some of the Labour left, like Sid Bidwell, support racist immigration controls, and it has certainly been very muted in its handling of the issue with no major challenge being made to the Callaghan leadership.



Tony Benn addresses November 1979 demonstration against racist immigration laws

The Increase in State Racism

The main threat to black people in Britain comes not from the fascists but from the state. In Chapter Two ('Roots') we mentioned some of the forms of state racism and over the last few years it has grown even more. Immigration control remains the most important form. It is blacks who are stopped and questioned on entry to Britain, whilst whites are waved through the barriers without a glance. Black children are given X-ray tests to check their age and black fiances subjected to virginity tests. Many are kept in detention centres or prisons for weeks. Dependents have to wait up to two years for their applications for entry to Britain to be vetted and face lengthy, hostile interviews. The Runnymede Trust investigated 56 cases rejected as fraud and found that 53 were genuine. There is ample evidence of the extreme racism of immigration officers, but the problem is not that the 'wrong people' are attracted to the job, it is the job itself. Immigration laws were passed to prevent black people entering Britain, so that it is inevitable that any officer with a low 'refusal rate' will be carpeted and forced to mend his/her ways.

For blacks already in Britain there is the racism of the police and the courts. Under the 1971 Immigration Act the police have the right to check people to see if they are illegal immigrants or overstayers if there are reasonable grounds for suspicion. In practice they stop black people in the street or go on 'trawling



Photo: Andrew Ward (Report)

missions' raiding houses in black areas. The other major charge used by the police to harass black youth is SUS ('being a suspected person loitering with

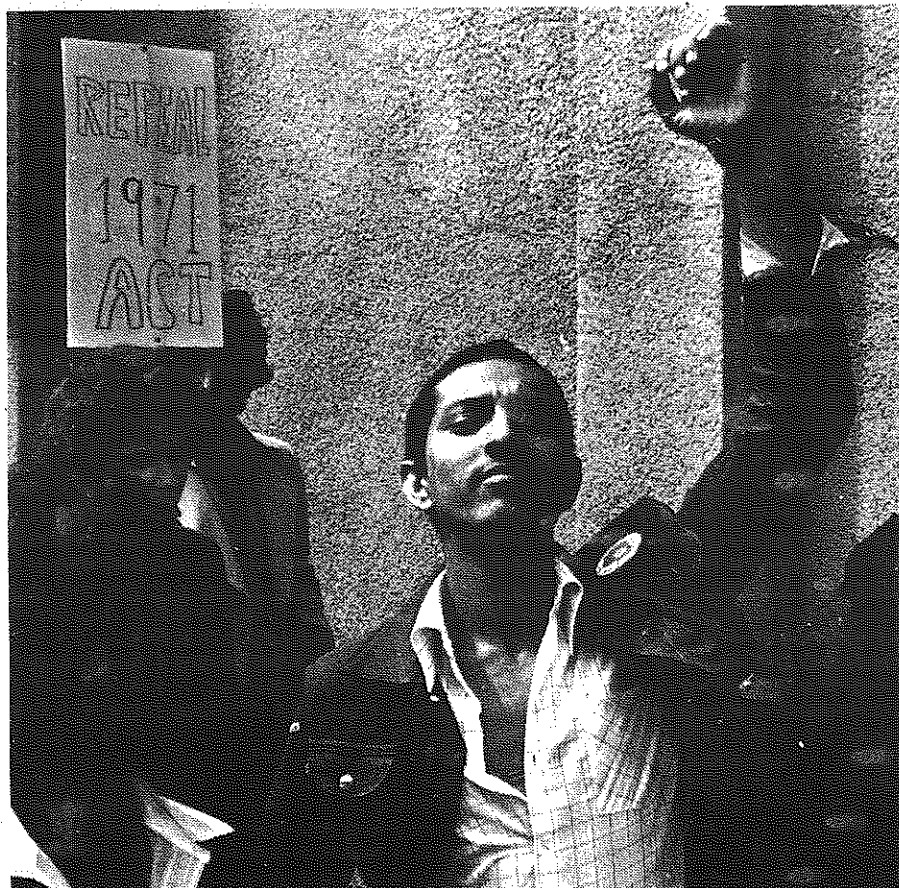
intent to commit a felonious offence'). Conviction does not usually require any other witnesses apart from police officers and no robbery has to take place. This law is overwhelmingly applied to blacks compared with whites. The attitude of the police towards blacks was clearly conveyed in the warning given by David McNee, the Police Commissioner for London: 'Keep off the streets and you won't get into trouble.'

The Labour government's Green Paper on Nationality in 1977, the report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration in March 1978 and the proposals made by the Conservative party in opposition a few weeks later, all agree on the need for tighter controls on immigration. It is likely that the nationality laws to be introduced by the new Tory government will reduce the civil rights of black people and legitimate a stepping up of police harassment of black communities. The Tories are known to be considering 'a system of internal control of immigration', in other words identity cards and pass laws.

The state has become the most persistent and powerful enemy confronting black people. In its many guises it lies behind the majority of the problems they face every day.

The strong state

The increase in state racism should be seen in the wider context of the emergence of what has been called the 'strong state.' Since the end of the boom many countries, from West Germany to



Abdul Azad after a successful campaign to prevent his deportation under the immigration laws

India, have moved towards a more authoritarian form of government while leaving parliamentary democracy intact. An example of how far it is possible for the strong state to develop is provided by West Germany. Since 1972 there has been a policy of *Berufsverbot* (the 'professional ban') which excludes from employment in the civil service those whose 'loyalty to the constitution' is said to be in doubt. 1,300,000 people have been investigated and about 4,000 banned or dismissed from employment. Reasons have included participating in the anti-nuclear movement and living in a flat with a member of a left organisation.

There are several factors which make West Germany different from Britain and it is unlikely that we will see anything along the lines of *Berufsverbot* here in the foreseeable future, but there are plenty of indications of a move towards more of a 'law and order' society. This is seen most clearly in relation to Northern Ireland. The Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1973 gave the police the power to detain for seven days without trial and for people to be sent to jail for membership of a 'prescribed organisation'. In the same year no-jury Diplock courts were introduced. These have a conviction rate of 94%, of which 80% are based solely on alleged 'confessions' by the accused. There are continual random raids on 'terrorist affected' (i.e. Catholic) areas and it has been estimated that details of nearly half a million people (one third of the popu-

lation) are kept in the army's computer.

Back in Britain there have been a whole series of measures enacted which chip away at the freedoms traditionally associated with liberal democracies: the erosion of the right to squat and occupy through the Criminal Trespass Act, prosecutions under the Official Secrets Act, the banning of demonstrations under the Public Order Act and so on. The new Tory government is pledged to make another attempt to make trade unions subject to legal sanctions while Special Branch monitoring of militants has increased. There has also been a massive rise in expenditure on security forces. All these measures have been introduced in a piece-meal fashion which has prevented opponents from mounting a co-ordinated campaign against them. This 'softly, softly' approach has proved far more effective than any crude, obvious attack on the working class.

Racism and fascism today

In this chapter we have tried to isolate those aspects of the crisis which create the space for fascism and racism. We have concluded that there is little likelihood of the present fascist groups like the National Front being in a position to take over the state or even of them growing significantly in the immediate future. However, they do represent a danger with their attacks on blacks, gays and the left; by helping to maintain divisions in the working class and encouraging the major political parties to move to the right on

race. This means that anti-fascist struggles must continue to be an important part of the activities of socialists. On the other hand we must make greater efforts than in the past in anti-racist struggles and this means fighting the racism of the state. It is the racist immigration laws, the racism of the police and of the courts which are the greatest day to day problems for black people.

Over the last few years first the Labour government and now the Tories have moved towards a repressive, authoritarian form of state rule. There has been no reason for capitalists to want to turn to the fascists. At the same time placing too great an emphasis on the notion of the strong state can lead to serious errors. We can underestimate the extent to which the capitalist state was based on repression in the past, or the extent to which it still relies on its acceptance as legitimate by the mass of the population to govern. There is a danger of us turning the very necessary defence of civil liberties into a far too uncritical defence of the liberal state as against the strong state. The greatest mistake of all would be for us to present the strong state as an unshakeable monolith. The move towards this form of state is, at least in part, an acknowledgement of ideological and political weakness. It is a way of the state legitimating itself by constructing a series of 'internal threats' which it therefore has to take strong measures to repress. If it had total popular consent in its rule this would not be necessary.



Photo: Peter Stepokura