Capitalism and immigration

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Capitalism and immigration[1]

Ours is not the first generation to encounter migration on a vast scale. Two hundred million people, representing three percent of the global population, work outside their countries – double the number of migrants 25 years ago. This new wave of migration (for which there are several reasons to which we shall turn later on), especially that portion coming mainly from the poor countries, inhabited principally by people of dark skin, to rich countries, who principally happen to be inhabited by people of lighter skin, has generated a torrent of anti-immigrant sentiment in the US to a certain extent, but particularly across the countries of western Europe. There is concern of hysteric proportions over asylum seekers in Britain, foreign workers in Germany, immigrants in general in Austria, etc. The new arrivals are popularly portrayed as welfare scroungers, job snatchers, criminals, drug traffickers and, increasingly, terrorists who present a danger to European culture and stability.

Anti-immigrant sentiment, expressed covertly by the mainstream bourgeois parties, is overtly espoused by Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in France, Umberto Bossi's Northern League in Italy, Jorg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria, the late Pim Fortuyn's Fortuyn List in the Netherlands, Philip De Winter's Vlaams Block in Belgium, Pia Kjaersgaard's People's Party in Denmark, Carl Hagen's

Progress Party in Norway and Nick Griffin's British National Party in the UK – to name but a few.

Listening to the leaders of the bourgeois racist parties of the respectable and not-so-respectable variety, ordinary workers might be forgiven for gaining the perception of immigration being a new, and dangerous, phenomenon. It is worth reminding them that immigration, the racist myths to the contrary notwithstanding, is not a novel phenomenon, which only began with the arrival of foreign workers in western Europe in the aftermath of the second world war from the erstwhile colonies and other poor countries – in the case of Britain from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent.

To assert that somehow foreign workers would undermine national culture, stability and racial homogeneity is to make the bold and absurd claim that the countries of Europe developed in idyllic and splendid isolation from the rest of the world – a claim devoid of all foundation. In the case of Britain, there were waves of immigrants between the Roman occupation and the Norman Conquest in 1066, let alone in the centuries following them – movements of population that make nonsense of the very concept of British racial exclusivity. (Indeed, this has now been backed up by DNA evidence, which has revealed that even those who in Britain really can claim descent from the Cheddar Gorge man are also likely to have distant and not-so-distant ancestors who came from the Middle East, southern and eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, etc.)

Capitalism and migration

All the same, systemic large-scale migration is unique to capitalism. Developing capitalism obliges workers, through physical or economic compulsion, to move from one corner of a country to another, or from one country or continent to another, thus neces-

sitating both internal and international migration. In its earliest days, this movement took the form of the slave trade – the first forced, large-scale and cruel movement of labour in history. Thirty million Africans were transported as slaves across the Atlantic to the New World, of whom only 11 million survived the journey. Jamaica and the rest of the British West Indies were turned into colonial labour camps in

> a traffic so beneficial to the nation,

in the words of a British secretary of state in 1774.

All of the members of the royal family and the great Whig families of England made fortunes out of this miserable trade in human flesh, fortunes which they invested in the construction of canals and coal mines. Those who made their fortunes in the slave trade included:

- Sir Isaac Newton, the famous scientist
- Sir John Vanburgh, architect, playwright and founder of King's College, Cambridge
- The Earl of Halifax, founder of the Bank of England
- Thomas Lucas Lee (died in 1784), treasurer of Guy's Hospital
- Francis Baring (1740-1810), founder of Baring's Bank
- William Beckfort (1709-1770), Lord Mayor of London and the richest plantation owner.

A 1720s' contemporary list of shareholders of the slave-trading South Sea Company (which took over from the Royal African Company when the latter lost its monopoly of the slave trade in 1698) names most of the 462 members of the House of Commons and half the members of the House of Lords. Britain's crucial part in the transport of African slaves on such a vast scale between 1500-1800 gave Britain a head start and, inter alia, helped to kick

start the industrial revolution. Apart from reflecting on the inhumanity and cruelty of the British ruling class, the transport of 30 million slaves across the Atlantic represents a successful attempt to satisfy the colossal demand for labour that marked the dawn of modern capital.

In addition to slavery, capitalism has always relied on the 'free' movement of labour – workers seeking to escape poverty and unemployment go to the centres of developing or developed capitalism to meet the demand for wage labour, thus initiating migratory movements within countries and across international frontiers. Really large-scale free movement of people in search of a livelihood began in its present form in the 19th century. In Britain, for instance, the enclosures of common land forced agricultural workers to leave the countryside en masse and head for the urban industrial centres, just as the potato famine in Ireland drove significant sections of the destitute Irish population to head for Britain, there to work in factories, mines and on railway construction, or to cross the Atlantic to seek work in the US. Throughout the 19th century, all Britain's cities were immigrant cities, filled by first- or second-generation migrants from the countryside of Britain, Ireland and Europe. Half the population of London during the 1880s had been born elsewhere. Capitalist development of the US, Canada, Australia and Argentina took place on the back of populations overwhelmingly of immigrant origin.

Just as capital moves from one place to another, and from one country to another, in search of profit, so does labour, overcoming many obstacles, move in order to make a living and escape destitution and unemployment in places where capitalism has failed to develop altogether, or is insufficiently developed, or is in decline, to the centres of its expansion. The invention and development of the steam engine, and with it the railways and steam ships, made migration, internal and external, a realistic proposition on a large scale. Consequently, by 1840, on average 70,000 people

emigrated each year from Britain. In the mid 1850s this number doubled. Most emigrants went to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US. As a result, by 1871, Britain became a net exporter of people and, with a few notable exceptions, continued to be so throughout each successive decade right up to 1990.*

Europe – a continent of immigrants

Although Europe has traditionally thought of itself as a continent of emigration, it is nevertheless indisputable that immigration is an integral part of the European landscape. Following five centuries of intra-European migration, Europeans are a rather mixed people. A quarter of the French today have a foreign-born parent or grandparent; in Vienna, the figure is 40 percent. In the 18th century, when Amsterdam built its dykes and polders and cleared its bogs, it brought in northern German workers. When the French built their vineyards, they employed Spaniards. When London built its water and sewerage infrastructure, the Irish provided the labour, as indeed they did from the earliest days of the industrial revolution. In the 19th century, when Baron Haussman rebuilt Paris, with wide boulevards so as to make barricade fighting next to impossible, he brought in Germans and Belgians.

Europe – not the Americas, as is usually thought – was the main destination for Italians in their century of emigration from 1876 to 1976. Close to 12.6 million Italians went to other European countries – a million more than those who emigrated to non-European countries. While the US was the destination for the largest number of Italians (5.7 million), France, with 4.1 million, was not far behind, with tiny Switzerland receiving 4 million Italians, Germany 2.4 mil-

* The information in this paragraph comes from 'Racism and immigration in Britain' by Ruth Brown, *International Socialism Journal*, Autumn 1995

lion and Austria 1.2 million. Since the second world war alone, Europe has absorbed more than 20 million immigrants.

One thing is clear: namely, that in comparison with the movement of people from the second half of the 19th century to the first world war, the present-day volumes are very small indeed. In the 40 years leading up to WW1, migration raised the New World labour force by a third and lowered the European labour force by an eighth. If the migrants (200 million) today constitute just under 3 percent of the global population, in the 19th century they represented 10 percent.

Europe has absorbed more than 20 million immigrants. Today, intra-European migration is by and large uncontroversial, but in their time such migratory movements were just as controversial and it was just as sensitive an issue as is presently the immigration of non-Europeans into Europe. Immigrants seemed overwhelmingly alien to the locals and anti-immigrant sentiment was just as rife then as it is today.*

In Britain during the second half of the 19th century, for instance, the strength of prejudice against Irish workers was no less than that encountered today by black immigrants in Britain and other imperialist countries. Anti-Irish sentiment, bordering on hysteria, was whipped up by the capitalist press and, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, the mass of the workers allowed themselves to be led along this path to impotence. In a letter of 1870 to Meyer and Vogt, Marx gave the following graphic description of the bourgeois-instigated anti-Irish racism and national chauvinism with which the working class was infected:

> Every industrial and commercial centre in England possesses a

* Information in the preceding three paragraphs is drawn from 'The immigration fallacy' by Saskia Sassen in *Europe a Continent of Immigration*, *Financial Times*, 27 October 2004

working class divided into two *hostile camps*, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the *ruling* nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists of his country against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the 'poor whites' to the 'niggers' in the former slave states of the USA. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker at once the accomplice and the stupid tool of the *English rulers in Ireland*.

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. *This antagonism* is the secret of the *impotence of the English working class*, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And that class is fully aware of it.*

Reasons for migration

There are basically two causes of migration: namely, persecution or poverty. Historically, persecution has given rise to migration. Jews in large numbers fled persecution in Czarist Russia at the beginning of the 20th century and fascist terror in Germany in the 1930s, and Palestinians fled persecution at the hands of zionism in the wake of the latter's conquest of Palestine and the expulsion of its lawful owners at gunpoint. During the last 15 years, a consider-

* Letter to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt in New York from K Marx, April 1870, K Marx and F Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, pp236-7

able number of Iraqis, Afghans, Yugoslavs, Somalis, West Africans and those from the Lakes region of Africa, have been driven to fleeing their countries as a result of imperialist wars and imperialist-inspired civil strife and persecution.

It is equally natural for people to want to escape poverty and destitution and move to places that offer them the chance to earn a livelihood. People do not easily leave the countries in which they were born and brought up. Just as there were waves of intra-European migration during the 18th to 20th centuries, and even larger movements of population from Europe to North America and Oceania during the same period, in similar fashion are to be viewed the immigration of Mexicans and others into the US and of Asian, African, Afro-Caribbean and other peoples into Europe, North America and Oceania. These immigrants from the poor and oppressed nations do not up sticks and move thousands of miles away into the imperialist heartlands for the quality of climate or cuisine or the warm welcome that awaits them on arrival. On the contrary, they are prepared to put up with a hostile, at times dangerous, environment because they have no other choice. They are prepared to be regarded as criminals for no greater crime than the desire to earn a livelihood for themselves and their families. The brutal history of colonialist loot and imperialist exploitation has left their countries of origin with a legacy of dire poverty, disease and hunger, which continues to be aggravated by unequal terms of trade and the massive burden of debt servicing. The 13 million children who die each year before reaching the age of 5 are an eloquent and damning testimony of the relationship between a handful of rich imperialist oppressor nations and the vast majority of the poor oppressed nations. These 13 million children – the equivalent of two and a half holocausts a year – die in their mothers' arms, unseen and uncommemorated. The political and ideological representatives of imperialism (which, be it said in passing, was the sole author of the holocaust during the second world war),

while waxing eloquent every year on Holocaust Day, maintain a deadly silence on the far larger holocaust taking place every year under their system.

> [Capitalism long ago grew] into a world system of colonial oppression and of financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of 'advanced' countries.*

This handful of marauders shares the booty and, armed to the teeth, wages endless wars against the oppressed nations and from time to time draws

> . . . the whole world into *their* war over the division of *their* booty.

Without question,

> [C]apitalism has now singled out a *handful* . . . of exceptionally rich and powerful states which plunder the whole world simply by 'clipping coupons'.

With this colossal concentration of wealth in the imperialist countries on the one hand, and the equally colossal concentration of poverty in the oppressed nations on the other hand, it is hardly surprising that some of those from the oppressed nations who are able to undertake the journey should attempt to escape starvation and earn a living in the centres of wealth and capital concentration. This is all the more so in view of the shocking disparities in wages. The real wages, for instance, of a bus driver in a rich imperialist country are 15 times as high as in a poor oppressed nation. That is why people from the poor countries are desperate

* V I Lenin, Preface to the French and German editions of *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, October 1921

to move. It is also why they are right to attempt to do so. No one in their senses moves out of a poor country into a poorer one. When the Europeans moved from one country to another, or from one continent to another, it was without exception a move away from poverty to better conditions of existence. Why should it be different now? And this is the reason that today all the rich imperialist countries have become net recipients of immigrants.

Thus the driving force behind this wave of immigration from the poor to the rich countries is the grossly uneven distribution of wealth across the globe. As long as this is so, the movement of people across international frontiers can no more be stopped than can the movement of people within the national frontiers of each country – from the depressed areas to the economically vibrant zones.

No matter what attempts are made to keep them out,

> [T]he potential immigrants will not go away. On the contrary, the combination of porous borders with vast differentials in wages is a recipe for persistent pressure – similar to that of the 'barbarians' on the frontiers of the Roman empire.*

To the cries of those who, while accepting as a natural law the free movement of capital and goods across international frontiers, oblivious to ethnic, political and national boundaries, call for a halt to immigration, the huddled masses from the poorer parts of the world pay no heed, for their desperation leaves them with no scope for the capacity to listen. According to Philip Stephens:

> For those locked out of the rich man's club, every unmanned border crossing, every gap in a fence, every passing train, car or boat promises freedom and a future . . . as long as there is chaos and

* Martin Wolf, *Financial Times*, 28 November 2001

> poverty on Europe's periphery, the citizens of those countries will seek to escape.

Pointing to the futility of attempts to keep out the desperately poor and persecuted, Mr Stephens continues:

> None of this will work. Prohibition has already put migration into the hands of criminal gangs. The traffic in human misery now vies with the drugs trade as a source of billions for those who make their fortunes from the dark side of globalisation. Europe's borders will always be porous. Knowledge of the drugs networks should have taught governments long ago that as long as there is demand there will be supply.

Pinpointing the boundless cynicism of 'our' politicians, Mr Stephens says:

> It does not matter whether policies work. Perceptions are what count. Domestic electorates must be persuaded that their governments are being tough with 'scroungers' and 'bogus asylum-seekers'.

And all this anti-immigrant hysteria, the attempts to put an end to immigration and build a Fortress Europe were being undertaken just as David Blunkett published (in early 2002) a White Paper recognising the need to open up routes to legitimate immigration into Britain![*]

* *Financial Times*, 24 May 2005

Imperialism and immigration

> One of the special features of imperialism . . . is the decline in emigration from imperialist countries and the increase in immigration into these countries from the more backward countries where lower wages are paid.*

This has been fully confirmed by patterns of migration into and out of countries that became imperialist by the close of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Lenin, in the work quoted above, says that

> [E]migration from Great Britain has been declining since 1884. In that year the number of emigrants was 242,000, while in 1900, the number was 169,000. Emigration from Germany reached its highest point between 1881 and 1890, with a total of 1,453,000 emigrants. In the course of the following two decades, it fell to 544,000 and to 341,000. On the other hand, there was an increase in the number of workers entering Germany from Austria, Italy, Russia and other countries. According to the 1907 census, there were 1,342,294 foreigners in Germany, of whom 440,800 were industrial workers and 257,329 agricultural workers. In France, the workers employed in the mining industry are, 'in great part', foreigners: Poles, Italians and Spaniards.†

This trend, with a few variations, has continued down to the present. According to the International Organisation for Migration

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* V I Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1917, p127
† *Ibid*, pp127-8

(IOM), a Geneva-based intergovernmental body,

> During the 1990s, Europe became a continent of immigration.*

This statement from the IOM marks a profound change in that the continent of Europe joins the United States, Canada and Oceania as a significant *net* recipient of immigrants. The number of immigrants into western Europe has increased markedly since the second world war. If, in 1950, western Europe was home to 3.8 million foreign citizens, in 2003 this figure had risen to 20.5 million. Another 10 million were foreign-born, although by then no longer foreign nationals. The number has risen further since then.

Between 1970 and 1995, the US received a net inflow of 25 million foreign workers, while Canada received 3.4 million, Germany 2.7 million and France 1.4 million. These figures do not take account of illegal immigrants, who are believed to number between a third and half of new entrants into the imperialist countries. According to some estimates, the US alone may be host to as many as 12 million irregular migrants, whereas the entry of irregular migrants into the EU was estimated at half a million in 1999 – a nine-fold increase over a six-year period. In the five years to 2003, nearly a million migrants applied for regularisation in the EU.

By 2000, the gross migrant stock (foreign-born) stood at 35 million in the US, 7.3 million in Germany, 6.3 million in France, 5.8 million in Canada, 4.7 million in Australia and 4.5 million in the UK. In just the five years between 1998 and 2003, the number of foreign-born residents in Spain grew four-fold to 3 million, accounting for 7 percent of Spain's population of 42 million.

According to the 2001 census, of the 57.1 million people living in Britain (excluding northern Ireland), more than 4.3 million were born outside the UK, accounting for 7.53 percent of the population,

* IOM, *World Migration 2003: Managing Migration*, p43

as compared with 5.75 percent in 1991. The number of people born abroad and settled in Britain has nearly doubled over the past three decades and it underwent a rapid increase in the 10 years to 2001. While the decade 1971-1981 witnessed a rise of 360,371 in the number of foreign-born inhabitants in Britain, the following decade saw a rise of 402,245, and in the decade to 2001, the figure rose by 1.5 million thus accounting for more than half of the increase in the population as a whole. The major centre for immigration is the economically vibrant London area and the south east generally. Out of a total of London's population of 7.2 million, nearly a quarter (1.78 million) are foreign born.*

Net immigration into Britain stood at 40,000 a year in the 1980s. It went into reverse with the impact of the recession of the early 1990s, with a net outflow of people in 1992 and 1993, after which the number of arrivals picked up – averaging 60,000 a year over the 1994-1997 period, jumping to 133,500 in 1998. Home Office statistics, which take into account refugees and temporary visitors who turn out to be permanent stayers, put the net immigration into Britain at an average at 84,000 a year over the ten years to 1997/98, accounting for nearly half the 1.8 million increase in Britain's population between 1988-1998. And the Government actuary, in the projections released in August 2000, predicted more than half the expected 4.4 million rise in Britain's population by 2021 to come from immigration.

According to the *Financial Times* of 25 October 2000, however,

> [About] 400,000 people arrived legally in the UK in 1998 with the intention of staying a year or more; but some estimates suggest that another 200,000 entered the country illegally.

Correspondingly, employment over the 1994-1998 period rose

* *Sunday Times*, 11 September 2005

by 1.4 million, of which 20-30 percent is estimated to have been accounted for by immigrants. Over the five-year period to August 2000, Britain gained nearly 400,000 people, mainly of working age.*

In 1999, nearly 80,000 foreigners, mostly from the Philippines, India, Australia and South Africa, came to Britain; in addition, another 100,000 and their dependants came to the UK to fill job vacancies, following the change of rules by the Home Office in September 2000, making it easier for people to enter the UK for work. In 2002, the UK took around 150,000 foreign workers, while in 2003 about 119,000 people entered Britain as work permit holders – two and a half times the number in 1993. The largest number of these immigrants were from America, followed by eastern Europe and the Indian subcontinent. Net immigration in that year (2003) was 151,000 people, not taking into account the 40,000 asylum seekers.†

Since May 2004, when their countries joined the EU, 290,000 east Europeans applied to work in Britain. Of these, Polish workers accounted for 58 percent in the hospitality industry and 61 percent in the catering industry. Latvians and Lithuanians accounted for 26 percent and 21 percent respectively of the accession workers in agriculture. Some 7,500 workers from the accession countries registered as care workers in the three months to the end of September 2005. Over the same period, 700 teachers and classroom assistants, and more than 500 doctors and nurses, registered to work in the UK.‡

The *Financial Times* of 22 December 2003 noted that net immigration had risen from around zero in the early 1990s to more than 150,000. If this trend were to continue, said the *Financial*

* 'How migrants help keep Britain's economy healthy' by David Smith, *Sunday Times*, 27 August 2000
† *Financial Times*, 25 January 2005
‡ *Financial Times*, 23 November 2005

Times, the UK's population would rise to 69 million by 2050 – 12 million more than it would be without immigration.

In the five years from 1999 to 2003 inclusive, cumulative net immigration into the UK was close to 750,000.

Of those born abroad, 1 percent were born in Ireland and 1.5 percent in the rest of the EU.

According to official figures quoted by the TUC, the working population born outside Britain grew from 7 percent to 9 percent of the working population of Britain between 1995 and 2002 – certainly an underestimate as these figures do not include foreigners working illegally. It is well known that in London and in many other big cities the catering trade would grind to a halt without foreign workers, a good many of whom go unrecorded in the data as they lack work permits.

Asylum seekers

In addition, there are the asylum seekers. According to the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, more than 6 million people applied for asylum in the high income (ie, imperialist) countries during the decade of the 1990s – nearly three times the number (2.2 million) who lodged asylum applications in the 1980s. The collapse of the former eastern bloc regimes, the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, instigated and abetted by US and EU imperialism, and the resultant Balkan wars, as well as the first Gulf war, gave a spurt to the flow of refugees. From 200,000 in 1988, asylum applications to the then 15 EU member states jumped to 676,000 in 1992 during the war in Bosnia. After a lull, asylum claims surged again in 1999, with the war in Kosovo, by nearly 20 percent to 366,000.

In 2001, Britain was at the head of the list with 92,000 asylum applications, followed closely by Germany and the US. Considered

as a percentage of the population, however, the countries most affected in that year were Austria and Switzerland. Although the flow of refugees into the heartlands of imperialism grabs the headlines, the truth is that most refugees do not end up in the rich countries. The biggest recipients are poor (oppressed) countries in Asia and Africa. It is on them that the burden of the cross-border flow of refugees falls most heavily. It is they who take 85 percent of the world's refugees.

The countries that gave rise to the largest number of refugees in 2001 stood in the following order: Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq, Sudan, Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia – all victims of imperialist war, genocide and imperialist-inspired civil strife. This does not, however, prevent the perpetrators of such wars and genocide from describing their victims as 'bogus', although

> . . . these would have been on the top of anybody's list of countries from which to escape.*

In any case, most asylum applications are rejected. During 2000 and 2001, for instance, Britain alone rejected the applications of 150,000 asylum seekers.†

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2000, refugees accounted for fewer than a fifth of the permanent immigrants into Australia, Portugal, Switzerland, the UK, Canada, the US and France.

Stricter immigration laws and controls put in place by the imperialist countries, while reducing the opportunities for legal migration, have increased the temptation for direct (trafficking) and indirect (asylum door) illegal migration. In the words of the IOM,

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* *Financial Times*, 30 July 2003

† *Daily Telegraph*, 1 January 2002

> [W]ith the demand for legal migration opportunities outstripping supply, many people who are not refugees are seeking to gain access to new countries through the asylum channel in the absence of viable alternatives.*

During the two years (2000 and 2001) that followed changes to British law aimed at excluding 'economic migrants' from Britain, there was an increase of 50,000 in asylum applications as compared with the two years (1998 and 1999) preceding these changes. In 2000, 80,000 (98,000 if dependants are included) claimed asylum in Britain, the number falling by 10 percent in 2001, when 70,000 principal applicants (88,000 with dependants included) claimed asylum. The number fell sharply in the following three years to the end of 2004.

Thus, rejected asylum seekers may well, and in many cases do, end up as illegal immigrants. Precisely this scarcity of legal channels for migration has given rise to a new flourishing industry in human trafficking and smuggling, estimated to be worth $13bn a year.

> [Between 400,000-500,000 illegal immigrants manage to] slip or are smuggled into the EU each year . . . If these numbers . . . are correct, this would mean that more illegal migrants are crowding into Europe each year than the 300,000 or so who enter America.†

According to the *Economist*, even though by posing as refugees, the false asylum seekers supposedly discredit the asylum system, and

> . . . undermine the tolerance of Europeans for those who genu-

* IOM, *op cit*, p97
† *The Economist*, 6 May 2000

inely need protection, clamping down on phoney refugees would not, by itself, weed out the economic migrants whose only sin, like those of generations before, is to be seeking a better life in the rich world. Unless they have an official means of trying to fulfil that ambition, they will bend the existing rules. As a European Commission immigration specialist argues: 'if you had a legal open front door for migration, you'd have far less pressure on the asylum back door'.

Europe has yet to recognise the image of itself as a continent of immigration, even though, over the centuries, its constituent bits have been refreshed by the new blood and vitality of migrants from within Europe itself. It may suit politicians, wary of Europe's xenophobic streak and mindful that labour needs today may evaporate if economic revival falters tomorrow, to keep it that way.

Link between jobs and immigration

There is plenty of statistical evidence to show that there is a clear and direct link between immigration and the availability of jobs (in the country of origin and destination of immigrants). Thus, between the 1920s and 1930s there was a precipitate decline in immigration into Britain – with only 7,000 a year entering during this period owing to economic depression and the resultant depressed labour market. This reduction in the number of foreign workers coming into Britain happened, as it has always done, because of the economic conditions and not because of anti-immigrant legislation.

When capitalism is experiencing a boom, and the labour market is buoyant, nothing on earth can stop capital getting its hands on

labourers. No immigration laws are allowed to bar capital's access to this, the only source of extraction of surplus value. Since the mid 1970s, all primary immigration into Britain, as well as other western European countries, has virtually ended. This has not put an end to foreign workers entering Europe. If they numbered 11 million in the mid-1970s, today their number is 20 million, not taking into account another 10 million who are foreign-born but European nationals.

Referring to the 'keen awareness of the state of the British labour market' gained by the citizens of Kingston, Jamaica, through their access to the British press and 'informal communications networks between immigrant workers already settled in Britain and friends and acquaintances back home', Ruth Brown says that

> [These informal processes] proved to be an extremely accurate mechanism for meeting labour demand in Britain and immigration levels consistently dropped very quickly after any drop in the number of advertised vacancies.*

She adds, correctly, that

> [It] was only the racism of Britain's rulers some years later which destroyed this 'natural' relationship between levels of migration and the level of demand for labour.

In the apt words of the *Financial Times*:

> Long before the needs of the next boom are clear to lawmakers in capitals, they are often sensed by the would-be immigrants in the remoter countries of the globe.†

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* Ruth Brown, *op cit*

† *Financial Times*, 25 April 2004

The Commonwealth Immigrants Bill of 1962, as indeed all subsequent legislation to keep foreign workers out, played a crucially transforming role, while at the same time sharply increasing the number of workers from the Commonwealth. In the run-up to the introduction of this legislation, as well as in its aftermath, the entry of dependants of Commonwealth workers into Britain increased three-fold, as dependants did all they could to beat the deadline, driven by the widespread fear that Britain was determined on a course of permanently closing the door to New Commonwealth citizens, as well as to the families of those already settled in Britain.

From 21,550 New Commonwealth immigrants in 1959, their number increased to 58,300 in 1960 – this number doubled again in 1961 with a record 125,400 New Commonwealth immigrants entering Britain. Thus, this racist piece of legislation succeeded in accomplishing the destruction of the previously existing correlation between the scale of immigration into Britain and the level of demand for labour. As the government at the last moment decided not to restrict, under the provisions of the 1962 act, the right to family reunion of the Commonwealth workers already in Britain, it only managed to exacerbate the 'problem' of its own creation.

The attempts at tightening immigration controls by the US had, predictably, results similar to those in Europe. Apart from making it more expensive and dangerous for those wishing to cross the border into the US, the controls have merely served vastly to increase the inflow of illegal immigrants into the US.

In 1986, the US Congress passed its first law aimed at preventing Mexicans from crossing the border. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, while offering an amnesty to three million undocumented workers, initiated the effort to stop further arrivals. Border security was tightened and employers were threatened with punitive fines if they employed illegal workers. Far from reducing the number of illegal migrants, the act has had the opposite effect. The number of undocumented workers has grown from

about 4 million in 1986 to some 12 million at present. While failing to stem the flow of immigrants, the crackdown, with its improved border security, claims 300 lives a year as desperate and destitute immigrants continue to make the perilous desert crossing.

In the wake of the 1986 law, what was, in the case of the Mexicans at least, a circular pattern of migration, has become a settled pattern. Before the act, Mexican migrants crossed into the border states of California, Arizona and New Mexico, and most would leave when work dried up – only to repeat the process the following year. Very few stayed permanently. If in the 1970s and 1980s, the average time for migrant labour in the US was about two years, now it is over 10 years.

America is built on immigration and, as such, has a long history of immigrants – legal or illegal, a tradition honoured in the verse on the Statue of Liberty that exhorts the world to

> Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free.*

(Let it be said in parenthesis that the verse belongs to a different era, when the US could doubtless be associated with revolutionary democracy and all the freedoms associated with it. It has long since turned into an imperialist bloodsucker and a hangman of other people's liberties. And with it, Miss Liberty has come to represent US-imperialist domination, war and brigandage.)

America no longer welcomes the huddled masses from abroad. It has grown mean minded. It has built fences to stop migrants coming in, it fines employers and it jails and deports those found to be in the country illegally. In 1994, California went to the extent of passing Proposition 187, under which illegal immigrants there were denied public education, non-emergency medical treat-

* 'The New Colossus' by Emma Lazarus

ment and other tax-funded benefits. In Arizona, several hundred volunteers, styling themselves after the Minuteman militia, who fought against the British colonial authorities in the American War of Independence, established desert camps in 2005 in support of the US Border Patrol. In August 2005, Arizona and New Mexico proclaimed a 'state of emergency' on their borders with Mexico, assigning millions of dollars to strengthening immigration control efforts.*

All these efforts have proved, and will continue to prove, fruitless. As long as there is destitution and poverty elsewhere and demand for the labour power of these victims of imperialist economics and politics, the immigrants will continue to flock into the US – illegally if legal avenues are blocked.

Like the British Home Office, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) in the US trumpets the number of illegal immigrants it captures, expels and repatriates. The dry statistics of the INS, dutifully regurgitated by the imperialist media, fail to portray even in the barest outline the emotions, aspirations and humanity, the sacrifices and courage of those brave enough to run the wire. Speaking of the attempts of Mexicans trying to reach the US, one journalist has written:

> Driven as they are by grinding poverty, giving up is rarely an option with them – precisely for that reason they will continue to risk all and throw themselves on the mercy of the road north.†

* Information in the last four paragraphs is drawn from the *Financial Times*, 29 August 2005

† *Financial Times*, 23 February 2000

Divisions within the ruling class

The ruling class of Britain, as indeed of every other imperialist country, is divided on the desirability and usefulness of immigrants. As the *Economist* of 29 June 2002 put it, politics and economics push the government in opposite directions. At a time when net immigration was running at 180,000 a year, the government's relaxation of immigration rules was accompanied by its shrill rhetoric about illegal immigrants. Much of Europe's media are ridden with hysteria and its politicians struck by panic. The perception has been created that Europe has been overrun by immigrants and asylum seekers, when the truth is that the number of asylum seekers entering the EU has halved over the past decade and those claiming asylum each year represent no more than 0.1 percent of the EU's population, doing badly-paid and dirty jobs no local will touch.

Imperialist politicians, conservative and social-democratic alike, driven solely by demagogy and cheap politics, shout in unison: the dykes must be plugged to halt the flood of asylum seekers and immigrants. In a confidential memorandum prepared for Tony Blair and leaked to the *Guardian* in the spring of 2002, its author suggested that British warships be despatched to patrol the Mediterranean and intercept boats that *might* be carrying illegal immigrants who *might* end up in Britain, and that the Royal Air Force be pressed into service to effect the 'bulk removals' of rejected asylum seekers.

Towards the end of May 2002, Blair told José María Aznar, the then prime minister of Spain, that illegal immigration had to be the top item on the agenda of the summit of EU leaders due to be held in Seville the following month (June). It would appear that Britain is fighting on two fronts – the war on 'terror' and the war against

miserable asylum seekers and economic migrants.

At the same time, the very same politicians and a significant section of the media are advocating a much more liberal policy on immigration. The same David Blunkett who, as Home Secretary, boasted towards the end of 2003 that 49 illegal immigrants had been picked up in a raid in Sussex in October of that year, also said that there was 'no obvious limit' to the number of migrants Britain could absorb, adding that he had no clue as to how many of Britain's immigrants were illegal. This being the case, the point of sensationally publicising the arrest and deportation of the 49 victims of his raid can only have been to incense public prejudice against immigrants and at the same time to assuage the bigotry of those who cannot stand immigrants.

Typically, while publicly sensationalising the immigration issue and inflaming racial tensions with an eye to the next election, the governments of the imperialist countries busy themselves on the quiet with securing immigrant labour to meet the needs of business. Thus is was that in the second half of September 2000, Barbara Roche, the Home Office minister at the time, signalled a relaxation of Britain's immigration laws in a speech, stating that a certain number of skilled economic migrants were to be permitted to work in Britain for the first time since 1971. About the same time, after lengthy debates, the German Cabinet approved its 'Green Card' scheme to attract highly qualified information technology workers in the face of fierce opposition from the '*Kinder Statt Inder!*' (Children not Indians) brigade. And, in the US, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, on several occasions emphasised the need for immigration to promote growth.

At a meeting of the interior ministers of the EU in July 2000, Jean-Pierre Chevènement came up with a discussion paper arguing that the EU would need to admit 50-75 million immigrants by 2050 to take up vacant jobs. A few months later, António Vitorino, the then justice and home affairs commissioner of the EU, made a

speech in which he said that the time had come to recognise that the zero immigration policies of the previous 25 years were not working and, more importantly, had become irrelevant to the EU's economic and demographic conditions. The 25 years of zero immigration policy had harmed the European economy and into the bargain led to a rise in the number of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, accompanied by smuggling and trafficking in human beings.*

On 22 October 2000, the European Commission launched a debate on immigration with a view to formulating a common policy after recognising that the zero immigration policies of the past 20-30 years were 'no longer adequate'. The Commission estimated that, while the working population of Europe would decline by 2025, the over-65s would rise and account for 22 percent of the population – up from 15 percent in 2000.

Three years later, the Commission estimated that the number of people of working age in the EU's then 15 member states would decline by some 40 million between 2000 and 2050 – from 243 million to 203 million, while the number of people aged over 65 was set to rise by 60 percent to 103 million. The implication of this is that the number of workers for every pensioner was destined to decline sharply, putting existing pension schemes under severe strain.†

Meanwhile, in 2000, a report by the UN's population division forecast that, owing to a combination of low fertility and rising life expectancy, Europe's population was on course to shrink by 13 percent between 2000 and 2050, while its median age was set to rise by 10 years to 48. The report also forecast that the percentage of global population living in the high-income countries was set to decline from 20 percent to 14 percent by 2050. While the

* *Financial Times*, 12 October 2000
† *Financial Times*, 4 October 2003

report predicted a rise of 13 percent in the UK's population, thanks mainly to immigration, forecast at 136,000 a year, that of southern Europe faced a steep decline because of very low fertility.

However, the most spectacular collapses in population are likely to take place further east, with the Russian and Ukrainian populations declining by 30 percent and 36 percent respectively between 2000 and 2050. The report went on to argue that the EU needed net migration of 13.5 million people a year to stop the proportion of working-age people to pensioners from falling. As a result, the immigration needed by the EU to stabilise its old-age dependency ratio would bring its population to 1.2 billion by 2050.

In order to keep its working-age population stable between now and 2050, at present birth and death rates, Germany would need to import 487,000 migrants a year, France would need 109,000 and the EU in its entirety 1.6 million. And to keep the ratio of workers to pensioners steady, the flows would need to swell to 3.6 million a year in Germany, 1.8 million in France and an astounding 13.5 million a year in the EU as a whole. On the other hand, in the absence of immigration, the population of the 25 (after the 2004 accession of 10 new members) member states of the EU is forecast to drop from 450 million in 2004 to 400 million in 2050.

This demographic change, says the European Commission, implies a sharp rise in the dependency burden as well as a decline in potential economic growth, which could result in the EU's share of the global gross product declining from 18 percent (at the end of 2002) to 10 percent in 2050, while the share of the US rises from 23 percent to 26 percent during the same period – a big shift in economic weight.*

Other imperialist countries, too, face similar problems on this score. A 2004 study by Goldman Sachs says that even in the US, immigration would have to increase by 30 percent a year to stabi-

* *Financial Times*, 3 March 2003

lise the ratio of working-age population to the general population. In Japan, faced as it is with urgent and serious ageing problems, immigration would have to increase by more than 700 percent a year, increasing the share of migrants in its total population from the present-day level of just over 1 percent to 20 percent by 2050.*

In 2005, two years earlier than expected, the population of Japan – the world's tenth biggest country in population terms – fell by 19,000 to 127.76 million.†

In a well-argued article, Samuel Brittan says that, compared with a century ago, there is too little globalisation – the big difference being in migration policies. Many countries then allowed free inward and outward movement of workers. Restrictive immigration policies, he says, have the same effect as those in the area of drugs – whereby

> [P]rohibition produces the very evils it claims to prevent.‡

He therefore proposes to abolish the distinction between economic migrants and asylum seekers and allow people to seek their fortune in any country of their choosing.

Confining himself to Britain, he says that research shows that native wages have not been depressed (this point would be hotly disputed by many) because immigrants have tended to be restricted to three types of job:

a) Public services, where pay is fixed by the government and is well below market levels. The effect of newcomers is simply to reduce the shortages (in London, 23 percent of the doctors and 47 percent of the nurses are non-UK born).

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* *Financial Times*, 27 September 2004

† *Financial Times*, 3 January 2006

‡ 'Let the huddled masses go free' by Samuel Brittan, *Financial Times*, 25 October 2000

Since Brittan's article was published, the numbers have risen sharply. In 2002, more than 30,000 nurses of foreign origin were working in Britain's National Health Service. About a third of the NHS staff were born overseas and, according to Home Office figures, 44,000 medical workers entered Britain in 2003 alone. More precisely, 31 percent of the doctors and 13 percent of the nurses working in Britain are foreign-born, these proportions rising to 47 percent and 23 percent respectively in London.

> Migration is massively important. The NHS would fall apart if we didn't have that,

said Dr Edwin Borman of the British Medical Council. There is an overall shortage of GPs, as well as a shortage of about 10,000 hospital doctors. Without recourse to foreign doctors this gap cannot be plugged in the near future.*

Recruitment pressures are likely to increase, with the government committed to recruiting a further 35,000 nurses by 2008 and 100,000 nurses due to retire by 2010.†

b) Low-paid and insecure jobs in sectors such as catering and domestic services, which unskilled natives are unwilling or unable to take. If migrants don't fill these jobs, they simply remain unfilled or uncreated (70 percent of catering jobs are filled by migrants).

c) Highly-skilled information technology workers, whose inflow, according to a Home Office study, enabled the IT sector to grow faster rather than depressed pay in it. Apart from the Asians, 150,000 French IT entrepreneurs arrived in Britain between 1995 and 2000.

In addition, residential care homes, farming, contract cleaning (which employs 800,000) and the construction industry are heav-

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* Information in the above two paragraphs comes from the *Financial Times* of 14 April 2004 and 28 August 2004

† *Financial Times*, 4 May 2005

ily reliant on immigrant labour. Irish immigrant labour, on whom the construction industry was traditionally reliant, has now been replaced by the Portuguese, Poles, Ukrainians and Lithuanians.

> Without migrant workers contractors would struggle to complete many major projects,

says Alan Ritchie, General Secretary of UCATT, the construction workers' union. The sector would need, says the Construction Industry Training Board, 80,000 new entrants in each of the next five years to meet the growth and replace those leaving the industry. Mr Ritchie says that measures are needed to protect foreign construction workers, whose rates of pay are 20 to 30 percent lower than those of indigenous workers.*

Even Martin Wolf, a *Financial Times* analyst who is not much in favour of sizeable immigration, has to admit that

> [If] our aim were to maximise global economic output, we would abolish restrictions on the movement of people . . . If immigrants pay more taxes than they receive in benefits, there is a gain to the rest of society.†

Immigration, he says, saves some of the costs of training people, adding that

> [Britain does] an almost disturbingly good job of this: in 2002 more than 30,000 nurses of foreign origin were working in its National Health Service. Some 42 percent of foreigners resident in the UK had tertiary level education in 2001 and 2002, against just 29 percent of the native population.

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* *Financial Times*, 4 May 2005
† *Financial Times*, 14 April 2004

Immigration also gives 'access to languages and cultures'. In the end, the prejudice against the foreigner takes the better of him, and Mr Wolf, who is himself a second- or third-generation jew in Britain, concludes thus:

> Yet the most important conclusion is that one's assessment of the desirability of sizeable immigration is a matter more of values than of economics. It is not a choice between wealth and poverty, but of the sort of country one desires to inhabit.

The implication is clear: do we really want to be surrounded by these hordes from foreign lands? My parent or grandparents got in. That was good. But the door must be firmly guarded, if not completely shut now. Doubtless, the essence of much of this debate concerning immigration is about race and ethnic diversity, not economics.

It is generally admitted that immigrants are resourceful, ambitious and entrepreneurial; that they have made a valuable contribution in the fields of medicine, science, academia, sports, music, cuisine and the arts, as well as in business and in government; that millions of others, though less famous, play an equally vital role – without them many health systems would be understaffed and many jobs that provide essential services and generate revenues would remain unfilled. Far from being 'benefit scroungers' and a burden on society, immigrants contribute more in taxes than they receive in benefits.

According to Treasury figures, in the 1998/99 financial year, the immigrant population paid 10 percent more in tax (£31.2bn) than it took out in benefits (£28.8 billion) – a net gain to the Treasury of nearly £2.5bn a year.*

The Treasury estimates that net immigration adds 0.4 percent a

* *Financial Times*, 23 January 2001

year to growth in the labour force and the GDP.*

Gordon Brown, in his role as chancellor of the exchequer, said that an increase in Britain's economic growth was in part due to immigration.†

The *Financial Times* of 9 October 2000, having stated that between 1988 and 1997 the US allowed twice as many legal immigrants (9.3 million) as western Europe (5.3 million), added:

> Now European economists are wondering whether there is reason for the US's economic performance.

Large sections of the economy, in particular the NHS, construction, contract cleaning and catering industries rely on migrant labour.

> The seemingly never-ending supply of foreign workers to Britain's shores may be part of the explanation for one of the economic puzzles of the past decade: how has the British economy managed to sustain strong growth without a jump in inflation? Indeed, inflation has consistently undershot most expectations, including those of the Bank of England.
>
> . . . migration has changed the way the Bank of England thinks about the trade-off between growth and inflation.‡

> All at once, continued growth across the globe hinges on the timely appearance of the man from Hyderabad . . . [even] German

* *Sunday Times,* 11 September 2005

† *Financial Times*, 24 May 2002

‡ 'The issue of immigrants and asylum seekers remains politically charged. But the increasing flow of workers from overseas may have helped keep inflation and interest rates down' by Anna Fifield and Ed Crooks, *Financial Times*, 28 August 2004

industry is swooning with desire for 'computer-Inder'.*

In addition, the immigrants are a source of valuable remittances to the countries they come from. Formal remittances by immigrants totalled $167bn (£97bn) in 2004 – up from $31bn in 1990. This sum is almost triple the value of official aid to developing countries, and close to the amount they received in the form of foreign direct investment.

Large as this sum is, it represents only the formal transfers. Informal transfers may have been twice that amount. While in 1995, official development aid stood at $59bn and remittances also at $59bn, in 2004, the aid had increased by a mere $20bn to $79bn, whereas remittances had shot up to $167bn, nearly triple their size in 1995. Thus it can be seen that immigrants play a very important role in alleviating world poverty. The biggest beneficiaries of these remittances are India, China and Mexico, who received $21.7bn, $21.3bn and $18.1bn respectively in 2004. Britain's immigrant population alone remitted £2.7bn in 2004.†

The World Bank, basing itself on recent household studies, says that the total worldwide remittances in 2005 amounted to $232bn (£133.6bn, €198.4bn). Of these, $167bn went to developing countries.‡

Real purpose

While immigration controls do not stop the movement of labour, they are nevertheless a potent weapon in the hands of the ruling class, for in periods of economic depression and worsening condi-

* *Financial Times*, 25 April 2000
† World Bank, IMF and Britain's Department for International Development, cited in *The Times*, 17 November 2005
‡ *Financial Times*, 16 November 2005

tions for the working class, which are a recurrent characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, they enable the ruling class to shift the blame for these conditions away from the real culprit, capitalism, and onto foreign workers.

These controls are aimed at (and actually achieve) pitting the older-established section (many themselves first-, second- or third-generation immigrants) of the working class against those newly arrived. Instead of a united working class fighting against the daily encroachments of capital and for the overthrow of capitalism, the only cause of their misery, one encounters the tragic spectacle of one section of the workers blaming another for conditions none of them can be blamed for. This state of affairs assumes ludicrous proportions when second- or third- generation Irish, jews and southern Europeans single out the workers from the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean as being responsible for the scarcity of jobs, bad housing conditions, lengthening queues at hospitals, etc. The latter in turn blame the Somalis and other recent entrants. This stupid blame game among different sections of the working class would be hilarious were it not so tragic.

During the 19th century, the British ruling class had no use for immigration controls. Britain was the workshop of the world and its industry had an insatiable appetite for labour. It also enjoyed the reputation as a generous provider of political asylum and refuge to those fleeing persecution. At that time, free immigration went hand in hand with free trade.

By the turn of the century, however, conditions had changed drastically. Britain faced competition from rising industrial powers, notably, Germany, the US and France, at the same time as it was in the grip of a deep economic recession with the resultant rising unemployment, massive cuts in living standards and widespread destitution. The working class responded with a strike wave and an explosion of New Unionism, aimed at organising the unskilled masses of workers, most of whom had been left out of the unions

and were treated with contempt by the organised labour movement, which represented the skilled workers.

These attempts to fight back were defeated by the ruling class. All the same, with unemployment a perennial feature and discontent rife among the teeming millions of destitute proletarians, the bourgeoisie needed a weapon to divide, weaken and subdue working-class militancy. It found this weapon in the Aliens Act of 1905, which institutionalised the notion that immigrants alone were responsible for the increasing misery, destitution, squalor and mass unemployment wreaking havoc among the working class. The introduction of this legislation was accompanied by a frenzied anti-Semitic campaign, led by the so-called popular press and demagogic bourgeois politicians, directed against east European jewish workers fleeing persecution and arriving in the East End of London. One member of parliament likened the arrival of the jews to the entry of diseased cattle from Canada.*

Liberal MP Cathchart Wilson blamed the inability of capitalism to solve the housing problem on the immigrant workers. In a base attempt to rouse the working class against poor immigrants, he demagogically and rhetorically asked:

> What is the use of spending thousands of pounds on building beautiful workmen's dwellings if the places of our workpeople, the backbone of the country, are to be taken over by the refuse scum of other nations?†

The aristocracy of labour, which constituted the official leadership of the working-class movement, fell into line, as was to be expected, and did the bidding of the bourgeoisie. It held the immigrant workers responsible for rising unemployment and deteriorat-

* Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 1965, p89
† Cited in *ibid*

ing conditions. From 1892 on (that is, more than a decade before the enactment of the Aliens Act), the TUC called for a complete end to all immigration. Ben Tillett, the dockers' leader, addressed the immigrant workers thus:

> Yes, you are our brothers, and we will do our duty by you. But we wish you had not come.*

In 1903, and in the years following, the TUC passed a number of resolutions demanding tough legislation against immigrant workers, who, it alleged, were stealing their members' jobs, the dockers' union being the most vociferous in this context.

Irrespective of their sufferings, the talents they bring with them, or their contribution to the economic, cultural and social life of the host country, the ruling class of Britain, or indeed of any other capitalist country, has routinely stoked up anti-foreign sentiments, leading, in times of war, to blind nationalism and roguish patriotism.

The eve of the first world war coincided with a series of strikes in Britain, with four times the number of days lost through strikes as at the beginning of the 20th century. The national dock and rail strikes of 1911 were followed by a miners' strike in 1912. The outbreak of the war in 1914 furnished the perfect pretext for the British ruling class to unleash national jingoism on an unprecedented scale. Within weeks of the commencement of the war, the Aliens Restriction Act and the Defence of the Realm Act were rushed through Parliament. Under these pieces of draconian legislation, while nearly 29,000 Germans and Austrians were instantly expelled, another 32,000 'non-British' nationals were locked up in detention centres to remain there for the duration of the war.

Newspapers of the day were littered with anti-immigrant and

* Quoted in Ruth Brown, *op cit*

anti-German hysteria. Typical of the anti-immigrant venom was the *Cardiff Herald*, which wrote:

> You know, we know and they know that a Chinaman isn't worth a toss as a seaman: that his only claim to indulgence is that he is cheap.*

On the anti-German national chauvinist front, Horatio Bottomley, editor of *John Bull*, the magazine with the largest weekly circulation at that time, wrote:

> I call for a vendetta against every German in Britain, whether 'naturalised' or not. You cannot naturalise an unnatural beast – a human abortion – a hellish freak. But you can exterminate it. And now the time has come. No German must be allowed to live in our land.†

The anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner language may have moderated somewhat since those days, but the virulent campaign against foreigners, laying at their doorstep all the ills of capitalism, continues unabated – all in an attempt to exploit the insecurity of the workers under the conditions of capitalism by portrayal of the foreigner as illegal, social security scrounger, criminal, drug trafficker and, increasingly, as a terrorist.

For instance, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* run a regular anti-immigrant hate campaign. In July 2004, the *Sun* wrote that bogus colleges were furnishing an easy route into Britain for illegal immigrants, saying,

> This scandal allows access to Britain for scroungers, prostitutes, crooks and perhaps even terrorists.

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* Cited in Jenny Clegg, *Fu Manchu and the 'Yellow Peril'*, 1994, p27
† *John Bull*, 15 May 1915

In the run-up to the May 2005 general election, Michael Howard, the then Conservative leader and himself the son of jewish immigrants, leading a totally discredited party and with little to offer to the electorate, in typical scoundrelly fashion, latched on to the question of immigration: in a full-page advertisement in the *Sunday Telegraph*, he set out the Tory racist stall, claiming that

> [T]here are literally millions of people in other countries who want to come and live here. Britain cannot take them all.*

Labour countered it by an equally racist response. The home secretary, Charles Clarke, assured the electorate in a strategy document on immigration that

> [His] top priority [was] public confidence in the immigration system.

To counter the Tories' proposed quota system, Labour put forward a points system.

Michael Howard also called for immigrants to be screened for diseases, following which the *Daily Mail* carried the banner headline:

> Our NHS, not the world health service!†

The intended incendiary effect of this front-page headline is not hard to realise.

Gary Silverman, commenting upon the attempts of the Conservative and Labour parties to present immigration as the 'greatest threat facing the UK today', had this to say:

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* *The Sunday Telegraph*, 23 January 2005

† *Daily Mail*, 16 February 2005

> With general elections expected this year, the country's two major political parties are tripping over each other, trying to appear tougher on immigration. Labour wants a points system that would encourage only skilled workers to settle in the UK. The Conservatives favour quotas for foreign migrants.
>
> . . . it's hard to avoid the impression that both parties are using the immigration issue to appeal to the less admirable instincts of the British public.*

Gary Silverman is from New York. As such, he has personal experience of living in a city, which, in the words of Lenin, 'is like a mill which grinds up national distinctions' and turns people of various nationalities into Americans without in the least threatening American identity.

> And what is taking place on a grand, international scale in New York [and in London, Paris, Rome, Madrid and Berlin, we may add] is also taking place in every big city and factory settlement.†

In an effort to assuage the fears of the average Briton aroused to anti-immigrant frenzy by the unscrupulous bourgeois politicians and the press alike, Mr Silverman goes on to say:

> From my perspective as a New Yorker, all this rhetoric about the UK being overrun by immigrants seems comical. In New York we are always being overrun by immigrants and the main consequence is the food tends to improve with each new group of arrivals. My last neighbourhood, in the borough of Queens, was positively surreal in its ethnic composition. We had ethnic Chinese from Argentina,

* 'Migrants, the more the merrier' by Gary Silverman, *Financial Times*, 12 February 2005

† 'Critical remarks on the national question' by V I Lenin, December 1913, *Collected Works*, Vol 20, p29

> ethnic Indians from Guyana, jews from Uzbekistan, jews from Afghanistan and Russian-speaking Koreans. We all survived.
>
> What is missing from the UK debate is a fully formed view of why migrants have been flocking to cities like London and New York. They are arriving because there is work to be done.

Mr Silverman pokes special fun at the Conservatives, who are supposedly believers in free markets. What is more, they are not doing any favours to British business by standing in the way of cheap labour, when in fact they should be fighting for 'more immigration as a way to lower labour costs', adding sarcastically that 'these guys can't even get their part in the class war right'.

No, Mr Silverman, these guys *have* got their part in the class war right. They have access to all the cheap labour that British capital needs. The availability of the *cheap* labour is facilitated all the more easily through immigration controls, with the consequent division into legal and illegal workers, which turns the latter (illegal workers) into the most exploitable material, while at the same time blaming them for all the calamities emanating from the normal workings of the capitalist system – and thus pits one section of the working class against another to disunite and weaken the entire working-class movement.

Their dirty work, done through such incendiary assertions and demagogic electoral platforms, the gutter press and the respectable bourgeois politicians alike leave the rest to fascist thugs to attack foreigners and the police to harass immigrant minorities and make their lives even more miserable than already is the case through surveillance, knocks on the door at night, raids, arrests and summary deportations. Given the hysteria skilfully manufactured by the respectable bourgeois politicians and the gutter press, and the near absence of any working-class attempt to counter it, it is not surprising that a Mori poll for the *Financial Times* found in

August 2004 (just before the last general election) that

> 30 percent of people cited immigration and race relations as being among the most important national issues, compared with 14 percent in 2001 and only 3 percent in 1997, immediately after Tony Blair's first landslide victory.*

Continuing the same old shameful game of divide and rule, the present-day imperialist bourgeoisie is employing every weapon in its armoury to divide the working class along national, religious and racial lines. European ministers, members of parliament, bourgeois journalists and mainstream media routinely refer to the asylum seekers, who are the victims of imperialist wars and imperialist-inspired civil strife, as 'bogus applicants' with 'manifestly ill-founded claims', whose applications must be rejected, for to do otherwise would be an 'abuse of asylum rights' and would 'open the floodgates' to the entry of undeserving hordes and cause a complete breakdown of the mechanisms for regulating the flow of asylum seekers.

If this is the language of the respectable bourgeois, it is hardly surprising that the openly racist and fascist thugs, as well as the police and immigration officials, take their cue and get on with the business of victimising workers of foreign origin, subjecting them to harassment and violence and openly calling for their repatriation. There is a kind of division of labour, not only between subtle racism of the respectable bourgeois and the crude racism of the fascist thug, but also between the concealed and hypocritical racism of the front bench and the raw, open and sordid racism of many a backbencher.

Thus, one representative of the right, making the case against immigration back in 1991, argued that Britain could not accept eve-

* Anna Fifield and Ed Crooks, *op cit*

ry 'James Frederick Bonga Bonga' as that would result in '100,000 people settling in Burton', doubling the number of families in bed and breakfast and an additional '100,000 on social security'.*

These were not the words used by the National Front, but by Ivan Lawrence, the influential chairman of the Conservative home affairs backbench committee and MP for Burton. Ivan Lawrence was by no means alone in expressing such rabidly anti-immigrant sentiments. His colleague, Tory MP David Evans, also speaking in November 1991 on immigration, asked the rhetorical question:

> Why should this country be the world's dumping ground for asylum seekers?

These two gentlemen were only following in the footsteps of Peter Griffith, who in 1964 won the Smethwick parliamentary seat on the back of the racist slogan:

> If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour.

The open racism of the type mentioned in the preceding paragraphs was merely an accurate reflection of the respectable racism of the then Tory prime minister John Major. Arguing for strong European borders against immigrants, Major said:

> We must not be wide open to all comers simply because Paris, Rome or London seem more attractive than Bombay or Algiers.

He urged the need to guard against a torrent of

> illegal immigrants, drug pushers, criminals and terrorists.

Having emotively jumbled together these disparate groups in an

* *The Scotsman*, 14 November 1991

attempt to obliterate the boundary line between them and rouse racial tension, Major hypocritically went on to reason that immigration controls were in the interests of good race relations. This is the stock argument, as we shall see later, of Tory and Labour hypocrites alike – that immigration legislation must be tightened as the only route to racial harmony. In the final analysis, this argument boils down to this: to ensure good race relations, every attempt must be made to exclude from our society all members of other races, whatever that might mean.

John Major's government doubled the carriers' liability fine in 1991 and, as a result, the number of asylum applicants reaching Britain halved by the end of 1992. The result was that thousands of refugees found themselves stranded, unable to flee persecution and worse, for they could not persuade carriers to transport them without the requisite legal documentation. By 1991, visa requirements for travel to the UK had been imposed on the citizens of nearly 100 countries. Major's government added further countries to the list in order to block the entry into Britain of people displaced by imperialist-led and imperialist-inspired wars in the Balkans and elsewhere – the victims of the wars in former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Sierra Leone being the prime examples in this context. Further draconian measures were enacted through the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act.

Britain is by no means alone in pursuing this racist, inhumane, anti-immigrant and anti-asylum programme. Since the late 1980s, the EU has streamlined and coordinated its policy, which seeks to deny freedom of movement, the right to family reunion, the right to political activity and to belong to a trade union, let alone a political organisation. This policy is carried out to the accompaniment of denial of access to education, health provision, employment and social security to those unfortunate victims of imperialism who manage to escape immediate deportation upon arrival.

In Fortress Europe, the relaxation of internal border controls

goes hand in hand with tough external controls. While the 1985 Schengen Treaty put in place the framework for the EC (now the EU) border controls, the Trevi group of EU Interior and Justice ministers, whose proceedings are marked by a cloak of secrecy, has formulated most of the EU immigration and asylum policy, whose influence is clearly visible in Britain's legislation on carriers' liability.

The purpose of all legislation in this area is to denude those who would attempt to migrate to, or seek asylum in, the EU of every right and to make it pretty unattractive for them to embark upon this hazardous enterprise. For instance, under the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act, those who reach Britain through a third country regarded as 'safe' by the Home Office are excluded, as are those arriving without proper documentation. Applications must be lodged promptly, and, if rejected, the applicant is given only 48 hours in which to lodge an appeal. The denial of accommodation to the applicant is accompanied under the act by the power to detain him/her in some high-security prisons or in purpose-built detention centres.

Abolition of legal aid, compulsory fingerprinting, stiff fines on airlines carrying unsuccessful asylum seekers and fast-track deportations of applicants refused permission to stay – these are all part of everyday life in 'democratic' Europe, which, along with the US, has arrogated to itself the right to pass judgement on the democratic credentials of foreign regimes.

Method behind madness

It would be wrong to conclude from the foregoing that there is no method in the madness of the ruling bourgeoisie. Immigration controls, with their implied message that immigrants, not capitalism, are the problem, divide the working class by pitting its indig-

enous section against the foreigners. As such, they are a powerful ideological weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie – a weapon directed against the proletariat in its entirety.

In addition, by creating the conditions for illegal entry of foreign workers, and the resultant distinction between legal and illegal immigrants, these controls create nightmarish conditions for those entering illegally, thus making them the perfect material for superexploitation, resulting in slave-like working conditions and leading, in a large number of cases, to dependence on criminal gangs, sexual slavery, child prostitution and child labour. They are the source of wage subsidies to the employers and price subsidies to the general public.

Bridget Anderson, the author of an early 2005 TUC report on immigration, clearly demonstrates that conditions of most shameful exploitation, to which foreign workers are often subjected – particularly in the areas of contract cleaning, care homes, construction and agriculture – are crucial to the functioning of the economy.

In this report, she provides a wealth of detail on the exposure of foreign workers to conditions of forced labour mediated by violence, intimidation, debt bondage, confiscation of identity documents with the resultant restriction of movement, and work permits (if they have any) that bind foreign workers to a particular employer. Capital needs a vast reservoir of workers who can be hired and fired instantly. The Morecambe Bay tragedy of 5 February 2004, when 21 Chinese cocklers were drowned, and the 58 Chinese would-be immigrants suffocated in the back of a lorry in June 2000 are just two of the examples of the tragic consequences of imperialist immigration controls.

In a remarkably candid article in the *Financial Times*, Mr Christopher Caldwell accused David Blunkett (British Home Secretary at the time, and who had boasted that there was 'no obvious limit' to the number of immigrants Britain could absorb) of demagogy for drawing a sharp distinction between legal and illegal

immigration. And this because

> [I]f mass migration is a natural outgrowth of the global economy, it is precisely illegal immigration – not legal – that provides the economic bonanza. A Bangladeshi physicist who joins a university in Los Angeles or Paris on a work visa will probably produce as much – and get paid as much – as his American or French colleagues. It is his impoverished compatriot, the illiterate Bangladeshi janitress working for less than the minimum wage, who is the revolutionary figure. She and others like her enable lifestyles that would otherwise be impossible.
>
> You can see why the leftist insistence on the term 'undocumented immigrant' for 'illegal alien' is not mere political correctness. To call immigrants 'illegal' is just to misname the subsidy they provide to employers through their ineligibility for insurance and minimum-wage laws . . .
>
> Economically, it is worth having such immigrants *only* if they live under a different political regime.*

Let us take the example of the US in this context. There are reliably said to be 12 million illegal (undocumented) immigrants in the US, including 6 million Mexicans, with a continued annual inflow of undocumented Mexicans estimated to be in the order of 500,000. Illegal Mexicans represent 18 percent of Los Angeles' construction workforce and account for 10 percent of the total labour force in a region that generates 30 percent of California's gross product. In California, the US's leading food-producing state, with the heaviest concentration of legal and illegal Mexican-born workers, 400,000 work on farms that generate more than $20bn a year. California is believed to be home to about 50 percent of all illegal

* *Financial Times*, 22 November 2003 (our emphasis)

Mexicans in the US, although the demand for labour is taking them all across the country. In Washington state, where farming is the third largest industry, fruit growers claim that up to 70 percent of the 70,000 they employ at peak harvest times are illegal.

Reliable estimates have it that 600,000 of the US's farm labour force of 4 million carry no documents.

Driven by desperation and destitution, on average 300 Mexicans lose their lives every year as they run the wire to undertake the lowest-paid jobs in the US. And their contribution to the US economy may be gleaned from an estimate by the Cato Institute, according to which the cost of fruit and vegetables would increase by 6 percent if US farms were denuded of illegal farm workers. And their role as unrecognised fighters against inflation was acknowledged by Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve chairman, in January 2000, when he suggested that immigration policies would need to be relaxed if growth was to be sustained at the then-existing pace.*

Thus it can be seen that illegal immigration is a source of huge enrichment to the bourgeoisie, while at the same time serving as a scapegoat for the ills of capitalism and as an instrument for sowing deep divisions within the working class.

Electoral advantage

Finally, the anti-immigrant hysteria and demagogy are a convenient ploy routinely used by bourgeois parties in all the imperialist countries for gaining electoral advantage. Every British election since the passing of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act has been preceded by the spectacle of the two major bourgeois par-

* Most of the information in the preceding paragraph is drawn from *Financial Times*, 23 February 2000

ties, Labour and Tory, tripping over each other in an effort to appear tougher on immigration.

> Ever since the Smethwick election it has been quite clear that immigration can be the greatest potential vote-loser for the Labour Party.

So wrote Richard Crossman in his *Diaries*, adding that he saw nothing but disaster if it (the Labour party) was

> . . . seen to be permitting a flood of immigrants to come in and blight the central areas of our cities.*

As it had been an imperialist and a racist party right from its inception, Labour has had little difficulty following Crossman's advice, as we shall see. From then on it was to be an auction between the Conservatives and Labour as to which one of them was tougher on immigration.

Whereas Dennis Healey, on behalf of the Labour opposition's front bench, was prepared, as late as the committee stage of the 1962 bill, to tell a mass meeting of commonwealth and immigrants' organisations in Britain that a Labour government would repeal the Tory legislation, by the end of 1962, Labour leader Harold Wilson was busy assuring parliament that Labour no longer opposed the need for immigration controls. Increasingly, Labour MPs in the early 1960s enthusiastically asserted that Britain could not afford to be

> . . . the welfare state of the whole of the Commonwealth.†

During the 1964 election campaign, twice as many Labour can-

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* Cited in Ruth Brown, *op cit*

† Paul Foot, *op cit*, p177

didates as Tory included the question of immigration in their election addresses, with nearly all of them stating clearly that Labour was keen to continue the immigration policies of the Conservative government. In the Wandsworth Central constituency, the Labour candidate went to the length of issuing a leaflet headed 'Things about immigration the Tories want you to forget!'

The leaflet stated, *inter alia*, that

> [L]arge-scale immigration has occurred only under this Tory government. The Tory Immigration Act has failed to control it – immigrants of all colours and races continue to arrive.*

Labour's election manifesto clearly stated that it would retain immigration controls whatever the circumstances, while negotiating with the governments of Commonwealth countries over means of putting an end to immigration 'at source'. The reasons for Labour's *volte-face* were its racism and electoral opportunism; it feared the loss of electoral support unless it took a tough stance on immigration.

Having won the 1964 election, far from repealing the 1962 act, Labour went on to strengthen it further.

The year 1968 saw a major immigration scare with the expulsion of Asians from Kenya – a scare that had more to do with the political battles between Harold Wilson's foundering government and the Tory opposition than with the 27,000 Kenyan Asians who eventually managed to settle in Britain.

Labour's response to the arrival in Britain of a few Kenyan Asians, and to the hysteria provoked by it on the part of the Conservative party and the gutter press, was to rush through parliament the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act in a record three days. Although they held British passports, the Kenyans were denied

* Cited in Paul Foot, *ibid*, p181

the right of entry into Britain under this legislation. At a stroke, 150,000 Asians were rendered effectively stateless.

Feeling upstaged by Labour, Enoch Powell, then a member of the Conservative front bench, made his infamous 'rivers of blood' speech in response to the 1968 act with the intention of inflaming racist sentiments and luring voters away from Labour. Shamefully, not only Smithfield meat porters but also dockers, hitherto one of the most militant sections of the British working class, demonstrated in support of Powell's calls for further draconian restrictions on immigration (especially from the New Commonwealth). At the same time, an opinion poll revealed that 74 percent of the British population backed Powell's views.

Powell's flagrantly racist pronouncements, in view of his membership of the front bench, proved embarrassing for the Conservative party. As a result, he was sacked from the shadow cabinet, although Powell, in a manner characteristic of him, had done no more than draw the logical conclusion from what both the major parties, Labour and Conservative, had stated about immigration and the Kenyan Asian scare in the run up to the 1970 general election.

Labour lost the 1970 election all the same, leaving behind a shameful legacy of racism, which even the right-wing Conservatives could view only with envy. On returning to power in 1974, Labour continued its racist policy – only much more openly and flagrantly. While the government ordered gynaecological exanimations of Asian women, supposedly to determine their virginity, its leading spokesmen became more brazen by the day in expressing their racist views.

Joining the racist hysteria surrounding the expulsion from Malawi in 1974 of a mere 250 Asians who held British passports, Labour MP Bob Mellish said that

> [People] cannot come here just because they have a British pass-

port – full stop.

The case of the tiny group of Malawi Asians also served to furnish proof that immigration controls have little to do with numbers and everything to do with inflaming racist tensions, dividing and weakening the working class, and gaining electoral advantage through appeals to the basest sentiments of the most backward sections of the population. By 1978, Labour spokesmen were no longer ashamed of admitting, as did Merlyn Rees on television, that all immigration legislation was designed to stop 'coloured' immigration. Doubtless, this had been the accepted premise of Labour's policy on immigration, which had been put forward by its own committees in the early 1950s and which was enshrined and institutionalised in the 1962 act and every subsequent piece of legislation on immigration. The major difference was the audacity with which its spokesmen were, by 1978, admitting it openly.

Less than a decade later, at a time when primary immigration had been reduced to negligible levels, the Conservatives revived the race scare in the approach to the 1979 general election. Appealing to the basest instincts of the most backward sections of British society, Margaret Thatcher spoke thus:

> The British character has done much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in . . . if you want good race relations you have got to allay people's fear on numbers.

The implication of the above remark, saturated through and through with racism and imperialist chauvinism, is clear: the voters had better opt for the Conservatives, for they were the true party of race, nation and empire. Thatcher's statement helped the Conservatives on the one hand to outbid the equally racist Labour

government, which had earned notoriety for having introduced virginity tests on Asian brides, and on the other hand to undermine support for the National Front, which had secured 120,000 votes in the 1977 London Council elections.

For its part, Callaghan's Labour government sent thousands of policemen to protect a provocative fascist 'election' rally in the predominantly Asian West London suburb of Southall and to attack the 5,000 anti-fascists demonstrating against the presence of a few dozen fascists in an area where nobody, for obvious reasons, votes for them. In the resulting carnage, 1,000 people were injured, one man, Blair Peach, was killed, 800 people were arrested and 342 prosecuted; 85 percent of those charged were convicted and received in most cases stiff fines or jail terms. Prime Minister Callaghan perversely blamed the troubles on 'outside agitators'.

In spite of this shameful behaviour, Labour went on to lose the 1979 general election, for during its term of office it had attacked working-class living standards through the Social Contract with the trade-union leadership, presided over the tripling of unemployment from 500,000 to 1.5 million, instituted savage cuts in health, education and welfare services, at the same time as galloping inflation further eroded the purchasing power of pensioners as well as of those in work. All these factors created a fertile ground for the renewal of a racist offensive, which Thatcher's Conservatives were successfully able to manipulate to their electoral advantage.

Labour's parting contribution to further tightening immigration controls was its green paper on nationality law, several proposals of which were later incorporated into the Nationality Act 1981 by the incoming Thatcher Conservative government. This act took away the right of citizenship from a large number of the New Commonwealth citizens, who had until then been classed as British citizens.

The Nationality Act was introduced to the accompaniment of boastful, not to say shameful, claims by many a Conservative

MP that racism amongst British people was a 'natural' instinct. Conservative MP Tony Marlow had these delightful words to utter in this context:

> People have criticised these measures because they say they are racialist, as if a word of abuse. What does racialist mean? It means tribal. After all, man is a tribal animal. We have a feeling of kith and kin for people like ourselves, with our background and culture.*

With this open wearing of the racist badge with pride by mainstream Conservative MPs, not surprisingly, groups further to the right felt much encouraged and emboldened during Thatcher's first term as prime minister. The notorious Monday Club was reactivated by the likes of Enoch Powell and Harvey Proctor, both Tory MPs, and the club's Immigration and Repatriation Policy Committee regularly advocated in the early 1980s the forced repatriation from Britain of 100,000 New Commonwealth immigrants every year.

There was a parallel shift to the right in 'academic' circles in the 1980s, with publications such as the *Salisbury Review* routinely supporting forced repatriation, as well as coming up with pseudo-scientific claims linking black immigrants to 'vastly disproportionate' amounts of violent crime. The reactionary imperialist gutter press popularised the caricature figures of the West Indian mugger and the 'Wily Asian', with the latter being accused of abusing the arranged marriage custom so as to evade immigration laws. As a result, the police were given the nod by the government to harass black people in Britain, with frequent raids by the police and immigration officials, principally on Asian business establishments with large workforces. Although they had committed no offence, many were arrested and questioned under a plethora of

* Quoted in R Miles and A Phizacklea, *White Man's Country*, 1984, p96

immigration laws and rules.

In the run-up to the 1986 general election, the last to be fought under Thatcher's leadership, the Conservatives started a new immigration scare, with the government bringing in new restrictions for visa applications from Asia, thus knowingly creating hold-ups at Heathrow as the intended targets of these restrictions hurried to beat the deadline. The government then used the chaos as 'proof' that Britain was in danger of being swamped by a new wave of immigration.

The government's actions led to a spate of racist attacks. A headline in the *Sun* screamed:

> 3,000 Asians flood Britain*

Not surprisingly, the same night, some local racist thugs daubed '3,000 Moore' and 'Packie Patel' across the entrance door of an Asian newsagent. Notwithstanding the deplorable spelling there was no ambiguity about the message behind these slogans.

In the run-up to the 1997 general election, which brought Blair's Labour into office, in the auction over race and immigration, while the Conservative spokesman, Michael Howard, desperately tried to put 'clear blue water' between his Conservative party and Labour, in attempting to play the race card yet again. Jack Straw, then Labour's shadow home secretary, retorted by truthfully asserting that

> [Y]ou couldn't get a cigarette paper between Labour and the Tories over the question of immigration.†

Thus, by its own admission, Labour's policy on immigration is identical to that of the Conservative party. They are as racist as

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* *The Sun*, 15 October 1986

† *The Guardian*, 3 March 1995

each other. Labour had correctly characterised the 1993 Asylum Act, enacted by the Conservative government, as 'shabby and mean'. Since coming to power, it has gone much further.

Enduring bond between state and unofficial racism

Racism has been at the heart of immigration legislation in Britain. A cabinet committee set up by Labour as far back as 1951, when the demand for immigrant labour was extremely high, and British politicians and businessmen were engaged in the active recruitment of foreign workers, recommended that

> [Immigration restrictions in the future should] as a general rule, be more or less confined to coloured persons.*

These recommendations were to be built on by successive British governments in a series of legislative measures.

This fact is of cardinal importance, for it summarily disposes of the myth that if governments do not take decisive action against the entry of foreign workers, extreme right and racist organisations will exploit public fears. Better then, so runs the argument, let Jack Chirac and Tony Blair construct the new European fortress than hand the keys to Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front Nationale and its British counterparts.

The truth, however, is that there is a close, strong and enduring bond between state racism and the racism of the unofficial fringe organisations. Each time the state enacts restrictive and racist legislation, it not only takes on board and implements a part of the policies and programme advocated by the racist groups, it also encourages the latter to make further demands in the area of

* R Miles and A Phizacklea, *op cit*, pp148-49

immigration policy. For every piece of immigration legislation, with its implicit message that the arrival of foreign workers, especially black, is an unmitigated disaster, that it is these foreign workers, not capitalism, who are responsible for all the ills of present-day society, constitutes a standing incitement to racism.

Labour and Conservatives alike have resorted to the demagogic pretext that strict immigration controls are essential for good relations and to keep fascism at bay. In the memorable phrase of Labour's Roy Hattersley in 1965:

> Without integration, limitation is inexcusable: without limitation, integration is impossible.

In modern speak, Roy Hattersley's syllogism parades as 'firm but fair' immigration controls. While the explicit basis of Hattersley-like assertions is that the fewer the immigrants the better it is for harmonious race relations, their implicit message is that only the total absence of foreign workers can keep racial peace.

The truth is that these assertions are made by bourgeois politicians to lend a veneer of respectability and moral legitimacy to the racist immigration legislation and controls instituted by the state. For it is crazy to believe that unleashing immigration officers to practise racism at the point of entry, and to let the police loose on ethnic minorities in fishing raids, is the best means of promoting integration and good race relations and keeping the racists at bay.

In the name of saving Britain from the far right, the two major bourgeois parties, Labour and Tory, are tripping over each other to adopt the policies advocated by insignificant fascist organisations. Writing in the *Observer*, Nick Cohen presented the Blair government's position on immigration and asylum in these sarcastic terms:

> Unless they are tough on crime and drive asylum-seekers into prisons and beggary, [say the Blairites,] the streets will be filled by men in black leather itching to invade Poland. The only way to save us from neo-fascism is to triangulate [sic] with neo-fascism . . .
>
> [David Blunkett] has been raising the phantom menace of the far-right in [an attempt to provide] political cover for policies he would push for if the BNP did not exist.*

Blunkett, as home secretary, justified instructing immigrants to speak English at home and his plans to hold the children of asylum seekers in segregated classrooms on the pretext that if he did not act this way, the 'right will step into the gap'. Of course, the real reason was that once children go to a local school and form friendships with local children and community bonds develop between their parents and those of the local population, it becomes very difficult to expel foreign workers. David Blunkett stated it frankly in parliament:

> The difficulty sometimes with families whose removal has been attempted is that their youngsters have become part of a school, making it virtually impossible in some circumstances to operate the managed system to which we should all sign up.

During the 1990s, before the BNP won a seat on Burnley Council, the Conservative and Labour parties vied with each other in announcing crackdowns on criminals and asylum-seekers in every session of parliament. Nick Griffin, the leader of the BNP, acknowledged their help in these words:

> The asylum-seeker issue has been great for us. The issue legiti-

* 'How frightening are they?' by Nick Cohen, *guardian.co.uk*, 13 October 2002

mises us.

Nick Cohen makes the correct observation that

> If Blairites believe they are responding to a future BNP threat, then they must acknowledge it is a threat they helped create,

and that today

> . . . we are getting a touch close to far-right policies from a party which doesn't actually call itself far-right.

In other words, Labour *is* the BNP it pretends to be saving us from.

Far from being 'alien' to the traditions of British bourgeois 'democracy', the BNP is a product of it; it does not manufacture racism, it lives off it. And, over the past four decades, through their pronouncements and legislative measures, Labour and Conservatives alike have carefully prepared the conditions for making racism respectable and making it far easier for the BNP to feed off this state racism.

Here are two examples of attacks on the British muslim community, indistinguishable from each other, the first from despicable Nick Griffin, Chairman of the BNP, and the second from the equally despicable Peter Hain, presently Labour Northern Ireland Secretary and Minister for Europe at the time of his utterance on muslims:

> None of this should be held against ordinary muslims, many of whom are not much more 'muslim' than Britain is 'christian'. Any hostility directed to them can only drive them into the arms of the fundamentalists. But . . . an understanding of what the Koran really says . . . should lead anyone with an ounce of common sense to realise that a growing muslim population is a recipe for com-

> munal strife and violence, particularly in a country where political correctness prevents the political establishment from closing the gates to the immigration flood, taking steps to reverse the tide, and saying to a minority which sees expansion and domination as its religious duty: 'Mend your ways and keep yourselves to yourselves – or get out!'*

> Some muslims, he says are cutting themselves off and feeding both rightwing politics and their own extremists: 'We need an honest dialogue about the minority of isolationists, fundamentalists and fanatics who open the door to exploitation and who provide fertile ground for al-Qaida extremists'. Muslims are welcome but muslim immigrants could be 'very isolationist' and need to integrate more, he argues.†

Such is Labour's position on immigration and asylum that in 2002 we had the bizarre spectacle of the Conservative shadow minister Oliver Letwin criticising Labour's David Blunkett for using the expression 'swamp' in regard to immigrants and asylum seekers.

It is the same with the foul British press. Paul Dacre, the editor of the *Daily Mail*, which in the 1930s shouted 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts', defends his paper's relentless characterisation of refugees and asylum seekers as thieves leading a luxuriant life at the expense of a hard-working and cheated Middle England by asserting that unless he tackles the issue 'you are going to give rise to the ugly right wing'. 'The goof doesn't realise', retorts Mr Cohen, 'that he is the ugly right wing'.

While the BNP received 0.2 percent of the vote in the 2001 general election and won three of the 5,878 seats up for grabs in the

* 'The real face of Islam', Nick Griffin, October 2001
† Peter Hain, interviewed in *The Guardian*, 13 May 2002

May 2002 council elections, the Labour party are busy, as were the Tories earlier, carrying out the programme of the BNP. And yet, the Troto-revisionist fraternity are in favour of canvassing support for the Labour party on all kinds of pretexts – including the need to keep the BNP out!

Immigration controls stoke up racism by creating, on the one hand, the division between immigrant and non-immigrant workers and, on the other hand, the division between legal and illegal immigrants. While the immigrants are blamed for unemployment, housing shortages and other social problems under capitalism, the so-called illegals bear the brunt of the state's repressive machinery and the vitriol of the bourgeois politicians and the popular press alike. Not only they, but the entire communities they are associated with, are spied on and harassed by the machinery of law enforcement.

Here is just one example of the hysteria surrounding these unfortunate victims of imperialism. Under the provocative and racially inflammatory banner headline 'LUNATIC ASYLUM', the *Sun* of 14 February 2001 stated that whereas 3,200 new illegal immigrants were setting up home in Britain every month,

> SWAMPED immigration officials are kicking out just TWELVE new bogus asylum seekers a month,

adding that the 'fiasco' was a bitter blow to Home Secretary Jack Straw, who had claimed that he was 'winning the war on illegal immigrants'.

The scoundrels of the Immigration Service Union joined this racist campaign, stating that

> The Home Office is stretching the truth. People on the streets know exactly what's going on and can see it day by day.

A hundred thousand people applied for asylum in 2000, out of which 79,000 were judged to be bogus. Of these, 9,000 were deported. The Immigration Union declared these removal figures to be misleading as they made no distinction between voluntary and forced removals. The union's claim was clearly aimed at undermining the government's efforts to be seen as being tough on asylum seekers and was eagerly seized upon by the opposition Conservatives as an electoral windfall with which to portray Labour as a soft touch on immigration. The Immigration Union obviously relishes far more the spectacle of forced removals, with all the attendant publicity and the racist hysteria, than the voluntary and quiet departure of rejected claimants.

Through a division between legal and illegal workers, ethnic minorities, especially non-white workers, are perceived, and targeted, by the police and immigration service as potential illegals whose immigration status must be checked before allowing them access to jobs, housing, education, healthcare and benefits – thus effectively turning employers, doctors, benefit officers and local government employees into immigration officers. This is not the road to integration. On the contrary, it is the surest means of institutionalising and firmly entrenching racism in every school, hospital, doctor's surgery, benefit office and local authority.

For our part, we are firmly of the opinion that it is not in the interests of the proletariat to stand for privileges for any nationality, national or racial grouping. The proletariat stands for and

> . . . welcomes every kind of assimilation . . . except that which is founded on force or privilege.*

The seven decades of the existence of the Soviet Union shall forever bear eloquent testimony to the fact that it is capitalism

* 'Critical remarks on the national question' by V I Lenin, *op cit*, p35

– not racial, religious and national differences – that prevents people from living in fraternal harmony and friendship and that causes fratricidal warfare between people of diverse backgrounds. Socialism alone can bring real peace and friendship among the masses of people by removing the conditions of insecurity that surround the working people everywhere under capitalism – crises of overproduction, unemployment, homelessness, destitution, poverty and war.

The problem can be solved only by proletarian revolution, through the seizure of state power by the proletariat and, by means of this, the transformation of the socialised means of production into public property and organising socialised production on the basis of a predetermined plan and thus lay the basis for

> . . . an unbroken, constantly accelerated development of the productive forces, and therewith for a practically unlimited increase of production itself.*

> To accomplish this universal act of emancipation is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. To thoroughly comprehend the historical conditions and thus the very nature of this act, to impart to the now oppressed proletarian class a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish – this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific socialism.†

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* F Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 1877, Moscow, 1954, p387
† *Ibid*, p391

Immigration, productivity growth, imports, outsourcing

Besides, the question of immigration cannot be considered in isolation from technological change, growth in productivity, export of capital, outsourcing and the growth of cheap imports. In all the imperialist countries, there are varying degrees of clamour against all or some of these phenomena, which are inextricable from capitalism in general – and imperialism in particular.

One of the principal characteristics of imperialism is the export of capital. This is because of the emergence of the

> . . . monopolist position of a few very rich countries, in which the accumulation of capital has reached gigantic proportions, [giving rise to] an enormous 'superabundance of capital' . . .
>
> The necessity for exporting capital arises from the fact that in a few countries capitalism has become 'overripe' and capital cannot find a field for 'profitable' investment.*

Hence the need to export this 'surplus of capital'. Doubtless, there would be no question of surplus of capital if capitalism could raise the living standards of the masses – an argument all too frequently deployed by the petty-bourgeois critics of capitalism. But capitalism would not be capitalism if it did such things. Imperialism is in the business of making the maximum profit. It therefore exports 'surplus capital' to places where an opportunity for making such a profit presents itself.

Since Lenin's day, the export of capital has accelerated enormously – especially during the past three decades. In the 13 years between 1983 and 1995, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) grew five

* V I Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, p60

times faster than trade and ten times faster than world output.*

Whereas FDI stood at $225bn in 1990, it shot up to $464bn in 1997 and topped $1,000bn in 2000. Of these colossal sums, three quarters are accounted for by flows between imperialist countries – these flows almost entirely going towards mergers and acquisitions (M&A), while a quarter is exported to developing countries. The importance of the latter as an avenue for imperialist export of capital, and thus for enhancing the latter's profitability, may be judged from the fact that FDI flows into the developing countries, while running during the second half of the 1980s at an annual average rate of $15bn, rose to a peak level of $241bn by 1996. Following the turmoil in Asia in 1997, FDI flows into the developing countries fell sharply to about $150bn in 1997, but have recovered since then and stood at $233bn at the end of 2004.†

Between 1980 and 1996, global FDI stock rose from 10 percent to 21 percent of global GDP, while the share of trade in the global GDP remained broadly constant, thus proving that

> [G]lobal integration is being accelerated more through investment [ie, export of capital] than trade [ie, export of commodities].‡

In 1997, the accumulated stock of FDI was estimated to stand at $3,500bn (more than twice the sum of $1,700bn it was in 1990) – 90 percent of it accounted for by multinational companies (MNCs) from the rich imperialist countries and 69 percent from just five usurer imperialist countries, namely, the US, Britain, Germany, France and Japan.

Two thirds of the FDI to developing countries goes to just a handful of them. China alone receives a quarter of the annual outflows, on average being the recipient of $50bn a year. In the 20 years

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* *The Economist*, 24 June 1995

† *Financial Times*, 30 September 2005

‡ *Financial Times,* 4 September 1998

to September 2004, China alone received $500bn in FDI, all because of the abundance of cheap labour. That in turn has fuelled an export engine that in 2003 stacked up a $124bn trade surplus with the US. This figure climbed to $202bn in 2005. China's foreign exchange reserves at the end of 2005 stood at $800bn and are increasing at the rate of $200bn a year.

Capital is exported to the developing countries, for there, while capital is scarce, wages are low, land and raw materials cheap, labour regulation flexible and tax benefits high – all making for very high profits.

In the imperialist countries, approximately 70 percent of the costs of a company come from labour and 30 percent from capital; the situation in countries such as China and India is diametrically the opposite. There capital is expensive and labour cheap. Hence the export of capital and jobs from the imperialist countries to the developing countries.*

Large chunks of manufacturing have been transferred by all the imperialist countries to the low cost developing countries, especially since the 1980s. This trend is now being extended into skilled office occupations – it is a kind of 'hollowing out' not faced before. Forrester, a research body, has stated that 3.3m US business processing jobs will go off shore by 2015, joining the 400,000 already gone, while a Berkeley University estimate puts the loss of white-collar jobs at 14m. Garther, another consultant, predicted in March 2004 that up to 25 percent of traditional IT jobs will be relocated from the developed (imperialist) to the developing countries by 2010 – a scenario not too unlikely in view of the fact that job losses will no longer be confined to call centres, an area which has courted much controversy recently, as countries such as India are likely to move up the value curve into areas such as newspaper sub-editing, law, accountancy, design, engineering, tax

* *Financial Times*, 27 September 2004

consultancy and financial services.

Half of all European companies plan to move more services off shore. Presently, UK companies account for 61 percent of European service jobs shifted off shore, followed by Germany and the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg) with 14 percent each. According to Forrester Research, 1.2m European IT and service jobs will move off shore by 2015, nearly three quarters of these from the UK. Developed countries that fail to relocate these jobs abroad, says Forrester, will simply be left behind and become far less competitive.

On the opposite side, the headcount at Indian call centres quadrupled in the three years to September 2004 to more than 350,000 and has been rising. India turns out 2.5 million English-speaking graduates a year. As such, it provides a vast reservoir of competent but cheap labour, which lures companies in Europe and America to relocate their back office jobs there. Not just Bangalore and Hyderabad, but many other towns are becoming centres for such relocated activity. Be it said in passing that India has more than 50 towns with a population of 500,000 or more.

While causing loss of jobs in Europe, America and Japan, and enabling large corporations to make huge profits, offshoring brings, as do cheap imports, real benefits to the consumers through the cheapening of goods and services. Besides, it must not be forgotten that Britain and the US are themselves popular offshoring destinations. In 2002, they (the US and UK) were the two largest exporters of commercial services. Britain has a growing trade surplus in business services, including research and development, advertising and legal activities. All the same, it is undoubtedly the case that offshoring (outsourcing), along with cheap imports and capital exports, is a source of job losses and lowering levels of pay in the imperialist countries.

Large though the job losses are through outsourcing, cheap imports and capital exports, they are as nothing compared with the

job losses in the imperialist countries through routine rounds of savage restructuring and increases in productivity.

For instance, in the US, output per hour in the non-farm business sector rose at a rate of 4 percent in the three years from 2001 to 2003 inclusive, while the economy grew at a little over 2 percent. The resulting fall in employment was inevitable. The decline in manufacturing employment, at 2.63m between March 2001 and January 2004, was higher than in the entire economy, at just 2.35m. By January 2004, employment in manufacturing was 17 percent below that in June 2000. During this period, the cause of job losses was a 17 percent increase in output per worker, while the output fell by a mere 3 percent. The US today produces twice as many manufactures as it did two decades ago – and with even fewer workers.

Information technology decimated the jobs of armies of clerks, replacing them with educated and relatively better-paid workers. It is reliably estimated that between 7 and 8 percent (7-8m) of US private jobs are lost every quarter. Attacking the cheap imports of goods and services is no more sensible than the export of capital and rises in productivity. Since rising productivity is a far greater source of job losses under capitalism then cheap imports, why is there not such a hue and cry against productivity growth? Writing in the *Financial Times* of 25 February 2004, Martin Wolf answers this question thus:

> The only relevant difference between productivity and trade is the all too visible involvement of foreigners, who do not have votes. They make wonderful scapegoats for unscrupulous politicians.

No wonder, then, that in the US, as a result of the workings of all these factors,

> . . . corporate profits were now taking a higher share of the growth

> in national income than employee compensation for the first time since the second world war,

while the real wages of those in work have 'started to fall behind inflation'.*

> Prolonged weakness in the labour market has left the nation with over a million fewer jobs than when the recession began [2000]. This is a worse position, in terms of recouping lost jobs, than any business cycle since the 1930s.†

An outmoded system

Anti-immigration hysteria, expressed in Thatcher's words about 'our' country being 'swamped' by immigrants and asylum seekers, is often countered by what passes for the left in Britain with statistics showing immigrants to be only a small portion of the population, and that Britain is not merely a recipient of immigrants but also a source of emigration. However unwittingly, those who play this numbers game risk making a fatal concession to capitalism by unjustifiably linking immigration and social problems, such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment and deteriorating social services.

It is difficult to see what possible connection there can be between immigration and the wholesale decimation of the UK's car, steel, shipbuilding, textile and mining industries, the destruction of

* Information in the preceding paragraphs is drawn from the *Financial Times* of 12 February 2004, 25 February 2004, 27 September 2004 and *Sunday Times*, 1 February 2004

† Economic Policy Institute, The State of Working America 2004/2005, Washington DC, 2004

jobs in banks and Britain's docks. The truth is that it is capitalism, not foreign workers, that creates unemployment, and it alone is the source of inadequate housing, underprovision of education and health care, derisory pensions for most retired people, a run-down transport system, and so forth.

There is no shortage of resources. The only problem is the continued existence of a historically-outmoded system of production that is incapable of pressing those resources into service unless it can make a profit.

> [I]n capitalistic society the means of production can only function when they have undergone a preliminary transformation into capital, into the means of exploiting human labour-power. The necessity of this transformation into capital of the means of production and subsistence stands like a ghost between these and the labourers. It alone prevents the coming together of the material and personal levers of production; it alone forbids the means of production to function, the workers to work and live . . .*

Under this system of organised robbery, destitution and homelessness goes hand in hand with an abundance of material and human resources, hunger and want sit cheek by jowl with abundance and overproduction. Capitalism is characterised by

> Accumulation of wealth at one pole [and] accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality and mental degradation, at the opposite pole, ie, on the side of the class that *produces its own product in the form of capital*.†

The absurdity of this system is particularly revealed in its lurid light during periods of economic crisis, during which

* F Engels, *op cit*, p383
† K Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 1867, Moscow, 1954, p645 (our emphasis)

> Commerce is at a standstill, the markets are glutted, products accumulate, as multitudinous as they are unsaleable, hard cash disappears, credit vanishes, factories are closed, the mass of the workers are in want of the means of subsistence, because they have produced too much of the means of subsistence . . .*

In view of the above, scapegoating the immigrants is a crude, yet very successful, attempt to blame the worst victims of capitalism and divert attention from the latter's responsibility for all the economic and social ills of present-day society. Workers who fall for this bait effectively become, whether they will it or not, accomplices and tools of the foreign and domestic policy of their imperialist ruling class, which, in an endeavour to maintain imperialist domination of the oppressed nations, violently intrudes into the latters' lives through predatory wars and imperialist-inspired civil strife.

And when the victims of this superexploitation, war and occupation, which are the driving forces behind periodic waves of immigration, manage to escape their miserable lot by reaching the centres of imperialism, they are vilified as scroungers and blamed at the same time for stealing jobs from local workers. This horrible and racist treatment of the foreign workers in Britain and other imperialist countries is merely a reflection, and an extension, of the foreign policy of imperialism – imperialism's violent interference in the countries of origin of the immigrants followed by draconian legislation against, and ill-treatment and superexploitation of, its luckless victims. Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Lakes region of Africa, Somalia and Sierra Leone, which over the past 15 years have been a major source of emigration into the imperialist countries, furnish excellent proof of this our assertion.

The foreign and domestic policy of imperialism are inextricably

* F Engels, *op cit*, p381

linked and the one cannot be arbitrarily separated from the other. They are two sides of the self same policy of imperialist plunder and oppression – one abroad and the other at home. Since modern-day racism is a product of the colonialist and imperialist system, an ideological outgrowth of the colonial plunder and imperialist superexploitation of the vast majority of the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America by a handful of exceptionally rich and powerful states, it is only natural that this division between the oppressor and oppressed nations finds its reflection in racist legislation and ill-treatment of foreign workers within the imperialist countries. Racism in the imperialist countries is merely the reflection of the division between oppressing and oppressed nations – a duplication in a somewhat altered form of the imperialist oppression abroad.

Racism is at the heart of the immigration policy of imperialism. Imperialism needs foreign labour and imports it at will. The immigration legislation is not aimed at excluding altogether foreign workers, nor is it able to do so. It is used by the ruling class for two purposes. First, to attempt to regulate the reserve army of labour – strict during periods of rising unemployment and relaxed in periods of heightened economic activity. Second, to divide and weaken the working-class movement.

In an effort to prevent resistance on the part of the working class against imperialist plunder, robbery and predatory wars abroad, and exploitation at home, and thus to divide and weaken the working-class movement, imperialism resorts to racism and immigration legislation, with its unstated, but clear, message that foreign workers, especially from certain parts of the world with particular religious affiliations or pigmentation of skin, are not welcome and that they are to blame for every social and economic evil attendant upon life under the conditions of capitalism.

The working class in the imperialist countries falls prey to imperialist propaganda for, without exception, the leadership of the working-class movement in these countries is in the hands of the

upper stratum, the labour aristocracy, who are bribed by imperialism 'in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert'.

This labour aristocracy,

> philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook . . . is the principal social . . . prop of the bourgeoisie. For they are the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real vehicles of reformism and chauvinism. In the civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie they inevitably, and in no small number take the side of the bourgeoisie, the 'Versaillese' against the 'Communards'.*

In Britain, this has been the case since the defeat of the Chartist movement in the middle of the 19th century. The formation of the Labour Party in 1900 (originally known as the Labour Representation Committee but called the Labour Party from 1906) gave political expression to this stratum, whose interests it has always defended. As these interests cannot be defended without defending imperialism, the Labour party has always been prepared to be a willing servant of British imperialism. In view of this, the struggle of the proletariat against racism and for working-class unity and socialism is inextricably linked with the struggle against social democracy and opportunism.

* V I Lenin, Preface to the French and German editions of *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*

Lenin's stance

Towards the end of 1913, Lenin had the opportunity to examine the question of immigration. In his remarkable article 'Capitalism and workers' immigration', he makes some truly penetrating observations, which have a bearing on the present-day controversies on this issue. It is therefore worth our while bringing Lenin's analysis to the notice of the proletariat, in Britain and in other imperialist countries, in the following slightly summarised version.

> Capitalism has given rise to a special form of migration . . . The rapidly developing industrial countries [attract workers from the backward countries through a combination of higher wages in the advanced capitalist countries and destitution in the backward countries]. There can be no doubt that dire poverty alone compels people to abandon their native land, and that capitalists exploit the immigrant workers in the most shameless manner.*

Lenin regarded this phenomenon, whereby advanced capitalism literally drags millions of workers 'into its orbit', as very progressive indeed, for through this forcible process it

> . . . tears them out of the backwoods in which they live, makes them participants in the world-historical movement and brings them face to face with the powerful, united, international class of factory owners.

He went on to say that

* 'Capitalism and workers' immigration' by V I Lenin, October 1913, *Collected Works*, Vol 19, p454

> [O]nly reactionaries can shut their eyes to the *progressive* significance of this modern migration of nations . . . [which draws] the masses of the working people of the *whole* world [into the arena of class struggle by] breaking down the musty, fusty habits of local life, breaking down national barriers and prejudices, uniting workers from all countries in huge factories and mines in America, Germany, and so forth.

At that time, as indeed today, the US was the largest single importer of foreign workers. Lenin looked at the immigration figures for America over a period of nine decades and noted the important change in the country of origin of emigrants to that country (see Table 1).

He commented that, whereas up to 1880 the overwhelming majority of the workers emigrating to the US came from the old civilised countries of Europe, such as Great Britain, Germany and partly Sweden, and that even up to 1890, Britain and Germany supplied in excess of half of the total immigrants, from 1880 onwards, there took place 'an incredibly rapid' rise in *new* immigration from eastern and southern Europe, from Austria, Italy and Russia. He produced figures (Table 2) for the number of people emigrating from the last-mentioned three countries to the US.

Lenin greeted these figures, and the phenomena they represented, with his characteristic youthful joy.

> Thus, the most backward countries in the old world, those that more than any other retain survivals of feudalism in every branch of social life, are, as it were, undergoing compulsory training in civilisation. American capitalism is tearing millions of workers of backward Eastern Europe (including Russia, which in 1891-1900 provided 594,000 immigrants and in 1900-09, 1,410,000) out of their semi-feudal conditions and is putting them in the ranks of the advanced, international army of the proletariat.

Relying on Hourwich's 'extremely illuminating book', *Immigration and Labour*, which had only just appeared then in English, he said that the number of emigrants to the US increased specially after the 1905 revolution, the figures being:

1905 – 1,000,000;

1906 – 1,260,000;

1907 – 1,400,000;

1908 and 1909 – 1,900,000 each.

This large movement of Russian workers to the US had had a beneficial effect on the American working-class movement and American capitalism alike. As to the former,

> Workers who had participated in various strikes in Russia introduced into America the bolder and more aggressive spirit of the mass strike.

TABLE 1

Immigration figures for the US over nine decades (Lenin)

1821-30	99,000
1831-40	496,000
1841-50	1,597,000
1851-60	2,453,000
1861-70	2,064,000
1871-80	2,262,000
1881-90	4,722,000
1891-1900	3,703,000
1900-09 (nine years)	7,210,000

TABLE 2

Numbers of people emigrating from Austria, Italy and Russia to the US (Lenin)

1871-80	201,000
1881-90	927,000
1891-1900	1,847,000
1900-09 (nine years)	5,127,000

As for American capitalism, it could only benefit from this movement of workers from backward countries to the US.

> Russia is lagging farther and farther behind, losing some of her best workers to foreign countries; America is advancing more and more rapidly, taking the most vigorous and able-bodied sections of the working population of the whole world.

Turning to Germany, Lenin said that she was

> . . . more or less keeping pace with the US [in the import of foreign workers and] changing from a country which released workers into one that attracts them from foreign countries.

While the number of German emigrants to the US declined sharply between 1890 and 1909, that of foreign workers in Germany registered a significant increase. Analysing the figures relating to foreign workers in Germany, and dividing them according to occupation and their country of origin, Lenin concluded that

> The more backward the country the larger is the number of 'unskilled' . . . labourers it supplies. The advanced nations seize, as it were, the best paid occupations for themselves and leave the

> semi-barbarian countries the worst paid occupations.

While six-tenths of Austrian immigrants in Germany and eight-tenths of immigrants from 'other countries' in Europe were industrial workers, a mere one-tenth of the workers from Russia, then the most backward country in Europe, were industrial workers – the remaining nine-tenths being employed in German agriculture.

> Thus, Russia is punished everywhere and in everything for her backwardness.

But, he added, alluding to the virile revolutionary movement of the Russian proletariat,

> . . . it is the workers of Russia who are more than any others bursting out of this state of backwardness and barbarism, more than others combating these 'delightful' features of their native land, and more closely than any others uniting with the workers of all countries into a single international force for emancipation.

In the face of bourgeois attempts at dividing and weakening the working-class movement by pitting workers of one nation against those of another, and recognising the inevitability and the progressive nature of the breakdown of all the narrow national barriers by capitalism, the proletariat has but one option – to unite under the banner of proletarian internationalism and the joint fight of the workers of all nationalities for socialism and communism through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

> The bourgeoisie incites the workers of one nation against those of another in the endeavour to keep them disunited. Class-conscious workers, realising that the break-down of all the national barriers

by capitalism is inevitable and progressive, are trying to help to enlighten and organise their fellow-workers from the backward countries.*

Conclusions

In the light of the foregoing, we draw the following conclusions:

1. Systematic and large-scale migration is unique to capitalism.
2. Immigration is an integral part of the European landscape and Europe is a continent of immigrants (the Americas and Australasia even more so).
3. Only dire poverty or persecution forces people to leave their native lands.
4. Imperialist predatory wars against oppressed people and imperialist-inspired civil strife force millions of people to seek asylum abroad, including in the heartlands of imperialism.
5. There is a direct link between immigration and the availability of jobs (in the country of origin and destination of immigrants respectively) and the operation of the labour market is capable of regulating the flow of immigration.
6. Immigration laws enacted by the imperialist countries are inherently racist and intended to divide and weaken the working-class movement.
7. By creating the distinction between legal and illegal immigrants, these laws are a continuing incitement to racism, setting the indigenous workers upon the newly-arrived foreigners.

* *Ibid*, p456

8. Illegal immigration is a source of huge enrichment to the bourgeoisie, while at the same time serving as a scapegoat for the ills of capitalism and as an instrument for sowing divisions within the working-class movement.
9. There is an enduring link between state and unofficial racism, as well as the racism of the front bench and the back benches in the parliaments of the imperialist countries.
10. Unemployment, poverty, homelessness, rundown social services, deteriorating infrastructure, public health and education, are not the fault of the workers – indigenous or foreign – but entirely due to the operations of capitalism, which has long been an outmoded system that needs to have funeral rites performed on it and be given a decent burial.
11. Immigration is not only inevitable under capitalism but also progressive, and 'only reactionaries can shut their eyes to the progressive significance of this modern migration of nations', which 'draws the masses of working people of the whole world' into the arena of class struggle by breaking down 'national barriers and prejudices, uniting workers from all countries' in huge workplaces in America, Europe and so forth.
12. And finally, while the bourgeoisie 'incites the workers of one nation against those of another' in order to disunite and weaken the entire working class, for their part, class-conscious workers, 'realising that the breakdown of all the national barriers by capitalism is inevitable and progressive', must do their best 'to help to enlighten and organise their fellow-workers from the backward countries'.

Harpal Brar
London, April 2006

CPGB-ML congress calls for an end to immigration control[2]

At the CPGB-ML's 2008 congress, delegates unanimously adopted a new policy on immigration and vowed to take the party's analysis into the working-class movement as a counter to the racist hysteria and anti-immigrant scapegoating that is being whipped up ever higher as the capitalist crisis deepens.

I would like to thank the party for opening up this debate as it has done. Unfortunately for us all, the issue of immigration remains the Achilles' heel of our movement, just as it was in Marx's day, when he and Engels noted that the antagonism between Irish and English workers in England was the key to the impotence of the English working-class movement, despite the latter's high level of organisation.

If we are serious about becoming the type of party that is capable of leading a revolutionary struggle to overthrow British imperialism, it is imperative that our party members are able to see clearly on this, the most divisive of issues, and are confident in thoroughly

refuting all the bourgeois prejudices that have been so carefully inculcated in our minds via school, literature, the media, etc.

One of the main prejudices that seems to dog the left-wing movement is that, since immigration helps capitalists make profits (by ensuring a steady supply of cheap labour and keeping wages down), then progressive people ought automatically to be opposed to the free movement of labour under capitalism. This argument seems to be given further strength by the fact that, under socialism, a country might well feel the need to apply border controls.

This second point, however, is a red herring. What a workers' government might need to do under particular conditions (ie, of capitalist encirclement) has no relevance to what workers demand *under conditions of capitalism*.

For example, we would not demand unemployment benefits for healthy people under socialism, because we know they would have ample opportunity to work. The same logic cannot be applied to the capitalist system, however, since capitalism denies the right to work to huge numbers of workers.

If we return to the main point (ie, that immigration is good for capitalism), we find a similar sort of confusion. To argue that anything that is good for capitalism must automatically be opposed by workers is to oversimplify and confuse the matter.

To take the most basic example, it is only through employing workers that capitalists can make profits through the extraction of surplus value; should we therefore call for total unemployment in order to starve capitalists of their profits?

Seen in this light, the argument becomes absurd. Of course, we call for full employment, despite the fact that, under the conditions of capitalism, employment means wage slavery for those employed and the further accumulation of profits and power to the employers.

There are other examples of the double-edged sword of progress under conditions of capitalism. The introduction of universal edu-

cation, for example, was a great benefit for workers, and one that communists fully supported and fought for. Nevertheless, under conditions of capitalism, the bourgeoisie has found ways to turn this step forward to its advantage, injecting bourgeois philosophy and prejudices into every subject, from history to art to science.

Does this mean we should fight for the abolition of education in order that workers' minds might not be so tainted? Of course not. Educated workers, no matter how inferior the education they receive by socialist standards, are in a much better position to make a scientific analysis of the world than those who have received no education and are therefore prey to all manner of superstition.

Of course, no matter how good our education, under capitalist conditions, we cannot help but be imbued with bourgeois prejudice, but an educated mind has more chance of combating these than an uneducated one – and being able to read is a basic prerequisite for accessing the science of Marxism Leninism.

Education, women's emancipation, employment, the vote – these seemingly progressive steps are all stunted and twisted benefits to workers under the conditions of capitalism, limited in scope, tainted in execution, and often serving to embellish illusions of bourgeois freedom. They will only blossom to complete and unfettered maturity once we have attained a higher level of society.

Nevertheless, we fight for them for the simple reason that, even in their limited, bourgeois form, they are steps forward that help to create the conditions in which workers will be able to organise themselves to throw off the shackles of capitalist society.

The same is true of unfettered immigration.

Under conditions of capitalism, mass migration can no more be stopped than can wage slavery itself. From the very earliest days of capitalist society, people found themselves forced to move from the countryside to the towns in order to find work and support their families. In present-day Britain, many people are forced to leave their homes in the regions and look for work in London and

the South East.

Should workers demand a halt to all this kind of migration? Where would we draw the lines? Should there be border controls at the edge of every county? Of every town? Again, seen in this light, the argument seems absurd, yet there is essentially no difference between this kind of migration and the international kind. In both cases, people are forced to move to find work. In both cases, contradictions arise between incoming and local populaces. In both cases, capitalism benefits from the free movement of labour.

As soon as capitalism went global, so did its contradictions. Conditions of life under imperialism force many people all over the world to head from the global hinterlands to the centres of imperialism in order to support their families.

Since we cannot stop immigration under conditions of capitalism, what we should instead turn our attention to is the effect such immigration has on our *movement*; on workers' struggles for pay and conditions under capitalism, and on the struggle for socialism.

Anti-immigrant legislation and propaganda all serve to whip up racist hysteria among working people, keeping them divided and impotent. This racism is still the most important weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie, and should therefore be the main target of the working-class movement.

Our focus should therefore be on calling for the abolition of immigration controls as a progressive step that would help to eradicate the poisonous racism that hampers our movement, and would also bring in many more workers to both the trade union and the revolutionary movements (and, incidentally, workers who bring with them much that is revolutionary, having suffered at the sharp end of the imperialist system). The best way to stop 'illegal' immigrants from lowering conditions and wages for British workers, for example, is to fight for the removal of their illegal status as the first step to bringing them into the unions etc and demanding decent pay and conditions for all!

As to arguments that incoming migrants put an 'intolerable strain' on the welfare system, and that since 'our taxes' pay for them, it is 'unfair' for people to come from abroad and 'take advantage', these are myths put about by bourgeois media and politicians to fuel anti-immigrant racism.

It is well known to our party members that the social provision that was provided in all western imperialist countries after the second world war was the product of a very special set of circumstances, most particularly, the threat of revolution following the devastation of Europe and the victories of, and example set by, the workers' government of the USSR.

It is not the level of immigration but the decline in fortunes, albeit temporary, of the world anti-imperialist movement that has led western governments to feel confident in attacking the level of social provision. Only a strong working-class movement will have the power to reverse that trend. And, ultimately, only a working-class revolution will make such provision a permanent, as opposed to a temporary, feature of life for working people.

That is the message we should be taking to working people: capitalism will never put their interests first, and will only provide the minimum that it can get away with at any particular time. Only socialism will put the needs of the people first and use society's resources to meet those needs.

Moreover, social provision in the West – housing, health care, education, unemployment benefit etc – has ultimately been paid for out of imperialist superprofits. Just because a small part of these superprofits has found its way into the pay packets of ordinary workers and then been used, via taxation, to make various kinds of social provision, this does not change the fact that the ultimate source of the income is not only the 'hard work' of British workers but also the even harder work of the superexploited peoples of the rest of the world.

So how can we accuse these people of 'taking advantage' if they

find themselves forced to come here to try and make a living?

Comrades, I move that we adopt the text proposed in the resolution into our party programme and take our analysis into the movement in order that we can get on with the vital work of countering the racist lies and dispelling the bourgeois prejudices that cripple our movement and stand in the way of the revolutionary task we have set ourselves, that of smashing British imperialism.

Joti Brar
London, July 2008

Immigration resolution unanimously adopted

This congress notes:

1. that the issue of immigration remains the Achilles' heel of our movement, just as it was in Marx's day, when he and Engels noted that the antagonism between Irish and English workers in England was the key to the impotence of the English working-class movement, despite the latter's high level of organisation;
2. the wide-ranging and comradely debate that has taken place since the last party congress on the issue of immigration.

This congress believes:

1. that if we are serious about becoming the type of party that is capable of leading a revolutionary struggle to overthrow British imperialism, it is imperative that our party members are able to see clearly on this, the most divisive of issues, and are confident in thoroughly refuting all the bourgeois preju-

dices that have been so carefully inculcated in our minds via school, literature, the media etc;

2. that as the capitalist crisis of overproduction deepens and conditions for British workers grow worse, the ruling class will undoubtedly attempt to whip up racism and anti-immigrant hysteria to an even higher pitch;
3. that our party must take a very clear position on immigration if it is to be in a position to refute the bourgeois propaganda onslaught and help British workers to do the same;
4. that the world situation makes this an urgent task for our party, and that failing to adopt a position now could seriously hamper our party's work over the next two years.

This congress therefore resolves to adopt the following into the CPGB-ML's party programme:

> This party firmly believes that immigration is not the cause of the ills of the working class in Britain, which are solely the result of the failings of the capitalist system.
>
> Immigration and asylum legislation and controls under capitalism have only one real goal: the division of the working class along racial lines, thus fatally weakening that class's ability to organise itself and to wage a revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of imperialism.
>
> These controls have the further effect of creating an army of 'illegal' immigrant workers, prey to superexploitation and living in dire conditions as an underclass, outside the system, afraid to organise and exercising a downward pull on the wages and conditions of all workers.
>
> The scourge of racism, along with all other ills of capitalism, will only be finally abolished after the successful overthrow of impe-

rialism. But since immigration can no more be abolished under capitalism than can wage slavery, our call should not be for the further control and scapegoating of immigrants, but the abolition of all border controls, as part of the wider fight to uproot racism from the working-class movement and build unity among workers in Britain, so strengthening the fight for communism.

NOTES

1. This article first appeared in two parts in *Lalkar*, March and May 2006. See *lalkar.org*.

2. This article was circulated as part of an inner-party discussion on immigration, before being delivered as a speech at the CPGB-ML 2008 congress. It was later printed in *Proletarian*, August 2008. See *cpgb-ml.org*.

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