

# **RACISM**

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## **PREFACE**

Some people claim that human beings can be divided into races on the basis of physical characteristics like skin colour, and racism is the theory that one group of people, identified in this way as a “race”, is superior to another. Racism results in hostility towards the group thought of as inferior, the practice of discrimination and persecution, and in some cases it has led to genocide.

Despite the fact that there is no evidence to support racism it continues to cause suffering for those who are its victims. Today, as in the past, different ideas and theories have been used to support racism, and different groups have been singled out as the victims of racist oppression.

This pamphlet tries to understand the origins and causes of racism and also to demonstrate the emptiness of racists' claims. For, without an understanding of why, and in what circumstances, racism arises, we will surely not be able to effectively eradicate it. Nor, without an end to racism will we be able to establish a system of society where divisions and hostility between people are replaced by unity and cooperation.

## CHAPTER 1: RACISM: A HISTORICAL VIEW

**R**acism is the theory that people of one race are superior to another. It often results in hostility towards the race thought of as inferior and in the practice of discrimination, persecution, and, in some cases even genocide. Racism asserts that human beings are divided into races which are distinguished by their physical characteristics, their cultural patterns and their modes of behaviour. These characteristics are supposed to conform to a type and to be inherited and unchanging. But such is the confusion of racism that the stereotypes are often widely variable. For example when racists condemn blacks as lazy and feckless, it is not unusual for the same people also to fear black workers as a threat to jobs which, they argue, should “belong” to white workers. Asian immigrants to Britain are often criticised as primitive and anarchic but they are also seen as an alien influence on the commerce of this country because in some areas they have taken over shops and petrol stations, which could hardly be operated by people who were backward and disorganised. Some of the ideas that were first used to try to justify racism came from religion.

### **Religious Racism**

It is only during the past 150 years or so that attempts have been made to put racism on a scientific footing. Before that discriminatory practices were usually justified, or condemned, on religious grounds. The discovery of the Americas was something of a blow to believers in the idea of the Creation; St. Augustine had written that humankind “has sprung from one protoplasm”, so that there needed to be something of a rethink to accommodate the people in the newly-discovered lands. One way out was to decide that they could not be descendants of Adam and Eve, which had the added “advantage” of excusing such atrocities as the Spanish inflicted on the American Indians. In 1510 a Scottish professor, John Major, applied the doctrine of “natural slavery” to the Indians, arguing that using force against them was justified as a preliminary to converting them to Christianity. The debate on this issue revolved around religious theories and was exclusively concerned with the American Indians; the negroes were not considered.

Religious theories were also used at first when negro slaves began to arrive in the West Indies in the 17th century. Slave trading had become big business when the demand for sugar and rum in England increased dramatically. In the years between 1663 and 1775 English sugar consumption rose twenty fold and this led to a pressing demand for slaves on the sugar plantations. These two demands - for sugar and slaves - allied to the rise of British manufacture, made the elements of a triangular trading arrangement in which vast fortunes were amassed. From the ports of London, Liverpool and Bristol, ships carried goods such as textiles, cutlery, gunpowder and beer. These were exchanged on the coasts of Africa for slaves who had been captured in the interior and who had been force-marched to the coast, often under fearsomely brutal guards. The slaves were packed like sardines, rank upon rank, into the ships and taken to the West Indies where they were exchanged for sugar, molasses, rum and tobacco for transport to England.

That part of the triangle in which the slaves were transported from Africa to the West Indies was known as the middle passage and it soon became notorious for the conditions in which the negroes were transported (the stench of a slave ship was said to be detectable almost a mile away) and for the brutality inflicted on them, although this was to some extent held in check by the fact that the slaves were a valuable cargo. During the 1680s the death rate of slaves in transit was about one in four - a rate which could be matched, or even overtaken, by that for the seamen who were also subject to the cruelty of ships' captains and officers.

It is no exaggeration to say that this trade, and this cruelty, provided the foundation for a significant part of the development of the British capitalist class. In 1788 the manufacturer, Samuel Taylor, stated that each year about £200,000 worth of goods was shipped from Manchester to Africa, of which about £180,000 was spent on buying black slaves. The gun industry of Birmingham and the copper industry of Swansea were nourished on the trade and the ports of London, Liverpool and Bristol - especially the last two - prospered mightily on it. Between 1630 and 1807 the slave merchants of Britain made an estimated profit of £12 million on the 2½ million slaves they bought and sold, about half of which accrued to them during the 40 years between 1750 and 1790. The profits accumulated in the triangular trade were often reinvested in rising industries such as coal and iron in South Wales, iron in South Yorkshire, textiles in Lancashire, and the great rail networks. Funds were also used to set up banks some of which have been absorbed into today's Big Five.

In the cities where they operated, the people who profited from the slave trade were pillars of respectability and often staunch supporters of the church. They became members of Parliament and were given titles: Thomas Johnson was knighted in 1708 and Ellis Cunliffe was made a baronet in 1767. For 35 of the years between 1700 to 1820, Liverpool had a Lord Mayor who was a slave merchant or was related to one. It was a similar story in other slave ports: William Beckford was an alderman of the City of London, sheriff (1755-6) and Lord Mayor (1762-3 and 1769-70) apart from being MP for Shaftesbury and then London. Beckford's wealth was based on his huge landholding in Jamaica and his interests as a merchant in London.

This cruelty, this trade, and these riches, were at first justified on the grounds that the slaves were heathens, which had the disadvantage for the slave owners that a slave could gain freedom -in theory at any rate - through conversion to Christianity. Another approach - more satisfactory to the slave owners - was to argue that the negroes were inferior and so quite proper subjects for ruthless exploitation by the colonising powers. This argument was at first extremely crude, a compound of demonology, sexual fears and commercial interest. In the late 17th century Thomas Herbert speculated that negro women copulated with baboons and that negroes practised cannibalism as an expression of friendship to the victim: "They know no surer way to express true love than in making (not two souls) two bodies one in an inseparable union." Later, as the theory of the so-called Chain of Creation took root, negroes were assigned a place between humans and animals. In 1757 a German surgeon stated that negro blood was black and blackened bandages. Forty years later the Manchester surgeon Charles White compared anatomical features of negroes and whites and concluded that in terms of bodily structure the negro was the closer to the ape. (Although White held that negroes were generally equal to Europeans and was an opponent of slavery.)

### **"Scientific" Racism**

The debate moved onto a different, wider plane in the 19th century when there was a rash of publications which sought to explain not just the slave trade but most of human history and culture on the basis of racial difference. Robert Knox, a Scottish doctor, published his theories in 1850: "With me, race, or hereditary descent is everything; it stamps the man". Knox placed the races he classified as "Slavonian" and "Gothic" at the top, above the "Saxon", "Celt", "Italian". In 1853 the French aristocrat Count Gobineau produced his *Essay On the Inequality of the Human Races*, a complex theory which linked racial superiority with class: "A society is great and brilliant only as far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species", Gobineau was one of the first to put forward the theory of the superiority of the "Aryan" race, identifying the aristocracy with Aryans while the lower classes were merely a confusion of the "Negroid and the Semite", His ideas were subsequently very influential in European politics, literature and history.

Attempts to change the basis of racist thinking from religious persecution and sexual neurosis to something more scientific were given a new impetus by a misinterpretation of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. The appearance of *The Origin of Species* threw a new light on the debate over race and some writers used Darwin's ideas in formulating a general law of social development. This law became known as 'Social Darwinism' and can be most simply expressed as an application of the principle of "survival of the fittest". One of these writers was Walter Bagehot, an influential figure in politics, who argued in 1873 that "those nations which are strongest tend to prevail over the others; and in certain marked peculiarities the strongest tend to be the best". In fact Bagehot's words expose the basic problem of Social Darwinism, which is that the theory defines both fitness and survival in terms of each other. Thus: those who survived must be the fittest; how do we know they are the fittest? because they survived. Of course Social Darwinism was useful in justifying the expansion of European capitalism into the colonies of Africa, India and the Far East. The fact that European states had conquered and occupied vast areas of the earth proved that they were the fittest and should therefore dominate the subject peoples. And the fact that they were the fittest proved that they should survive and continue to subjugate others.

The second half of the nineteenth century was the heyday of pseudo-scientific racism which produced a mass of "evidence". It led to many different and confused ideas about the dividing line between races. Some of this investigation was used in anthropology, by people like Paul Broca in France, John Beddoe in England and Otto Ammon in Germany. It was partly based on the measurement of physical characteristics, particularly the proportions and shape of the skull and the nose. By relating these to social features such as the numbers of each group who tended to live in cities, it was possible to formulate a theory that long-headed people (classified as Nordics) were superior to the flat-headed (Alpines and Celts). Nordics, ran the theory, were the more aggressive and enterprising people while the Alpines and the Celts were more anxious and submissive; Nordics were also blonde while Alpines and Celts were dark or sallow. This was married to a concern that the Nordics were threatened with being outbred by the fast breeding and immigration of the others. In 1885 Beddoe warned that "the Gaelic and Iberian races of the West, mostly dark-haired, are tending to swamp the blond Teutons of England by a reflux migration. At the same time, the possible effects of conjugal selection, of selection through disease, and the relative increase of the darker types through the more rapid multiplication of the artisan class, should be kept in view".

In fact such anthropological investigations could be applied in any way that suited the prejudice of the user. While Beddoe pronounced on the approach of the Gaelic menace, Broca deduced from his findings that the French, who were part of the broad-headed Alpines or Celts, were the superior race. It was more than coincidence that Broca's superior assessment of the broad-headed came when France was in a fervour of nationalism after defeat in the Franco-Prussian war.

At the end of the 19th century, an Englishman living in Germany, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, repeated the claim that flaxen haired, blue eyed Nordics were distinguished by inherent qualities of strength, leadership and inventiveness. In his *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1899, he stated: "The amount of Nordic blood in each nation is a very fair measure of its strength and standing in civilisation". Chamberlain's theories were very popular in Germany, which was at that time in transition into a modern, expansionist capitalist state. Germany came late onto the scene of imperialism, with a need to compete in the scramble for what was left of areas like Africa. Theories of racial superiority such as Chamberlain's were useful propaganda for the German ruling class. The Kaiser ordered that Chamberlain's book should be on display in libraries and bookshops throughout the country and that it be distributed to all officers in the German army. In fact Chamberlain, who was a

fanatical anti-semitic, had constructed a definition of a superior race which cunningly embraced a number of physical types, so as to include all Germans except Jews.

Extreme nationalists seized on these ideas, which made the Jews a particular scapegoat for the problems of the German people. A lot of what happened later - the defeat of Germany in the 1914-18 war and the subsequent economic and political crises - was analysed in terms of a Jewish conspiracy to undermine the purity of the Aryan people. This prejudiced neurosis was successfully exploited by the Nazis in their climb to power during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

As a result, the German state under the Nazis was characterised by an official policy of racism, backed by theories which plumbed new depths of absurdity and horror. To begin with, like Chamberlain, the Nazis defined an ideal racial type which included all Germans who were not Jews. When it suited their purpose - as in the case of the expansionist ambitions of the German ruling class towards the Saar and Czechoslovakia - they claimed that all Germans everywhere had an essential affinity and must therefore be united into one nation. In contrast, the Jews were not just racially inferior; they were malignant as vermin and should be destroyed. "Anti-semitism", said the SS leader Heinrich Himmler in October 1943, "is exactly the same as delousing. Getting rid of lice is not a question of ideology, it is a matter of cleanliness. In just this same way anti-semitism for us has not been a question of ideology but a matter of cleanliness."

Nazi orators ranted about the bonds of German "blood", as if it were in some way different from the blood of people in other countries. The Nazis' preoccupation with such fallacies was typical of the prejudices they disseminated. At times, the needs of the German leadership were such that the Nazis had to modify their racism, exposing it in the process for the bigotry that it was. So after the wartime treaty between Italy and Germany the Italians, who by the standards of Nazi theories were an inferior racial group, were suddenly elevated into the ranks of the superior. A more glaring example came with the entry of Japan into the war in 1941. This was particularly difficult for the Nazis, who found themselves in alliance with a racial group classified by them as inferior. They solved the problem to their satisfaction by effectively granting the Japanese the status of "honorary" Aryans and thus exempting them from racial discrimination and repression.

### **America: The Melting Pot?**

The racism which originated and developed in Europe was used in America to justify the system of chattel slavery which existed there. In the 17th century the southern states relied on an economy which might be described as plantation capitalism. Money was invested with the object of realising a profit for the investor, not only in the plantations of tobacco and cotton but also in the human beings who were put to work there as slaves. The American planters adopted the same sorts of justification for their ownership of slaves as had people in other countries, like Britain, who had also grown rich on the transport of slaves. At first they claimed that negroes were heathens, then that Christian teaching showed the black race to be inferior to the white and therefore fit for enslavement (a theory also held by the Ku Klux Klan) ; and finally that there was biological and anthropological evidence for the blacks' "inferiority".

But not all whites in America were happy with the slave system. In particular the growing industrial capitalist interests of the northern states wanted a free labour market throughout the country to be able to develop and expand those interests without the hindrance of slavery. This led to the American Civil War which was not however fought principally about the emancipation of the slaves. At the outset of the war, Abraham Lincoln declared: "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and it is not either to save or destroy

slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves, I would do it". In practice, the negroes found that "emancipation" meant that a whole complex of discriminatory and repressive barriers - economic, social, legal - were erected against them. In public places such as parks and beaches they were allocated separate, inferior facilities; on public transport and in places like restaurants they were forced to sit apart from whites. Their children could only attend segregated schools and colleges. In many states racism went beyond mere segregation; in the Deep South negroes were commonly murdered, out of simple malice, and the killers were allowed to go free, without arrest, trial or penalty. Indeed, in some cases the culprits actually boasted of what they had done and were that much more popular locally as a result.

This discrimination required the support of a legal system, for if blacks were to be excluded from certain places and opportunities it was necessary to have a definition of a negro. In theory amendments to the Federal constitution freed the slaves. For example the 14th amendment said: "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States." In spite of this the southern states enacted what were called the Black Codes, which effectively forced the negroes back into servitude. When it became necessary to decide who was, and who was not, a negro, then the laws were exposed in all their absurdity. In 1904 in Louisiana, a court decided that the word "negro" did not necessarily include persons "in whom the admixture is so slight that even a scientific expert could not be positive of its presence". That same year, again in Louisiana, it was decided that an "appreciable amount" of "Negro blood" made a person a negro within the law - without satisfactorily defining "appreciable amount". Most southern states settled for "any ascertainable trace" of negro descent as a satisfactory boundary between black and white, which meant that anyone having any negro ancestor, no matter how remote, was classified as a negro. In fact there were many cases in which people who were apparently white were suddenly found to have a negro ancestry and then became ostracised as racially inferior. This meant that someone defined as white in one state might be classified as negro in another and could, therefore, dramatically change their status simply by crossing a state boundary.

In the last analysis, this repression depended on the negroes being denied the vote, which meant that they were without any political influence. This was achieved by a multitude of tricks and deceptions. In some cases the vote was only available to people who could satisfy the local registrar that they understood the Constitution or were of "good" character - and the local registrar always took care that no blacks were so qualified. In Louisiana in 1898 there was an attempt to restrict the franchise to those who had voted in elections before 1867 and to their descendants; it was hardly likely that so soon after official emancipation any great numbers of negroes would have been able to vote in 1867. This meant that whereas in 1896 in Louisiana there were 130,334 registered negro voters, by 1904 this had fallen to 1,342. If such legal moves failed, then the whites could still fall back on the informal pressure of terror, violence and lynchings to force negroes to "keep their place".

It was possible for many southerners to deceive themselves about this repression - to tell themselves that it was not happening, or that the negroes were not capable of anything better, or that they were content with their lot. A letter to the Guardian as recently as 14 April 1960, from a judge in Burke County, Georgia (who described himself as "lawyer, plantation owner, public official" and "a friend sympathetic to the Negroes") stated that during 30 years experience of hearing complaints from black people he had never heard a single one about being denied the right to vote. Such insidious complacency tended to conceal the important fact that the whites were in a sense also disenfranchising themselves. Political divisions within the dominant white group, and all types of reform movements, were stifled in order to achieve the unity needed to deny the vote to blacks. As the party which had stood for the Union in the Civil War, the Republicans suffered from this: for a long time the South was a

Democrat stronghold, where the policies of candidates did not matter as long as they wore the right party label.

This situation was ended in the 1950s, when schools and other facilities were forcibly integrated and a large-scale, determined and courageous voter registration campaign enabled the American negroes to assert some political influence. Nowadays it is common for the southern states to elect black people - and Republicans - to all sorts of political offices. After the riots and the use of the army in the 1950s there are officially no segregated schools or colleges.

Politicians can now make successful appeals to the idea of American national pride, but this cannot hide the racial divisions and prejudice which still exist. For America is a country of immigrants. Besides black slaves, America has absorbed millions of people from most parts of the world, particularly from Europe. They were all looking for a better deal for themselves as workers, often trying to escape from intolerable conditions in their country of origin, like the Irish who flooded into America after the potato famine of the 19th century. They came to a hotbed of prejudice and the truth is there is still prejudice against immigrants from the Caribbean such as Puerto Ricans, against Europeans such as Poles and Germans, against Jews and many others. In each case the rejection stems from a fear of competition - for a job, for a home, for a place in the queue. The racial mixing of America might have been an influence against prejudice. It might have convinced American workers of the essential similarity of all human beings and of the essential unity of the working class world-wide. Instead, because of the pressure of scarcity, competition and suspicion, this has not happened.

### **Colonial Racism**

Racism was also practised by white European people against those who originated in Africa and Asia. During the century after 1815 almost the whole of Asia, India, Africa and Australasia were colonised by the capitalist powers of Europe. One particularly hectic episode was aptly called the "scramble for Africa". In the 1870s only about ten per cent of the continent was colonised but by 1925 about 90 per cent of Africa was under European rule. This process often involved the creation of separate countries as the imperialist powers drew arbitrary frontiers to mark off their gains. Contact between these powers and the people they had subjugated was rarely easy and frequently violent and bloody. For it was a matter of the theft - more diplomatically known as annexation - of vast areas of land, dispossessing a native population who had lived off it for centuries. Of course they resisted - and of course they were crushed by the armed forces of the annexing powers. As Hilaire Belloc put it:

Whatever happens, we have got  
The Maxim gun  
And they have not.

This expansion was a very different matter to the development of the plantations of America and the West Indies through the transport of slave labour. The European powers took over Africa, Asia and the Far East in their quest for the raw materials and markets demanded by their expanding industrial economies. In the process they committed atrocities, which they excused as necessary acts in the face of a native population who were unwilling to accept the alleged benefits of European civilisation. Those "benefits" included such things as the settlement of farms by Europeans on the most fertile land, the opening up of mines, the construction of roads, bridges, railways, ports, schools, hospitals, townships . . . It was easy to represent this as a marvellous gift of enlightenment from a civilised people to a bunch of ungrateful savages and to conclude that white Europeans were inherently superior to the peoples they had forced into submission. The decimation of a tribe or two was a small price to pay for the "benefits".

This suppression was especially urgent and ruthless because it was being applied by a small minority against vast numerical odds. At its peak the British Empire contained some 372 million people of whom only 50 million were white. Such a minority could hardly have operated at any level of efficiency or commitment had they not been bolstered by a strong conviction of their own innate superiority. They could hardly have condoned - or participated in - the massive cruelty of colonialism had they not been persuaded that their mission was to uplift a lower people.

The colonial administrator of Victorian times, with his high, stiff collar, his pig-headed condescension and his mannered habits, is now something of a figure of fun. But in his time he represented an extremely powerful force. He stood for the ideology from which sprang the racism that played so large a part in the history of Africa and Asia. Although we may laugh at him now, he had the Maxim gun. From the ideology he stood for came the apartheid of South Africa, racist governments in places like Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and the political and military repression which has attempted to hold at bay the rising tides of African nationalism. In most places that nationalism has won because it outgrew the interests which stood in its way. Colonialism in most cases degenerated into agricultural exploitation and held back industrial development in the interests of maintaining markets for the exports of the colonial powers. Colonies were often easy outlets for emigrant workers, who found they could command very much higher standards of living than in their country of origin. Inevitably these workers were among the bitterest and most prejudiced opponents of the black nationalist movements; some of their theories were extreme even for racists, their racial anecdotes unlikely enough to strain the most elastic credibility. The triumph of the nationalists was a bitter blow to white workers for they no longer had a privileged position in the labour market. Many of the nationalist movements called themselves socialist, implying that they stood for revolutionary change in society which would dispossess the owning class. What actually happened was the replacement of the old colonial ruling class by a new one. Property society continued, with its privileges, its inequalities and its corruption. In the case of many new African states the transition took place on the basis of an ideology of black nationalism. But the victory of black nationalism in Africa has the promise, not of freedom but of the more rapid development of industrial capitalism.

### **British Racism**

Finally we can consider the more recent examples of racial prejudice which have been the response of British workers to the post-war immigration of people from the West Indies, Asia and Africa. This immigration has been represented by some people - for example Enoch Powell - as an act of madness which is undermining the basis of civilised life in Britain. In fact it was a perfectly normal episode in capitalism - the movement of a pool of unemployed workers from one area to another. This happens all the time. For example the London area is thickly populated with workers who came, or whose parents came, from Wales, Ireland and Scotland. They travelled to London to escape from unemployment in their home area, in the hope of finding work in the capital.

When the black immigration began in the 1950s capitalism was in a period of boom, with industries in this country generally suffering from a shortage of labour. Firms where the work was particularly hard or dirty or badly paid were experiencing special difficulty, as were services like public transport and hospitals where the hours and other conditions were unattractive. Capitalism's classic remedy to this problem is to call on its pool of unemployed. But at that time there was no such pool in Britain. Between 1950 and 1960 the average percentage unemployment in the United Kingdom was under 1.7. So industry here had to look abroad for workers to do the jobs which, in a time of relatively full employment, were difficult to fill. Citizens of British colonies were granted United Kingdom citizenship under the

Nationality Act of 1948, which meant that workers from the West Indies and Pakistan could come to Britain and stay for as long as they liked.

At the same time conditions in those countries were a strong encouragement to emigrate. In the West Indies there was widespread unemployment, unrelieved by any system of dole or social security. One traditional outlet - the United States - had been blocked by the McLarran-Walter Act of 1952. The Indian sub-continent had suffered persistent impoverishment under British rule and the upheaval of the partition into India and Pakistan deprived millions of their jobs and their homes. These factors, together with the ever-present threat of natural calamities such as floods and crop failures and unnatural ones such as religious massacres, made the prospect of emigration especially attractive.

The first immigrants - about 500, from Jamaica - came in 1948. The London *Evening Standard* (21 June) headlined the event "Welcome Home" and the new arrivals were quickly found work. For the next few years the annual inflow was numbered in hundreds, until 1952 when it reached about 2,000. Thereafter it increased rapidly: 24,000 in 1954, 22,000 in 1957, until by 1958 there were some 125,000 West Indians in this country. By that time there were also about 55,000 immigrants from India and Pakistan. Many had been actively encouraged to come here by the concerns which were suffering a shortage of labour. London Transport (as it then was) set up recruiting offices in the West Indies, and West Indian nurses were welcomed to work in National Health hospitals by none other than the then Minister of Health, Enoch Powell. Some companies which had recruited immigrant workers encouraged them to persuade their friends and families back home to come and join them on the production line.

As the trickle of immigration became a flood it exerted the predictable pressure on the limited resources in housing, schooling, medical care and social services. Competition brought its reaction of prejudice, and not just from openly racist organisations. In many cases trade unions opposed the employment of black workers. In a counter-reaction the immigrants tended to congregate in areas like Brixton and Southall, Wolverhampton and Smethwick. As prejudice against them hardened these were often the only places where a black skin was not a bar to finding a home or friendship - which further accentuated the tendency to congregate in particular areas. And, as is usually the case, the immigrants were particularly vulnerable to landlords, employers and others who were in a position to exploit their plight to the limit.

This situation contained all the elements of explosive racial prejudice. The immigrants' skin colour made them easily identifiable. They were concentrated in certain industries and areas, which promoted the prejudice that they were a threat to the local worker's chances of finding a job and a home. They brought with them their own established customs, language, culture and their own attitudes on sensitive issues such as sexual relations and the family, all of which were liable to distortion as an assault on established morals. It was not difficult to expand these prejudices into a rampant neurosis which could effortlessly multiply one black face in a hospital waiting area into a room full of immigrants clamouring for immediate attention for all manner of exotic, desperately contagious diseases.

As the 1958 riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill suggested, and the 1964 parliamentary election in Smethwick confirmed, racial prejudice had become something of a political issue in Britain. Since then both Labour and Tory governments have implemented racist immigration laws and controls; the freedom of immigration of the 1948 Nationality Act has disappeared into history. Prejudices have been inflamed and exploited by the speeches of politicians like Duncan Sandys and Enoch Powell and by the activities of groups like the National Front and British Movement. These prejudices have not been supported by any scientific argument or evidence: the racist case has usually been based on an imagined assault

on the “British way of life”. Racism continues to this day and politicians continue to use it to distract the attention of workers away from the real problems facing them.

## CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS RACE?

The word “race” was first used in the 17th century, as mercantilist explorers from Europe encountered groups of people who were clearly of a different physical appearance. Since then the word has been widely and indiscriminately used - and abused - to the point at which any useful meaning it ever had is in danger of being obscured. Today there are scientists who will argue that the whole concept is incorrect, that racial divisions do not exist in any valid sense. There are others who argue the opposite case, and some who assert that not only do the divisions exist but they also determine human behaviour, cultural traditions, achievements and the like.

If we are to use the word “race” at all we must first do so as a classification of human beings on the basis of physical characteristics. We must be aware that we are discussing a human sub-group and that that is the limit of the concept of race. In other words, human beings as a whole are of one species; whatever their separate physical traits they can all mate with each other and thereby produce offspring who are themselves fertile. Thus humans with a black skin can mate with those whose skin is white and their children can go on to produce offspring of their own, and so on. This may seem too obvious to need spelling out, except that racial prejudices can be so wild and extensive that at times they bring this sort of demonstrable fact into question.

Suppose a race is defined, then, as a human sub-group distinguishable from other sub-groups through some inherent physical characteristics. If this is at all valid, a race must have physical characteristics which are passed from one generation to the next and which are not present in other races. At first sight this seems to fit in with the existence of groups of people who can be classified as separate on the basis of discernible physical features. To begin with the obvious, there are people with black skin and people with white. Then there are others whose skin might be described as yellow or brown. Whites tend to think of blacks as having crinkly hair and broad, flat noses; of yellow people as having slant eyes; of brown people as having straight, black hair and brown eyes. On the other hand whites are thought of by the Chinese as being hairy and having big noses. On this type of classification it has been customary for investigators to divide human beings into five main sub-groups - the European or Caucasian, the Asiatic or Mongoloid, the American Indian or late Mongoloid, the African or Negroid and the Australasian or Australoid.

But if these divisions are valid, it must be possible to draw boundaries between races and to place all humans in one sub-group or another. This brings us up against a number of problems. Firstly, there are wide differences between individuals within each group; there are many variations of skin colour and very few people who can properly be described as “black”. There are very few, too, who can properly be described as “white” while many who are categorised as “white” have skins which are darker than many described as black. Then there are variations in other characteristics, like brown people whose hair is thick and wavy. And on the basis of physical appearance, in which race would we place a person with a sallow skin, brown eyes, crinkly fair hair, freckles and a snub nose?

Such questions as these make the whole concept of racial boundaries - and therefore that of race itself - distinctly shaky. Investigators in this field have also experienced this difficulty; such has been their uncertainty over the whereabouts of racial boundaries that they have not been able to agree on the number of races in existence. Their estimates have varied from the four racial groups which were defined by Carl Linnaeus to the 150 amassed by the American anthropologist George R. Gliddon.

To resolve this difficulty we must take into account the fact that, for all practical purposes, there is no such thing as a “pure” race. Racial “purity” would depend on a group of people existing in conditions of rigid and complete isolation, over centuries of exclusive inbreeding. There may somewhere be such groups but the mass of humanity has not existed in this manner. Since prehistoric times, as people began to be able to protect themselves against natural forces, they have wandered all over the world. The people we might classify as Celts spread out from Western Europe to Asia Minor; the Teutons from the Black Sea area to Spain, Italy and North Africa; the Slavs northwards to Russia and the Balkans. The American Indians are descended from Mongoloid people who crossed into America a long time before the first settlers arrived from Europe. The American negro originated partly from a mixing of native American Indians and Africans. Wherever humans have moved across the world they have interbred, mixing their stock again and again. As human society has developed - in particular with the shrinking of the world through faster communications - the process of mixing has become established and has accelerated. So the concept of a “pure” race is not valid. If any such races exist they would be in very small, isolated groups, absolutely untypical of the mass of the world's people. In the modern world, where the racists peddle their doctrines of racial “purity”, it simply does not exist.

The science of biology has been important in the matter of race because of the evidence that it provides to refute racist arguments. In particular, increased understanding about the mechanisms of heredity - the way in which physical characteristics are passed on from parents to children through the transfer of genes that takes place at the moment of conception - have shown the extent to which all human beings are biologically alike. The physical characteristic of skin colour, to which racists attach so much importance, is determined by only four genes out of a total of about 100,000. In other words, whatever differences there are between one racial group and another, people within anyone racial group are genetically more different from each other than from people in other racial groups. Humanity is biologically one and all racial groups have far more in common than they have differences.

The work of Charles Darwin, however much his conclusions have had to be modified, provides a basis for an understanding of why there are racial differences. All types of life, animal and plant, show variations between individuals some of which may be progressive because they help the organism to adapt and survive in its environment and others regressive, in the sense that they hinder that adaptation or even prevent it. So, in the case of racial differences, the dark skin of people in Africa may have developed and dominated there through the protection which that pigment in the skin gave against the tropical sun. In places where the sun rarely, or never, reaches such intensity a pale-skinned person can not only survive but actually benefit from the fact that the sun can more easily penetrate, so providing essential vitamins. This is not the orderly process it may seem, for human evolution has been a lengthy and complex business, proceeding through a random and profligate biological scattering. Each human reproduction is markedly random for there are enormously high odds against the female egg being fertilised by anyone of millions of male sperm and therefore against the birth of any individual. We are all of us, in a sense, here by a very lucky chance.

### **Racial Mixing**

Racial mixing is part of the same biological development as that which brought racial differences. Racists will argue that for races - or at least certain races - to interbreed is disastrous for the quality of the resultant offspring. Fascists warn about the debasement of human stock, the pollution of blood, the corruption of cultural values and so on. All of this is supported not by scientific evidence but by bigotry. There is no evidence to prove that the child of a mixed colour parentage is in any way inferior to one born of single colour parents. Indeed, there are specialists in this field who argue exactly the opposite:

Those who deliver themselves of unfavourable judgements concerning “race crossing” are merely expressing their prejudices . . . . The truth seems to be that far from being deleterious to the resulting off-spring and the generations following them, interbreeding between different ethnic groups is from the biological and every other standpoint highly advantageous to mankind . . . . Indeed, if there were any truth in the suggestion that hybridisation results in degeneration or decadence man should have died out long ago or else sunk to the level of a deformed idiot, for he is one of the most highly hybridised creatures on earth. (Ashley Montagu, *Mans Most Dangerous Myth*).

There is abundant evidence to support this view. A prime example of racial mixing is the United States. That country is often referred to as one of the world's great racial “melting pots”, with a population overwhelmingly descended from immigrants - some voluntary, some forced - from all over the world. In particular, the United States has seen a fusion between black people and white with their physical differences being slowly eroded with time. If racial mixing were detrimental to a society, causing it to stagnate or regress, then America would be among the most backward nations in the world. In fact, as we know, it is among the most advanced and highly developed - probably the most powerful state in the world. Many modern technological achievements originated there making the USA one of the two space powers. Militarily, economically and politically it dominates much of the earth. This is not to argue that imperialism, backed by immense armed forces, is a socially useful or progressive feature, but in capitalist society it is the measure of a nation's power and capability. The United States could not have achieved such a position if it were true that racial mixing undermined or hampered a state's development. In any case, interbreeding is an established fact of human life; to unravel it would be an extremely difficult and prolonged business, to all intents and purposes impossible.

### **Race and Culture**

So far we have discussed the issue of race mainly from the biological angle. But if we accept that there are inherent physical differences between groups of people, it is fair to ask how far this can be taken; does it have any useful application to human affairs? The racist argument is that it can be taken a very long way -in some cases to justify a policy of genocide - and that it is of vital significance to human society. This case is based on the argument that physical features such as colour of skin also determine behaviour, affecting a person's mental and physical capacities in different ways. Negroes, for example, are often insultingly caricatured as capable of great physical strength but of limited mental ability. From that standpoint the racist argument is that race determines cultural standards, so that people of one skin colour (that of the racist) are able to erect a civilisation of a higher standard than those of another colour. This is in fact a circular argument, with racists believing that just as race determines culture so also does culture determine race. Race can be identified by their cultural standards and those standards can also be identified by reference to race. There is little scope in this argument for reason or logic to break into the circle, except that the facts simply deny the truth of the racist case. The earlier civilisations - for their time of an exceptionally high standard - were built up by groups who would now be classified by racists as inferior, in South America, around the Mediterranean, in Africa and on the Indian sub-continent. In the modern world there are many groups of white people whose way of life is so depressed that, to be consistent, the racist would need to recategorise them - the poor whites of America, for example, or the most deprived slum dwellers of Britain.

We can now look at this issue in more detail. We have already seen that a person's physical features are determined by their genetic make-up. A person's genes can be observed, counted -even caused to mutate. But nobody has yet discovered any genes which inherently determine human personality or a person's cultural preferences. Nobody has yet unearthed any evidence

that such features are passed on from generation to generation in accordance with the laws of genetic inheritance. Still less has anyone embarked on the task of not only finding such genes but linking them to those which determine physical features, so that racial characteristics could be seen to be biologically connected to cultural ones. In fact there is no prospect of such a connection being made, for if race is anything it is a biological concept, confined to dividing human beings on the basis of genetically inherited bodily features while culture is an expression of people's response to the material conditions in which they find themselves. Race is a matter of biology while culture is a welter of historical and social influences. Real material evidence denies any link between the two. Cultural changes can, and do, happen with great speed. A country can develop out of a primitive condition into that of a modern state within a very short time but the study of genetics shows that biological changes happen very much more slowly - certainly too slowly to explain changes in cultural achievements.

One example of this is what happened to Japan in the late 19th century. Before the 1850s Japan was an insular feudal country which resisted any contact with the developing capitalist world outside. The population of about 30 million had hardly varied over 150 years; no ships were allowed to be built of more than 50 tons and anyone who left the country faced the death penalty if they returned. At a time when in England the Stockton and Darlington railway had been open for 28 years, Japan had virtually no highways and few wheeled vehicles. In 1853 the American President approached the rulers of Japan with a request to open up the existing meagre links with a few Dutch and Chinese traders into a contact with world commerce. At that time, observers of the Japanese might have concluded that their backwardness was a racial, biological feature. Their ruling class apparently had no ambition, nor capacity to expand into the world outside and Japanese ideas, assumptions, laws and morals - in other words culture - were fashioned by this timeless claustrophobic existence. Racists might have argued that this was because the Japanese were incapable of behaving in any other way.

A year later the Japanese rulers signed a treaty of Peace and Amity with America, which signalled the country's transformation. Within 40 years Japan had developed into a challenging economic and military power in the Far East. People who only recently had been feudal peasants were schooled into fighting a victorious modern war against China and ten years later they astounded the world by defeating the great power of Tsarist Russia in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5. Japan played a comparatively minor part in the First World War but after 1918 became a major threat to the economic dominance of American and European powers in the Far East. This was emphasised by the powerful and sophisticated war machine which was successful for so long during the second world war. Since 1945 Japan has rebuilt its industries, and developed new industries in electronics, motor cars, cameras and so on. It remains a powerful competitor to the older states of world capitalism.

None of this would have been possible, had the Japanese people been biologically retarded, as a racist might have claimed in the 1850s. Nor can the rapid advance of capitalism in Japan be explained by a biological adjustment among the people there, since, as we have said, genetic changes simply cannot happen at such a pace. The social relationships in Japan, and the country's culture, have changed in step with its economic development and its people have had no difficulty in adapting to the rapid changes. There is only one way to explain this logically - that culture is a product of society and is not linked to people's biological features.

Another example, which deals with what was once a rampant prejudice, is that of the state of Israel. At a time when Jews were the most prominent butt of racist propaganda there was a popular theory that they were biologically averse to becoming involved in a modern military machine. Racists asserted that Jews were shifty, insidious and cowardly - inherent features which would enable them to avoid being recruited into the armed forces or, if they were recruited, would angle them into cushy, safe jobs a long way from any combat. If there were

any substance to this prejudice, the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 would have meant a nation which was economically and militarily feeble, an easy prey to the hostile states which surrounded it. In fact, the opposite has been true. The country's population - female as well as male - are conscripted into the armed forces and, as part of Israel's military machine, have proved to be exceptionally efficient and ruthless combatants. Israel has been engaged in a succession of wars which have established it as a dominant military power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its soldiers have been tough and pitiless in combat. Its leaders and militarists, like Moshe Dayan and Menachem Begin, have proved to be single-minded in their assertion of the interests of the Israeli ruling class. A state which was founded with propaganda promises stressing the horrors of the Nazi holocaust has itself perpetrated atrocities and massacres. All of this has been a response to the needs of the Israeli capitalist class to defend their interests from the encroachment of hostile neighbouring states and, where necessary or possible, to expand their hold over the area. The culture of Israel is that of a modern capitalist military power and the workers of the country, just like those of other countries, have accepted and absorbed it as the Israeli ruling class needed them to. Again, this has not been a matter of biology but of social and historical factors.

The evidence of Israel as well as Japan leads to the conclusion that race does not determine culture. If it did it would be necessary to argue that there had been a massive, fundamental genetic change in the case of Israel, over the space of some 20 years, and in the case of Japan, over some 50 years. Genetic changes simply do not happen at such a speed; they are a very gradual process with numerous diversions and reversals. Racists who talk of "British" or "western" or "Aryan" culture being under threat from an "alien" influence are dealing in unsupportable, unscientific myth.

### **Race and Intelligence**

But in spite of all the evidence, racialism - the making of policies and the enforcement of them on the basis of alleged racial differences - continues to flourish. Inevitably, there has to be a continuous effort to justify this, just as there was when slavery and colonial repression were bolstered by theories of religion and later of craniology and social Darwinism. In their time, these were considered to be powerful, conclusive evidence; nowadays, of course, they are exposed as baseless. We should remember this when we are confronted with the current attempts to justify racism - some of them palpably malicious and to that extent flimsy, and some rather more sophisticated and thoughtful and perhaps, at first glance, scientifically argued. A recent example of this, which received widespread publicity and was the subject of heated debate, is the work of the American educational psychologist, Arthur Jensen, in assessing the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of American children. In 1969, in the *Harvard Educational Review*, Jensen published an article "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?", which concluded that it was not unreasonable to say that "genetic factors are strongly implicated in the average Negro-White intelligence difference". Jensen's argument was that about 80 per cent of what determines intelligence is genetic - a matter of inheritance - and about 20 per cent environmental - fashioned by social, historical, material factors. As he found that on average black children scored lower in IQ tests than whites, he concluded that they must as a group be genetically inferior in terms of intelligence. This work was seized on by racists, who claimed that it provided objective scientific proof of what had long been obvious to the casual observer and therefore justified their case that social policies and decisions should be based on this proven black inferiority.

But the racists' excitement was distinctly premature, Jensen's work came under a sustained assault from other investigators in this field who questioned his conclusions, the basis from which he began, and the argumentative links between the two. But his ideas, in however crude a form, are common enough in popular racial prejudice to justify a brief examination of race, intelligence and IQ.

The concept of an Intelligence Quotient emerged in the early years of this century when Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon invented an “intelligence scale”. At the time they disclaimed any notion that there could be any precise measurement of this thing called “intelligence”, aiming only to “measure the useful effects of adaptations and the value of the difficulties overcome by them”. The idea of a precise gauge of intelligence, which could be used in the formation of laws and social policies, the allocation of resources and so on, came from later investigators, Among these was Lewis M. Terman, who in 1916 coined the term Intelligence Quotient, The concept of IQ attracted a lot of excited support and interest, This was particularly so in America, where racists saw much wisdom in Terman's opinion that “the major differences in the intelligence test scores of certain races, as Negroes and Whites, will never be fully accounted for on the environmental hypothesis”, (Terman was not troubled by the racial structure of his IQ test, nor was he daunted by the task of computing IQs for dead people, producing them for Napoleon, Lincoln, Galileo and so on.)

Whatever the confidence of people like Terman, the fact is that the concept of an IQ really settles nothing and leaves a great many important questions without an answer. What is intelligence? Is it a fixed entity? Can it be measured? Is it measured by IQ tests? Does it have any connection with hereditary factors and in particular with racial differences?

To begin with, there is no certainty about the nature of intelligence. Is it an ability to absorb and usefully process large amounts of knowledge so as to develop and innovate - to expand knowledge? Or is it a highly practical memory, a capacity to store and retrieve facts? Or do we agree with Jensen, that it is “a capacity for abstract reasoning and problem-solving”? If the matter is so uncertain it seems doubtful that intelligence can be a fixed entity; it is as fraught with difficulties as the concept of race and must be treated with a similar caution.

A problem-solving ability is not an absolute; it develops in accordance with the problem itself. For the greater part of its life on earth humankind has survived by means of hunting and gathering food; the more advanced productive techniques which we now take for granted are in fact only about 15,000 years old. What might have been regarded, during the hunting/gathering phase, as intelligence was determined by the problems which had to be solved then in order to survive. It would have been very different from what is called intelligence in today's industrial capitalist society. A person from a primitive food gathering economy might do poorly in a modern IQ test against an industrial worker but the result would be different if the test were structured to the needs of primitive society. Each person would have a different “intelligence” but one could not be rated as superior to the other.

This throws a different light on the variations in IQ scores not just between, but within, defined groups such as whites, blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans. To form the basis of any valid judgement or decisions about relationships between such groups, and to be able to pronounce on their inherited intelligence, the tests would need to be completely separated from all historical, social and environmental influences. There would need to be a test based on absolute equality of opportunity, incentive, motivation, expectancy and ambition. There would need to be an unquestioning trust in the tester by the subject and in the subject by the tester. Of course these conditions are unattainable; it is not surprising that IQ tests cannot come up to them. The conclusion must be that IQ tests really tell us little more about a person than their ability to perform in IQ tests.

This leaves us with the question of whether “intelligence” is genetically conditioned - and therefore not susceptible to change by environmental influences - and in particular whether it has any connection with racial divisions. Although no genetic link has been found between physical characteristics and intellectual performance - and no gene which would determine the

latter - the work of people like Arthur Jensen is taken to suggest that there might be such a link: Jensen found that on average blacks scored lower in IQ tests than whites yet what does this really mean? The test was based on grouping by skin colour. But since blacks are genetically mixed and in many cases include a white ancestor this means that it would be as accurate to describe them as genetically, or inherently, white as it would be to describe them as black. If we argue that a person's skin colour makes them genetically of lower intelligence, how do we know that it is the black skin gene which is responsible for this and not the genes for the white skin which they may carry? If we take as our definition of a black anyone with an identifiable black ancestor, do we also define as white anyone with an identifiable white ancestor, which would include many blacks? On such uncertain grounds are racial divisions based, which deprives them of usefulness in any scientific assessment. At one time it may suit the assessors to classify as black someone with a coloured skin but at another they may need to modify their classification; the results of the assessment as a whole would then be different without the individual results changing.

We must also consider the fact that skin colour is only one of many racial features. If the assessors based their groups on some other feature, such as hair texture, they would have different groups, probably of mixed skin colour. There are numerous possibilities, all of them equally valid and each carrying its own effect on the average, overall result. But why should it be "convenient" to make a division on one basis and not on another? The answer is that Jensen's investigations, like much more work in this field, is by no means the objective, purely scientific enterprise which racists claim it to be. It is heavily influenced by the same historical, social and environmental factors as affected the performance of the children whom Jensen assessed. Jensen's work was all about the allocation of educational resources, about whether it was worthwhile to invest in attempting to raise the IQ of black children if they were inherently incapable of responding. In other words its basic assumptions were those of capitalist society - its priorities, its frames of judgement, its standards of success and failure.

So there is no objective biological evidence to link a person's genetic make up with their mental abilities. Any attempts to test those abilities cannot be objective and are therefore not scientifically valid. There is no case for saying that intellectual capacity is determined by race.

### **What is Race?**

We have seen the dangers of treating the concept of race with any certainty. Although there are obviously differences between one group of human beings and another, once we try to draw rigid divisions between them we quickly realise that it is impossible to be specific or consistent. The boundaries between races are obscure and arbitrary, varying according to the convenience of the investigator or to which feature is chosen as the arbiter of the race a person belongs to. The mixing of human stock has resulted from the interbreeding caused by migration all over the earth; the evidence is that this is leading to a gradual smoothing out of whatever differences there might be so that, with time, there will truly be only one "race" - the human "race". The racist argument, that racial mixing is harmful, is scientifically baseless; in truth the evidence is that if anything it is beneficial to human beings. We have also seen that whatever differences there are between human groupings, these are vastly outnumbered by our similarities. We come then to the conclusion that, although there may be much profit for racists in inventing biological differences, or in exaggerating and misinterpreting those which actually exist while denying the essential sameness of all human beings, there is in fact no case for basing social and political action on racial factors.

If it is anything, race is a biological concept. It is not psychological, social, behavioural, cultural or political. It does not explain social status, achievements, ability or human behaviour. These things are fashioned by material conditions and the social developments which arise from them.

## CHAPTER 3: ANTI-SEMITISM

Racial prejudice is a widespread feature of modern society; it is so diverse in character that it can be applied to explain almost any problem, deal with almost any emergency, satisfy almost any panic. It is not simply a matter of colour, for prejudice can operate between groups of people who have the same colour. A good example of this is anti-semitism.

### **Is there a Jewish Race?**

Since anti-semitism is a sort of “bread-and-butter” racism - rather like a staple diet of prejudice - it figures prominently in racist theory. We should, then, first discuss the question of whether Jews can properly be described as a race. In the terms of their religion they are in fact not only a race but “the chosen people”; in scientific and biological terms, however, they cannot be defined in this way.

Jews do not conform to any uniform recognisable physical type. They do not all have dark hair and dark eyes; in some parts of Europe such as Alsace and Poland there are substantial numbers who are blonde in appearance and in other areas there are many varieties of skin, hair and eye colour. There are Jews with black skins - for example the Falashas of Ethiopia. And the famous Jewish nose, so beloved of anti-semitic cartoonists, is a characteristic of only a minority. As is the case with other groups, it is wrong to talk about “Jewish blood” for they share the same blood groups with the rest of the world's population.

The explanation is that the Jews - again like other human groups - are not “pure”. They were not “pure” when they left the desert over 3,000 years ago and since then, in spite of all the efforts - voluntary as well as compulsory - to segregate them into an exclusive body, they have become even less so. At least three distinct strains can now be discerned in their make up - the Ashkenazi or German; the Sephardic or Spanish; and the Oriental. All these groups differ from one another and each contains wide variations in physical type. If anything, their migratory history has had the effect of making the Jews resemble the groups among which they live. Nevertheless, over centuries they have managed to preserve something of a separate identity for themselves. This means that they might best be described as a socio-religious group which, we should add, has in its struggle to survive often become as markedly racist as its own detractors.

### **Jews and the Nation State**

To understand the reason for anti-semitism and its catastrophic consequences we must refer to one of the essential features of property society - a feature which in fact existed before the emergence of capitalism. Property society brought the concept of the nation-state. People were encouraged - indeed often forced - to identify their own interests with those of the state and to regard the nation as a separate, independent entity often hostile to other states. This baseless and inhuman idea is called patriotism - a nationalistic prejudice which feeds on contempt for, and hostility towards, people in other nations.

Modern capitalism raised the setting up of nation-states to a fine art. As the first capitalist states expanded, they grew accustomed to defining national boundaries which were based on acts of forcible annexation, as happened when Africa was carved up between the colonising powers of Europe during the 19th century. Capitalism is also accustomed to redefining frontiers, setting up new states, or amalgamating or dissolving others, usually as part of the “peace” arrangements after a war. In this way, to give some recent examples, the state of Czechoslovakia was established after the first world war and the separate nations of East and

West Germany after 1945. In each case the people in the new state were pressured to regard themselves as having a new, different, national identity, to develop a new patriotism and to direct it against those who had recently been their compatriots.

The motive of this propaganda is the protection of the interests of the dominant class in a nation-state. Workers who are patriotic will readily sacrifice themselves when called upon to do so, either by allowing themselves to be exploited more intensely at work or by participating in a war against a group of foreign exploiters. But just as nationalism is important to the interests of a ruling class, so are there problems when within a nation-state there is a group which fosters its own identity and traditions and which therefore may be perceived to owe its loyalty - or at least a greater loyalty - to the group rather than to the state. Historically these problems have arisen with many groups including the Jews, who themselves have not lessened the antagonism by defending their separateness and being conspicuous through their religious rites and customs.

### **The Jews in History.**

From what is known of their history, the Jews were originally one of a number of racially and culturally similar tribes who came to the Eastern Mediterranean area from the desert region to the east. They entered Palestine as nomadic cattle breeders - a life-style which encouraged the retention of old-fashioned customs and rituals. At that time - about 1400 BC - Palestine lay on an important trade route between the empires of the Babylonians and the Assyrians to the north and the Egyptians to the south. Although their uncomfortable position as a buffer between other more powerful groups may have fostered feelings of group identity in the Jews - bolstered by their distinctive religion - their constant contact with traders and merchants would have acted against any tendency for them to be separate and exclusive. This latter fact would also have encouraged them to abandon the harsh, precarious existence of nomadic herdspeople for the ranks of merchants. But as they emigrated and settled in other countries they encountered the hostility of the established merchants there, which they met by banding together. The sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD caused the virtually complete dispersal of the Jews from Palestine, leaving them to survive as separate groups wherever they could, the subject of widespread and unrelenting hostility.

By the Middle Ages the Jews were scattered throughout the world, but with most living in Europe. Their persecution was mainly justified on religious grounds, the prejudices born of Christian teaching being luridly elaborated by such bizarre fantasies as the Jews having horns and a tail or being responsible for the Black Death. At the least they were subject to restrictions such as a ban on employing Christians. In many places they were disqualified from owning land and denied membership of the Guilds which were so integral a part of the feudal economy. One effect of this discrimination was to confine Jews to trade and money-lending, which stimulated the accusation that they were mean, grasping and swindling. In many countries Jews were forced to identify themselves publicly by wearing a prominent badge {the Nazis were not, then, the originators of this idea} and feelings against them often boiled over into physical attacks, at times reaching the scale of massacres. When it suited the purpose of the ruling class they would take the Jews under their protection; many kings of England, for example, declared them to be "servants of the king", which gave powerful protection to their persons and property. The price of this was to be milked to top up the royal coffers and if they were unable to pay they were liable to be expelled by their protector, as happened in England under Edward I in 1290. They were not allowed back into England until 1664.

At the time of the French Revolution there was something of a respite in the persecution of the Jews and in many European countries restrictions against them were lifted. But by the end of the 19th century the situation had changed, with a number of serious anti-Jewish campaigns

- or pogroms - notably in Russia and eastern Europe. These campaigns led to a large scale exodus of Jews: between 1905 and 1908 over 200,000 a year fled and it has been estimated that some 47 million left Europe, mostly for the United States, between 1844 and the start of World War One.

### **The Jews in Britain**

In Britain in 1850 the Jewish population amounted to about 35,000; by 1939 this figure had increased tenfold, most of the immigrants being refugees from Russia and eastern Europe. They were overwhelmingly urban settlers, concentrating in the East End of London (where about two-thirds of them settled), in the Strangeways district of Manchester and the Leylands in Leeds. Like many a large, concentrated, desperate immigrant population the Jews were cruelly vulnerable to an especially harsh exploitation, in some cases by their fellow immigrants. They were compelled to work in the sweatshops of the ready-made clothing trade, which had then only recently been established. In cramped, hot, dirty workrooms, side by side with similarly desperate English workers, the Jews laboured long and hard to the profit of their employers. They were also employed, under similar conditions, in small workshops producing furniture and footwear. These workshops could be set up with very little capital, which meant that some workers could, and did, start one up knowing that the worst that could follow failure would be to return to the sweatshop. Here we have the origins of the Jewish stake in entrepreneurial business and of the few Jewish businesses which later expanded into huge tailoring combines, chain stores, property development companies and entertainment empires.

The prejudice against Jews was, then, rooted in historical rather than racial factors. They were seen as an alien group of sojourners, owing no allegiance to their place of settlement and unwilling to give any. Because workers commonly came into contact with them at the point of retail trade, it was easy for them to have a reputation as unproductive “middlemen”, most comfortable when they were wheeling and dealing. Their identity as a separate, exclusive group fostered a variety of theories of subversion which held Jews responsible for an international conspiracy to undermine the culture and stability of whichever country they lived in. Between the wars fascist propaganda placed great emphasis on the alleged evil doings of something called “international finance”, by which was meant an imaginary world-wide Jewish plot to subvert modern civilisation.

Jewish influence was supposed to be at work in the Marconi scandal, just before the first world war, which concerned British government contracts to establish a chain of naval wireless stations throughout the British Empire. At about the same time there was the Indian silver scandal, which arose from a proposal that the India Office should secretly buy silver through the bullion dealers Samuel Montague, instead of through the usual method of the Bank of England operating on the silver market. Although it was of absolutely no concern to working class interests that one company rather than another should profit from a government rearmament drive, or from state purchases of precious metals, workers were angry at these underhand deals, which they saw as evidence of Jewish clannishness and devious fixing. The South African war, which was actually fought over which sections of the ruling class would profit from that country's mineral wealth, was blamed on Jewish influence. The journalist J.A.Hobson, who was sent to South Africa in 1899 by the *Manchester Guardian*, declared: "The Jews are *par excellence* the international financiers . . . they fastened on the Rand as they are prepared to fasten upon any other part of the globe" (*Contemporary Review*, no.77, 1900). Even the Social Democratic Federation newspaper *Justice* (which claimed to be stating a Marxist, internationalist analysis of capitalism) argued that “the Jew influence” was dragging Britain into the war and that the Prime Minister, Salisbury, was unable to master “a Jewish clique” (7 October 1899).

The effect was to inflame British workers' paranoia and confusion. In this way they could forget their poverty and the fact that it was their lives which were to be lost in the war to protect the capitalists' interests and could instead turn their wrath onto the Jews. No theory was too outrageous if it lent weight to the concept of Jews as sly, greedy and subversive. It was very similar to the malicious hysteria which is vented on black workers today. One writer, for example, in a London daily newspaper, described Jewish immigrants in these words:

filthy, rickety jetsam of humanity, bearing on their evil faces the stigmata of every physical and moral degeneration, men and women who have no intention of working otherwise than in trafficking. (*Standard*, 5 January 1905).

Attacks on Jewish people and on their homes and shops were commonplace, notably in the East End of London, and there were other serious incidents in Ireland and Wales. Anti-semitism was firmly rooted in working class demonology.

Between the wars conditions in Britain provided a fertile breeding ground for all types of prejudice and social scapegoating. On the one hand the capitalist class were disquieted by the progressive erosion of their standing in the world and by the apparently unstable attitudes of the working class who, for their part, were bewildered and cynical at the exposure of the politicians' promises to build a land fit for the heroines and heroes returned from the war. This was the type of situation in which racial prejudice could flourish. In 1920, the publication of an English version of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, with its apparent revelation of a Jewish plot to dominate the world, was regarded by some people as justification for a policy of discrimination and repression against Jews. The exposure of the work as a forgery - which did not take long - reduced its believers to a small lunatic fringe, among them members of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF). Formally the BUF denied anti-semitism; Mosley always insisted that fascists attacked Jews, not on the grounds of race or religion, but for their actions or political opinions. But a typical statement of his was in a telegram he sent to the notorious Nazi Jew baiter, Julius Streicher, in May 1935:

The forces of Jewish corruption must be conquered in all great countries before the future of Europe can be made secure in justice and peace.

Mosley could be provoked into even cruder expressions of his views and so could his followers, like William Joyce, who once complained that swimming in a public pool also used by Jews was likely to result in being "positively anointed in Jewish grease".

When war broke out in 1939, the BUF were in a dilemma. As an organisation expressing a fervent patriotism they could hardly fail to play an enthusiastic part in defending the interests of the British capitalist class (one of whom was Oswald Mosley). But they had reservations -to put it mildly - about fighting against Nazi Germany whose methods in dealing with political opponents and anyone classified as racially inferior they so much admired. They resolved the problem - at least to their own satisfaction - by attributing the war to their old enemy, an international Jewish conspiracy. So the BUF sent its members to war reluctantly, telling them that they had been manoeuvred into a conflict which set one lot of Aryans against another (which said little for the stability or the perceptiveness of these alleged Aryan super-people).

All this amounted, in the view of some people, to something called "The Jewish Problem" which, had the BUF ever come to power, would undoubtedly have been dealt with in a way having scant regard for political freedom or for human feelings. This, of course, was the way of the Nazis who applied to the "Problem" a "Final Solution" - the cold-blooded, deliberately organised murder of millions of people. This was in fact the quintessential logical expression

of racism and it did much to boost the Zionist response to it and cause the bloody conflict in the Middle East ever since the establishment of the state of Israel.

If, since the Second World War, the Jews have largely been replaced as the principal target of European racists, this is not to say that anti-semitism is dead. It still exists in Britain and sometimes bursts into violence elsewhere in Europe with bomb attacks on synagogues. It is notably strong in Russia, where so many Jews were once forced to flee from the last of the Tsarist pogroms. Now, under a “communist” government, the lot of many Jews in Russia remains one of enduring persecution - and this in a country which claims to operate on the basis of human interests and equal standing.

For a long time the Jews have been one of capitalism's handier scapegoats, liable to suffer most when the system is in crisis, as it was towards the end of the last century and during the 1930s. At such times, when working class suffering becomes especially acute, workers who need an explanation - any explanation - for their problems can be vulnerable to the racist urgings to blame a scapegoat rather than consider how capitalism works and why it imposes such problems on them. They are liable to ignore the fact that the majority of Jews are also members of the working class, enduring the same poverty, poor housing, sub-standard food and clothing and so on. They go through the same struggle for survival but Jews are no more aware of their class interests than are any other group of workers. In their ignorance they supported the establishment of the state of Israel and, if they live there, they serve the interests of the ruling class in the same way as workers everywhere - by acquiescing in their own exploitation, by participating in their rulers' wars, by voting for one capitalist party or another at election time. Israel is now a powerful, militaristic capitalist state - perhaps a nuclear power in the near future. It might have been hoped that the Jews' terrible history would have encouraged them to something more hopeful.

## CHAPTER 4: RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES

To some extent we dealt in Chapter I with the origins of racism in the United States, seeing it develop from the institution of slavery. One problem in considering racism in the USA is that it operates in so many directions with so many different groups as its targets. Racial prejudice exists not just against blacks but against people of Chinese, Japanese and Filipino origin. Then there is the discrimination against groups like Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Nor is possession of a “white” skin any protection, for racism reaches out to people whose origins are in Europe, whose ancestors emigrated to America from such countries as Italy, Poland and Russia. And, of course, there is prejudice - as there is almost everywhere - against Jews. At the same time these groups may erect barriers against each other. All of this makes the United States - which its politicians and its patriots describe as “God's own country” and “Land of the Free” - the world's classic case of the complexity and absurdity of racism. It is a situation to tax even the racists' vocabulary of insults; human beings are sneeringly labelled as “Wops”, “Yids”, “Polaks”, “Nips” . . . . But above all other forms of discrimination there has always been that against black people and this is the aspect we shall consider in this chapter. The analysis we present, and the comments we make about prejudice against blacks, can also be applied to the other groups we have mentioned.

### **The Slave Economy**

The first slaves were imported into America from Africa in 1619, twelve years after the arrival of the first settlers from England. At first only a few hundred slaves were imported, to work alongside the native Indian population who had also been enslaved. Treatment of the slaves was much the same as for white people who worked as indentured servants; in most cases they could earn their freedom and were given land of their own to cultivate. Slavery became uneconomic in the northern states and it was quickly abolished there. This might also have happened in the South had not the whole situation been dramatically changed by the cultivation of tobacco. This crop needed a large, hard-working labour force and the tobacco growers looked to the slave trade to supply it. By the 1660s slaves were arriving in America at the rate of about 6,000 a year. Alongside tobacco some cotton was also cultivated but this was not very profitable, largely owing to the laborious, inefficient and costly process of manually separating the cotton fibres from the rest of the plant. In 1794, just as the tobacco plantations were at a low ebb and the whole future of slavery was consequently in question, the cotton gin was invented. This machine, which separated the cotton seeds and fibres mechanically, had the effect of stimulating a profitable cotton industry. As plantations turned from the cultivation of tobacco to cotton the demand for slaves increased enormously, reviving the trade in them and giving a new lease of life to slavery. The system which developed may be called “plantation capitalism”; money was invested in cotton production, just as it might be in an established industrial enterprise of capitalism, but the workers involved were not the “free” wage earners characteristic of industrial capitalism but chattel slaves. At about the same time another invention allowed the mechanical granulation of sugar, which created a sugar empire, also dependent on slave labour, in the south. As the demand for slaves grew more urgent their price rose and the vastly profitable, vastly cruel, slave trade was born again, with a body of nonsensical theory to prove that it was all in accordance with Christian principles, or biological fact, or was essential to American prosperity or even in the slaves' best interests. By the 1830s the plantation system was entrenched in the South and so was the planters' determination to defend the institution of slavery.

Meanwhile, in the North things were different. That was the scene of a developing industrial capitalism so that in one formally united country there were two economic systems, and their respective dominant classes competed for control over the new land. The dispute was settled in the Civil War of 1861-65, which was fought over this issue and over the unity of the United

States. The southern aim of secession, which would have virtually set up a separate nation with its own economic style, was defeated and among the terms imposed by the victorious Union was the "emancipation" of the slaves. For some years after the war, during the time known as the Period of Reconstruction, the South was occupied by northern troops and the freed slaves were given certain civil and political rights. However, when the northern occupation ended in 1876, political power was restored to the plantation owners, which set the scene for the erosion of the "emancipation" measures, for the slaves, although no longer legally owned by the planters, were still economically dependent on them.

### **Formal Emancipation**

During the 1860s and the 1870s a series of constitutional amendments and new Acts theoretically guaranteed blacks an equal place with whites in American society. But in 1883 the Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional and this opened the way for a mass of minor legislation, known as the Jim Crow laws, which undermined the slaves' "emancipation". The rights and voting facilities nominally extended to blacks became dead letters and in the South separate (and inferior) schools, parks, transport and the like were allocated to them. In buses, for example, blacks were confined to a very few seats at the back; where there was a beach it was either denied to blacks or divided into white (better) and black (worse) sections; there were separate schools and colleges for whites and blacks. The segregation mania went even further than that, for in the South there were very few hospitals which would admit a black; they would - and did - see blacks die rather than offer them treatment. Many of these measures were challenged in the Supreme Court but were upheld on the specious grounds that the facilities, although separate, were equal; they did not imply that blacks were inferior and so could not be held to be discriminatory.

So it was that at the turn of the century the blacks in the south were almost as much under subjection as they had been under slavery. Chattel slavery had been legally abolished, from above, but it was another matter to make emancipation work against the opposition of the majority of people on whose cooperation its success depended. Laws do not change social conditions and the resulting attitudes. In spite of the "emancipation" measures the basis of the southern economy was still the plantation, which could be worked by the most elementary form of labour, with no need for the wages system of industrial capitalism. Slavery was succeeded by a system in which those who worked the land were additionally robbed, by force and fraud. And the black was deprived of even the element of security implied by the status of slave, which gave the owner a direct interest in the slaves being well fed and adequately housed - often to the envy of the "poor white" farmers. "Emancipation" in fact depressed the blacks to the lowest rungs of the occupational ladder, where half-starved sharecroppers scratched the meagrest of livings from the poorest of land.

The blacks were "kept in their place" by an unrelenting campaign by the whites, carried on by both legal and illegal means. Intimidation, beatings and lynchings became part of the southern way of life. It was common for blacks to be arrested, convicted and punished on trumped-up charges, particularly those alleging some sexual misdemeanour against a white person. The law enforcement agencies - the police and courts - which were in theory concerned with an unbiased administration of the law, were often corrupt, enthusiastic participants in the denial of rights to blacks. It was not unknown for the police to connive openly, even take part in, fearful acts of terrorism and murder against blacks. Terrorist organisations like the Ku Klux Klan were allowed to go about their grisly business virtually unhindered. What was theoretically the law of the land was resisted and ignored in a display of what might be seen as white solidarity.

The situation might have been different had the blacks been able to exercise a political influence. They were numerous enough, had they been able to take part in elections, to have

exerted significant pressure on the politicians who stood for racial discrimination. Again, however, they were thwarted, for the whites were able to place insurmountable obstacles in the way of a black trying to vote. Some of these were illegal, such as the threat, and the actual use, of violence and murder. Others simply adjusted the law, for example the imposition of a poll tax which no black could pay, or the use, as a voting qualification, of the “grandfather clause” of Louisiana. For almost a century after the Civil War the Democratic Party had a political stranglehold on the South, where they continued to be associated in the popular mind with the Confederacy, with slavery and the subjection of the black. From this racist repression, and this political stranglehold, some exceedingly ugly and menacing politicians were to emerge.

### **Blacks as Industrial Workers**

It was the first world war, which had so lasting an effect on the face of world capitalism, that began to change things for the American blacks. The industrial boom of the war brought a demand for labour from the industries in the North and the consequent migration of blacks from the South to the northern industrial cities. At about the same time industries such as textile processing, coal mining and steel production opened in the South, attracting both blacks and whites from the rural areas into the cities. At the beginning the blacks were much like any other migratory labour force - unskilled, bewildered by the speed and pressures of urban survival and very much at the mercy of employers, landlords and traders who had few scruples about making the most of the immigrants' plight. These problems have dogged all large-scale immigrations but in the case of the blacks coming to the North from the South there were also two other, particularly aggravating, factors. The first was the excessively backward and repressive situation they had left, which made adapting to an industrial city that much more difficult. The second was their skin colour, which made them readily accessible targets for other workers' frustration, confusion and despair. So in the case of the blacks there was an extra impetus to the normal tendency of migratory workers to gravitate towards certain parts of a town. It was very much a defensive move for the blacks to concentrate in places like Harlem in New York and Watts in Los Angeles.

But escaping from the South did not release the blacks from prejudice. The assimilation of a non-industrial people into a modern capitalist economy always produces its own stresses, which are easily stimulated and aggravated by the insecurity and the frustrations already being suffered by the established, “native” workers. The blacks' arrival in the North met an informal, tacit segregation which effectively confined them to inferior jobs and homes. Two styles of colour discrimination developed. In the South it was open and explicit, a part of the legal system - blacks simply did not have access to certain things and there were notices and other declarations to remind them of it. In the North and East the rules of segregation were implicit and were silently accepted by both sides. In the northern and eastern cities blacks did not even try to enter certain restaurants or hotels or move into certain parts of town. The only jobs open to them were labouring or menial. In this way was born that popular film character -the genial, musical black servant or railway porter with a heart of gold untroubled by ambitions to be equal. Overall, then, segregation still ruled; mixed marriages were illegal in almost half the states and in about one third of them blacks were officially denied access to the best schools, restaurants, parks and similar amenities.

The absorption of blacks into industry was accelerated by the second world war, when American factories needed workers too much to be able to discriminate on grounds of colour. It was estimated that in July 1943 there were about 1,300,000 blacks working in war plants; in shipbuilding the number of blacks employed in March 1944 exceeded that for all shipyard workers in 1940. In many important ways, this situation was incompatible with a system of racial segregation, which began to be broken down by the demands of industrial capitalism. The American armed forces, even though they were segregated into units by colour, were also

affected; in 1942 a southern senator suggested that black troops from the North should be stationed only in that part of the country, but this was peremptorily rejected as it conflicted with the military needs of American capitalism. This decision neatly represents the reality that the demands of Industrial capitalism cannot be endlessly denied by the prejudices and restrictions of a pre-industrial society. That the spread of capitalism in the South was hampered by racial discrimination, and in particular by the segregation laws, was amply illustrated by the experiences of the war. After 1945 the Federal authorities, in the overall interests of the American capitalist class, acted to limit segregation.

### **Desegregation**

In the armed forces, segregation was abolished in 1948, which allowed black American workers to join the same units as whites, to become officers commanding whites and to die alongside whites in the wars of their ruling class - as they did in Korea and Vietnam. In 1954 there was a more significant and far-reaching decision, when Chief Justice Warren ruled that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” and therefore unconstitutional and that desegregation of all schools and colleges must proceed “with all deliberate speed”. The southern segregationists realised the implications of this and how fatal it would be to their position as oppressors. Their first tactic was to delay implementation of the ruling, which was resisted by some states by a series of ingenious constitutional arguments which in turn were defeated by equally ingenious responses from the courts. In the end the success of the ruling rested on two things: the existence of a black person, or group of black people, courageous and persistent enough to claim this new constitutional right in the face of determined resistance and intimidation; and the willingness of the Federal authorities to enforce the ruling, by protecting those people, above the heads of the state politicians. In places like Little Rock, Arkansas and Oxford, Missouri, the people came forward to take their place in the schools and colleges. The government sent federal agents and the National Guard to ensure that the schools were desegregated and, amid scenes of mob hysteria and violence, the ruling was enforced. The effect has been lasting.

An important measure was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, at first proposed by President Kennedy and then pushed through by Lyndon Johnson with the combination of wheedling and arm-twisting in which he excelled. The Act was aimed against private discrimination, whereas all previous measures had been limited to discrimination in public. The Federal Government could prosecute local governments which discriminated, and deny them federal funds. It forbade the exclusion of blacks from schools, restaurants, hotels, sports facilities. The Act also proved difficult to implement against entrenched racial bigotry. But in the end modern industrial capitalism cannot settle with slavery nor with the prejudice which goes with it. It is a long process but the face of colour prejudice in the United States has changed and is continuing to change.

During the 1960s the blacks began a campaign of physically asserting their right to use public facilities equally with whites. They sat in the seats customarily reserved for whites in buses, they insisted on using, and sometimes staging sit-ins at, snack-bars, restaurants and lunch counters. They boycotted some services, as they had boycotted the buses in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954. In 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama - where the governor, George Wallace, was a typically populist, racist political manipulator - they opened a wide campaign to desegregate snack bars, jobs, stores and churches. {Southern racists had their own special interpretation of the theory that we are all god's children.} In 1963 there was a gigantic march on Washington DC to demand civil rights for blacks; 200,000 people were there at the end of the demonstration.

Perhaps more significant than these activities was the voter registration drive organised during the 1960s by the civil rights movement. At the time blacks were still denied the vote, by

intimidation or by an obstacle course of impossible severity. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson (who had not always been in favour of racial equality) listed a few of the artifices which were used: the black would be told that it was the wrong day to register, or too late in the day, or that the registrar was temporarily absent. Any black who was allowed to apply would have their application refused because they had not spelled out their second name, or had abbreviated a word. Sometimes a test would be enforced - perhaps to recite, word perfect, the American Constitution - with the registrar the sole judge of success or failure. No such obstacles were put in the way of white applicants. The voter registration drive, which began in Selma, Alabama in 1965, required a great deal of courage and persistence in face of the fiercest hostility, and several civil rights workers were murdered. This was a crucial issue to white domination; in Alabama, for example, blacks made up 40 per cent of the population and were potentially a powerful voting lobby which any hopeful politician would need to assuage. The effect of the registration drive was quickly apparent. In the 1964 presidential election the Republican candidate, Barry Goldwater, carried only those states where less than 45 per cent of eligible blacks were registered to vote. The other states were won by Lyndon Johnson, who was pledged to push on with a civil rights programme. In the elections of 1976, 46 per cent of southern blacks went to the polls, compared to 57 per cent of southern whites. Blacks now number some 26 million in the United States - about 12 per cent of the population. Once they had established the right to vote, blacks began to be elected to political office; by 1978 more than 2,200 held elective office in the South and there were black mayors even in Alabama and New Orleans. The Democratic Party no longer dominates southern politics; Republican candidates are often elected there.

### **Equality as Wage Slaves**

The fact that this had been achieved in the teeth of fierce opposition, coupled with the realisation that the loosening of segregation did little to ease the blacks' burden of poverty (the unemployment rate for blacks is about twice that for whites) has persuaded many blacks that integration is not the answer. In frustration and disillusionment black workers set up their own, exclusive organisations such as the Black Panthers and the Black Muslims, signalling also their disenchantment with the tactic of non-violence. The result has been a series of large scale riots in inner city areas, where poverty for whites as well as blacks is especially harsh. It is in these areas that the new flashpoints of racial tension are to be found; industrial, urbanised capitalism has added its own bilious flavour to racial prejudice. The black workers' anger and frustration is understandable but misguided. The capitalist system must condemn its workers to repression, impoverishment and an alienated existence. This is not confined to workers of any colour; moves towards racial "equality" have eased some of the American blacks' burdens but have left untouched their status as workers - degraded, exploited, harassed, oppressed.

In that way "emancipation" and the triumph of "civil rights" have clarified a number of issues for the American black. They have shown that workers everywhere are subject to the same problems whatever their skin colour or "race". In other words, all workers have a unity of interests against the interests of the capitalist class. Although the process has been hampered by the blacks' historical background, a black capitalist class is now emerging in America. There are "black" banks and money lending firms with assets which in 1980 totalled over \$2,000 million. On 17 June 1974 *Time* magazine profiled a black family living in a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama, in which the husband was "lawyer, businessman, politician" with a Cadillac and a Buick garaged at their ranch home. In 1980 Herman J. Russell, a black, was president and chairman of the board of a group whose annual sales then exceeded \$32 million. One result of this is to set in motion a reverse migratory trend, as blacks return to the South where business prospects are more promising. Another is in its effect on black people's unity, which is now anything but solid on social, economic and political issues - the same story as for white workers.

Black capitalists are ready to exploit all workers, whatever their skin colour. Unfortunately neither black nor white workers have yet seen the need to act in conscious unity to solve their problems by abolishing capitalism, and only when they do so will they be truly in touch with the possibility of their own emancipation.

## CHAPTER 5: RACISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

**I**n the Socialist Party's pamphlet *The Racial Problem*, which was published in November 1947, the section dealing with race prejudice in South Africa closed with these words:

The logical end of the road which the South African white worker is treading can only be bloody violence and destruction. No group can permanently hold down another many times more numerous than itself, and sooner or later the working class, particularly the white section, will have to face up to the situation and make their decision.

We cannot claim that this statement (which could equally have been applied to the issue of race prejudice and rising nationalism in several other African countries) was particularly perceptive or original. Even in those days, before the National Party came to power with the policy of overt racism and apartheid, the future of South Africa was frighteningly predictable to all but the most bigoted or blinkered. It is a classic case of racism which, in the face of mounting opposition and pressure from a developing industrial capitalism, has retreated only slowly, putting up a stubborn rearguard action. This clash, in essence between the needs of an industrial society and the restrictions imposed by a pre-industrial ideology, has indeed been expressed in bloody violence, destruction and atrocities. The working class, particularly the whites, have had to face reality and accept concessions which go against their bigotry. The end result is as inevitable as anything can be; apartheid will die, South Africa will become another developing African capitalist state (perhaps one of the more powerful and influential) where the ruling class is predominantly black.

### **Apartheid: How It Works**

Whites make up only 20 percent of the population of South Africa; there are a little over four million of them. There are about one million Asians, mainly Indians, about 2.25million Coloureds (mixed race) and over 18 million black Africans or Bantus. Nevertheless the European minority have for a long time controlled the economic and political structure of the country - in contrast to many of the other examples of racism we have considered which involve the repression of a minority by the majority. At a time when countries like the United States were moving towards dismantling their official racism, South Africa was energetically putting together its system of apartheid. This also happened in some other African states, for example Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), but South Africa's system of discrimination has proved the most durable of them all. The blacks have been confined to supplying abundant and cheap labour under the control of, and to the vast benefit of, the whites. This system was deliberately erected and systematically kept in being; the first laws denying Africans any legal right to land ownership were passed in the 19th century and were followed by a series of Acts which restricted their freedom to travel, to hold skilled jobs and to organise in unions and political parties and denied them the right to vote. The National Party government which was elected in 1948 rearranged these laws into one coherent code under the general name of apartheid - or separate development - which attempted to segregate the races with the eventual object of their living in separate, clearly defined, parts of the country. This policy was set out in 1979 when the National Party government laid before the parliament a national constitution which, typically, set a divine seal on its theories:

IN HUMBLE SUBMISSION to Almighty God, Who controls the destinies of nations and the history of people . . . We DECLARE that whereas we ARE CONSCIOUS of our responsibility towards God and man; BELIEVE that the black nations of the

Republic should each be given separate freedom in the land allotted to them for the exercise of the political aspirations of all the members of those nations

By "separate freedom" this preamble means the establishment of the Bantustans, which are essential to the ultimate object of apartheid. The Bantustans - also known, ironically, as Homelands - are intended to confine the Africans to some 13 per cent of the land, normally the least fertile, located in scattered units on the borders of the industrialised areas. The rest of the land - 87 per cent - is allocated to the whites. There is very little for the Africans to go to the Bantustans for, so the South African government has enforced their transfer and has also foisted on the areas the status of "independence". Outside the Bantustans, it is intended that blacks may live in the "Prescribed Areas" - those allocated to the whites - only under strict control, in other words if they are economically productive, or to put it another way, if they are contributing to the privileged standing of the whites. Anyone who does not come into this category is forcibly confined to the Bantustans. This has two noticeable effects: it means that the stable population of the Bantustans consists mainly of the old and the sick or of mothers and their children; it also means that the productive blacks are turned into a migrant labour force, existing in bleak misery in places where they can most readily meet the demand for their labour and supporting as best they can their families in the "Homeland".

The life-style of most whites is far superior. They hold the highest paid jobs, many live in large houses with swimming pools, televisions, freezers and the like. They own cars, their children go to the best schools, they have access to all the best in services like hospitals. They are able to employ blacks as servants. In contrast, the blacks have suffered extremes of deprivation. In mid 1985 almost a quarter of the black labour force was unemployed. A United Nations publication suggested that infant mortality for black children is 25 times that for whites. Many of the whites emigrated to South Africa to take jobs which in their country of origin would have yielded them a life-style a lot less luxurious; perhaps correctly, they see their privileges as dependent on a rigid control and repression of the blacks. Such people are, therefore, among the most ardent supporters of apartheid and will condone all manner of inhuman excesses in that cause.

Inevitably, the policies of the South African government need to be enforced through restrictions on the residence and movements of black people and essential to this are the infamous Pass Laws. These require every African over the age of 16 to carry a pass which indicates whether the holder is authorised to be in a prescribed white area as either a work seeker or an employee or because they have lived in the area continuously since birth. If a black person without this type of authorisation is found in a "prescribed area" they are arrested (during the most recent year - 1982 - for which records are available, some 200,000 such arrests were made) and are liable, apart from other penalties, to be deported to their "Homeland".

It would not be possible for all of this to exist without a powerful security system and police force. The South African government has dictatorial powers of arrest and detention without trial and the courts there are not averse to handing out savage sentences. A person whose activities are embarrassing to the government can be banned from taking part in political activity or even from engaging in discussion with more than one other person at a time. The South African police are not famous for any reticence in using these powers. They often respond to protest demonstrations with a frenzied savagery and their interrogating officers are notorious for torturing suspects and for the sudden death of people under their detention through "jumping out of a window" or expiring unexpectedly through "natural causes".

Finally, all this horror has been kept in operation by the fact that, in spite of their lower numbers, the whites have been able to keep political control in their hands. The blacks have

no effective voice in national government; they can only vote for members of their "Homeland" administrations while the Coloureds and Indians can elect representatives to the "tri-racial" parliament. These recent concessions are cosmetic and meaningless for at the very most they concede some say in the affairs of only a small and insignificant segment of the country while the whites control, and live off, the rest.

The racism of South Africa has sometimes been defended on the grounds that it at least enables the blacks to know where they stand. Their status and their "rights" - such as they are - are set down in laws and they know that if they stray outside the law they risk repercussions. There can be no argument about the fact that an attempt has been made to compose such laws but this brings us up against the fact that a legally defined racism must rely on a sound, consistent definition of race. In this the South African government has been no more successful than the others who have tried to compose such a definition and, of course, unless they can compose it the basis of apartheid is exposed as unscientific nonsense. The Population Registration Act of 1950 was the original main instrument for classifying the South African population in four main groups - Bantu, Coloured, Asiatic and White. The Act's definition of a white person is someone who in appearance is obviously white or who is generally accepted as white; but it excluded any person who, although in appearance obviously white, is generally accepted as coloured. This obviously unsatisfactory definition, under which a person can be white and coloured at the same time, caused a great deal of confusion. The South African government, which had to take its own nonsense seriously, set up a racial classification authority to decide on a person's race, which at least provided a lot of work for lawyers to argue the nuances of racist madness in "borderline" cases. Sometimes reality has had to be conveniently reshaped to fit in with the definitions; Japanese people have been known to bleach their skin and a child of white parents who in appearance was coloured was reclassified as coloured which was, to put it mildly, confusing and distressing for the family.

### **Apartheid: How It Developed**

The background to apartheid lies in the 17th century. In 1652, the first Europeans - the Dutch - arrived at the Cape to set up a station to service ships of the Dutch East India Company on their voyages to and from the Far East. At the time the place was inhabited by Hottentot herdspeople, and bush people who lived by hunting and gathering. The first distinctions between the settlers and the natives were based on religious grounds, the Dutch being ardent Christians who regarded the natives as heathens (the term Kaffir, which now has such derogatory implications, originally meant non-believer). In 1700 slaves were introduced from West and East Africa, Madagascar, India, Ceylon and Malaysia. The Dutch interbred often with the Hottentots and the slaves, which resulted in the "half-caste" group known as the Cape Coloureds. Over the next 150 years a pattern of racial discrimination, based on white supremacy, began to emerge. As they developed sheep and cattle farming the settlers moved away from the coastal areas in search of more fertile grazing and came into conflict with Bantu tribes from the North.

In 1806 the British came into control of the Cape and attempted to introduce radical changes in the social structure there. Apart from reorganising the governmental machine, the British freed the slaves and theoretically gave the Coloureds the same status as whites (by that time the Bush people had been almost eliminated). These measures, and the arrival of immigrants from Britain, persuaded the Dutch - the Boers - to move away from the Cape, in the exodus known as the Great Trek, and set up the two inland republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. As they moved, the Boers met up with the Bantus, who saw the incursion as a threat to their existence. There were many clashes, in which the Boers were usually victorious and the Bantus became reduced to servitude as labourers or as squatters on the land grabbed by the Boers. Both the Transvaal and the Orange Free State were later annexed by the British but were then given an "independent" status under British rule. In the 1860s the Indians

arrived, brought in to work as indentured labourers on the sugar plantations. Many of them, against the original intention, stayed on after the expiry of their time to become another segment in South Africa's racial make-up.

The situation might have remained like that for a long time, or changed only very slowly, had not diamonds and gold been discovered in the Rand in 1867 and 1884. Without its gold and diamonds South Africa might have become a sort of agrarian appendage to the rest of the continent. The new industries changed things dramatically, for South Africa was no longer just of strategic importance to the capitalist powers of Europe. The Rand demanded cheap labour - which meant black labour - and the growth of urban settlements near the mines. As the mines fell into the hands of big capitalists like Cecil Rhodes and Barney Barnett the small independent prospectors were rapidly reduced to the status of employees - the "poor whites" of the gold and diamond fields, who tried to soften the discomfort of their lowly position by ensuring that the higher paid jobs went to them rather than to the Africans and by refusing to be stripped to see if they were stealing diamonds. The blacks were confined to the low paid, unskilled jobs and this transference of the caste system of the farmlands into industry, and into the developing towns, brought a whole complex of problems which have disfigured South African society ever since and which have brought it to its present crisis. In 1890 a native miner could earn as much as 63s (£3.15) a month, which was reduced through the concerted efforts of the mining companies to 41s 6d (£2.09) a month. At the same time a white person, working as a junior mill hand in the mine could earn from £20-£25 a month and it was a general pattern that white workers (who, as we have said, were in any case usually in the more skilled or supervisory jobs) were ten times better paid than the blacks. The owners' attempts to force down black miners' wages led them to set up compounds where the natives were compelled to live and to enforce this by a system of "passports" which were the modern Pass Laws in embryo. Working conditions, especially for the blacks, were dreadful and extremely dangerous and the mining towns were ugly places of pitiless rapacity. The big capitalists prospered through ruthless trickery.

The introduction of capitalist production had a marked effect on the self-sufficient pastoral Boer communities. Many Boers, like the Africans they had themselves dispossessed, became landless squatters. In the Transvaal they mounted a stubborn resistance to the disintegration of their way of life, which in 1899 resulted in the Boer War, a classic imperialist conflict in which workers on both sides gave their lives to protect their masters' interests in the gold and diamond fields. When hostilities ended in 1902 the Boer leaders signed the Treaty of Vereeniging, which gave Crown Colony status to the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. After the first world war many of the landless Boers drifted into the towns where, unskilled and unaccustomed to the rigours of industrial wage slavery, they would have made a poor showing in competition for work with the Africans had not the government introduced various measures to discriminate in their favour. One of these was an employment colour bar, which effectively reserved the best for the whites. Between the world wars South African governments, without declaring a coherent long term policy on the issue, enacted a batch of legislation which attempted to protect the pre-industrial racist ideology of white dominance. Africans were forbidden to strike or join trade unions; a system of residential segregation was enforced through the Pass Laws; Africans were denied the vote. To some extent the South African capitalists were dissatisfied at what was {from the point of view of their profits) the wasteful and illogical practice of apartheid, but any protests from them were muted by their hopes for change in the future.

The election of the National Party government in 1948 marked a radical change, for what had previously been a somewhat haphazard collection of laws became coordinated into a powerful policy of segregation. The new government, with its unrealistic vision of an eternally white South Africa denuded of all blacks except those allowed the status of temporary sojourners to serve the whites, quickly passed a series of laws the titles of which speak for themselves

-Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, Native (Urban Areas) Consolidated Act, Population Registration Act, Group Areas Act and so on. The farmers were given substantial concessions, including tax allowances and fixed prices for their produce and the constituency boundaries were arranged so that a vote in a farming area was worth about 1.5 times one in a town. Inevitably these laws met opposition, which the government responded to with ever fiercer repression. Laws such as the Suppression of Communism Act and the Sabotage Act were wielded to stifle opposition. The government took powers of arbitrary detention and were not averse to massacre in the face of mass protest, as happened at Sharpeville in 1960, Soweto in 1976 and Uitenhage in 1985.

### **Apartheid Under Attack**

But of course the opposition has not been crushed. From outside South Africa there have been campaigns for boycotts and sanctions. One of the more successful has been the move to break sporting links; the denial of international class competition in sports like rugby football, cricket and athletics has been more than an irritant to those South Africans who regard the sports field as a place to express an aggressive, often male-oriented, nationalist arrogance. From outside there has also been support for an increasingly organised and militant guerrilla movement, which has engaged a large part of South Africa's military power. The strength of African protest has sometimes succeeded in making its townships almost ungovernable. Many hundreds of people, almost all of them black, have been killed over a short period of time and the government has been forced to reform some aspects of apartheid. Many of these changes are obviously cosmetic: the recruitment of Africans into the police; the encouragement of black small business people who might think they have a stake in the stability of South African society; the relaxation of strict apartheid in sport. In 1985 the laws prohibiting inter-racial sex and marriage were abolished. These reforms were not gifts from the South African government; they were prised from them and were conceded as an appeasement, designed to keep the basis of their racist policies intact. For example the concessions under which the different races can elect their own councils were in reality worthless, for the councils can only administer the apartheid system - they can do nothing to abolish or even modify it. One result of this is that Africans who serve as councillors and in the police are regarded as traitors and many of them have been horribly murdered.

Alongside the protests and the guerrilla warfare, pressure of a different kind has been exerted by industrial capitalists in South Africa. One of the most established and outspoken of these has been Harry Oppenheimer, head of the mining combine Anglo American Corporation. As early as May 1976, Oppenheimer set out his views clearly to the London Stock Exchange:

those of us who believe that private enterprise is the system best calculated to widen the areas of individual choice - to open up new opportunities and raise the standards of life - have to show very clearly that this private enterprise system is not something which bears the label "for whites only",

and he went on to say:

the migrant labour system becomes less and less appropriate from an economic point of view as well as, of course, from a social and moral point of view.

When Oppenheimer spoke about "new opportunities" and "raising standards of life" he was clearly referring to the interests of his class. The migrant labour system adequately suits a farming economy and to some extent even a mining industry but it cannot be applied efficiently in a modern industrial state which needs a settled, skilled labour force which can be hired and fired, or which will move "freely" from one place to another, to meet the demands of commodity production. This is recognised not only by the likes of Oppenheimer, for there are now rising Boer capitalists who are also becoming frustrated at the restrictions of

apartheid. During the 1970s South African industry changed from a labour intensive, low wage and low productivity economy to a capital intensive and high productivity one. This should also mean a higher wage economy - in other words higher wages for African industrial workers, which is incompatible with the assumptions of apartheid.

These combined pressures have brought the South African government up against the reality that is developing industrial capitalism cannot operate within the letters of a pre-industrial racism and that a minority cannot forever repress a majority. In July 1985 the South African government-financed Human Services Research Council reported that “classical apartheid” was a failure, urged a “broadening of the democratic base of the current power structure” and warned that “delays in addressing the issue could have catastrophic consequences”. Some reports indicate that the National Party leadership are themselves aware that apartheid is obsolete but they also know how difficult it is to persuade their followers of this. Various further reforms are being considered - a federal structure which would bring the “Homelands” back into the South African state, the abolition of the Pass Laws, the freeing of political prisoners. The government's dilemma is that they must offer reforms if white South Africa is to have any hope of survival; but the reforms themselves must add impetus to the blacks who now feel that they are close to wresting the political initiative from the whites.

The shift in National Party policy, away from their traditional constituency among farmers and white mining workers towards the urban working class – relatively well-off and more open to ideas of reform - left something of a political vacuum. Over recent years this has been filled by a number of parties which have split from the National Party, each adopting a more extreme and more assertive - and uncompromising - white racism. (The National Party was itself a creation of just such a split from the United Party, which it defeated in the 1948 election). In 1969 there was the Herstige (reconstituted) Nasionale Party; in 1982 the Conservative Party which is now the second largest opposition party after the Progressive Federal Party; in 1974 the Afrikaner Volkswag (People's Guard). On the fringes, but very much in evidence, is the Afrikaner Resistance Movement, a terrorist organisation some of whose members - including its leader, Eugene Terre Blanche - have appeared in court on charges of possessing arms and plotting assassination.

The significance of these organisations can be seen in the extent to which they have eaten into the National Party's electoral standing. In October 1985 the distribution of seats in the South Africa parliament was:

National Party .....	127
Progressive Federal Party .....	27
Conservative Party .....	18
New Republic Party .....	5
Herstige Nasionale Party .....	1

But more ominous for National Party leader Botha and his reforms was the projection into the next election of current by-election results, which give a total of 54 seats to the extremist opposition.

How seriously Botha took this was demonstrated in August 1985 when he was expected to make a speech outlining some major reforms of apartheid but in the event caved in to the pressure not to be seen to be giving in to influence from abroad. About a month before, a State of Emergency was declared under which it was an offence, amongst other things, to disclose the identity of anyone arrested under the regulations before official confirmation of the arrest; to make any statement calculated to subvert the government; to advise or incite anyone to stay away from work. The police powers of detention were extended and while in detention

nobody was allowed to sing or whistle or “be a nuisance”; the only book they were allowed to read was the bible or some other “holy book”.

Draconian measures were taken against the press, which gave the government full powers of censorship. Television crews were prevented from recording incidents which might reflect badly on the South African government, such as the way the police dealt with demonstrators.

The predictable response to this was an increase, not a lessening, in the violence of black protests, in particular against those blacks who were considered to be collaborating with the government. The use of the “necklace” - a tyre hung round the neck and set on fire - was the gruesome result in many cases. Violence between blacks was frequent. At the funeral of Nonyamezelo Mxenge, an anti-apartheid lawyer who was murdered in August 1985 (her husband was also murdered in 1981) the mourners clashed with members of the Zulu-dominated Inkatha, who were suspected of being in collusion with the police to attack the demonstrators. The violence spread over onto local Indian shopkeepers until, after four days of fighting, over 50 people were killed and some 2000 Indians had fled from their homes. There is reason to believe that the police colluded in the activities of the group known as the “vigilantes” - who might be called the defenders of the “black establishment”, One of the more horrific actions of the “vigilantes” was their clearance of the squatters camp at Crossroads in early 1986, when 32 people were killed and over 20,000 made homeless. Opposed to the “vigilantes” were the “comrades”, in general younger and more militant and feeling they had nothing to lose in the struggle against apartheid. The ruthlessness of the “comrades” - they were responsible for the use of the “necklace” against police informers and collaborators - rivalled that of the “vigilantes”.

Outside South Africa the state of emergency and the increase in repression resulted in a campaign for economic sanctions. This was especially favoured by the left wing, where “Sanctions Now” became a popular slogan. The idea was that cutting off South Africa economically from the rest of world capitalism could persuade the government there to change course. The history of similar campaigns against other countries in the past does not encourage such a theory; in fact, as happened in the case of Rhodesia, the very countries which are supposed to be imposing the sanctions are often surreptitiously active in circumventing them.

South Africa was also subjected to a certain amount of what might be called diplomatic pressure. The French withdrew their ambassador and the Americans their envoy – which at most could have made the normal intercourse between the two countries just a little less efficient. The advocate of sanctions claimed major victories when some big international companies announced that they were pulling out of South Africa. Sixty American companies took this line, the most famous being Eastman Kodak in Britain, the loudest applause was for the announcement that Barclays Bank, so long the target of demonstrators and boycotters planned to withdraw. However, these were no precipitate, morally-inspired decisions; in both cases the companies had protected their shareholders’ interests by a carefully planned withdrawal. The chairman of Kodak said they had taken a “business decision” to pull out for apartheid was responsible for South Africa’s economic “under performance”. Barclays chairman said the bank’s reasons for selling up (not closing down) were “basically commercial”.

Apartheid then has been very much on the defensive. The South African capitalists have had to recognise black trade unions; the migrant labour system can hardly avoid breaking down; separate development cannot operate efficiently in an industrialised society; political rights for all South Africans must follow all these other changes. And what then? The people of South Africa will have passed abruptly into a powerful capitalist economic and social order. They

will have thrown off the shackles of apartheid to become “free” wage workers. The chains they will then have will be those of wage slaves all over the world.

## CHAPTER 6: RACISM IN BRITAIN

When we discuss racism in Britain today we almost always mean racial prejudice based on skin colour. Other types of discrimination exist - for example against the Irish and the Jews -but the brunt of the racists' disfavour is now felt by black people. It is rare now to hear Irish immigrants blamed for unemployment or for creating slums; very rare to hear of Jews accused of importing and spreading diseases, of imposing an alien culture on a neighbourhood or of wangling themselves priority in social and medical services. These types of accusation are now levelled against black immigrants and it must first be said that they spring from the concrete reality of people's everyday lives. There are slums and other inadequate housing; there is unemployment; people are suffering from avoidable illnesses; personal and social stress disfigure human life; for the majority there is insufficient access to social and medical services. The experience of these problems breeds insecurity and fear and promotes a dangerous cynicism about the future. But this does not justify the racist case that social problems are caused by immigrant groups, for the problems existed a long time before the immigrants arrived, whether they are Irish or Jews or West Indian or whatever, and they also existed in the places the immigrants came from. This can be explained in only one way. The problems are inseparable from the present social system and will persist as long as that system lasts. The one thing which does change is the identity of the group which is condemned as the supposed cause of the problem.

Over the past 150 years or so, immigrant groups coming into Britain have included Irish, Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, Cypriots, Italians, Spaniards, Greeks, Maltese and Chinese. Those who came from the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent during the 1950s and from the decolonised African states in the 1960s are the latest in a long historical line. Irish immigration peaked during the years 1850-1880 and, as a group distinguishable through their accent and cultural habits, they were quickly confronted with a hostility which was sharpened by the competition they represented in the employment market. This hostility was justified by a spurious concept of the Irish which, popular in Victorian times, has by no means died out today. They were regarded as childish, ignorant, unstable, lazy, dirty and savage.

During the late 19th century the tendency was for the role of principal scapegoats to be thrust on the Jews, assisted by opportunists who hoped to make racism a political issue. In 1892 the Conservative Party was planning to introduce controls on Jewish immigration and in 1902 the British Brothers' League (BBL), the forerunner of many an odious racist movement, was formed. It was BBL theory that Jewish immigrants were overcrowding parts of the cities, forcing up rents and rates which in turn caused further overcrowding. In fact the areas, such as the East End of London, where the Jews tended to concentrate had long suffered from overcrowding and general decay. The Jews were also blamed for the high unemployment in the docks, when this was due to a cyclical economic depression; in the tailoring trade, although this was caused by a combination of more internal competition and the introduction of machinery; and in the shoemaking industry which in any case was in decline.

The reality is that large scale immigration is attracted to areas of industrial expansion or to places where a multiplicity of small productive units promises a lot of jobs, albeit with poor pay and conditions. Industrial expansion aggravates the existing pressure on housing and other resources. Most industrial towns have an area where immigrant workers, of whatever origin, have tended to congregate and set up communities, which then attract more immigrants. The impermanence of these inhabitants often ensures that the areas will remain in a condition of slumdom, and other decline comes as changes in housing patterns put a blight on older properties. In *The Alien Invasion* (1892), W.H.Wilkins complained that immigrants "add in a manner altogether out of proportion to their numbers to the miseries of our poor in the

congested districts of our great towns, to which they invariably drift". The point is that Wilkins could not accuse the immigrants of creating poverty, or its miseries, or urban congestion - only of aggravating problems which already existed.

### **Black Immigration**

In their early days, the black immigrants in Britain were met, along with other groups, with explicit and overt discrimination. Advertisements for flats and rooms, for example, often stated "No coloured or Irish" and similar restrictions were placed on vacant jobs. In 1960, to give just two of many instances, six black women were forced out of their jobs in a West Bromwich factory because their white workmates threatened to strike if they were allowed to continue. A couple of months later the dustmen in Westminster objected to the promotion of a Jamaican to driver/dustman on the grounds that such jobs should be reserved for whites. The passing of the various Immigration Acts, which effectively limited entry to Britain on racial grounds, was followed by the Race Relations Acts in 1965, 1968 and 1976. These latter laws theoretically prohibited discrimination on grounds of race against people who were legally in this country and the Commission for Racial Equality was set up to oversee their application. But they were at best timid measures, sops to soften the blows of the Immigration Acts and in any case took no account of the fact that ideas cannot be changed just by passing legislation. One effect of the Race Relations Act was to stimulate resentment against immigrants, who were now seen as a favoured group protected from legitimate criticism. Another effect was simply to drive discrimination under cover. Property owners no longer publicly state that black tenants are not welcome but simply do not accept them. It is the same with employment; although it is illegal to advertise that blacks need not apply for certain jobs there have been numerous examples of white applicants being accepted after a black applicant has been told that the post had been filled. The end result is that black people are still more likely to be unemployed than white people, more likely to be in lower paid jobs and lower standard accommodation.

Whatever the professed intentions of the Race Relations Acts, they have not prevented organisations like the National Front and British Movement, and others even more sinister, from stepping up their racist campaigns. Nor have they protected black people from persistent, serious violence. In areas where many blacks live, like the East End of London, racist harassment and assaults are now commonplace. Some have involved determined acts of arson causing a number of deaths. In one incident an Asian mother and her three small children perished. Figures for racial attacks in the Metropolitan police area increased from 1,280 in 1983 to about 1,450 in 1984. The police tend to minimise the significance of the figures by pointing out that they originate in the victims' own perception of the motive for the attacks; they do not confirm them all as racial. On the other hand the black community in places like Tower Hamlets, where racial harassment is rife, insist that victims are discouraged from reporting attacks precisely because they fear the police will not take them seriously. What cannot be doubted is that racially motivated violence is flourishing; the Commission for Racial Equality has received reports to this effect from Community Relations Councils all over the country and a Home Office study has concluded that, on the basis of incidents reported to the police. Asians are 50 times more likely than whites to be physically attacked.

Black people have reacted to this in self-defence, responding to violence from whites with their own. Their sense of alienation and exclusion from even the accepted norms of working class poverty has bred a restlessness among inner city blacks which can all too easily be stimulated into a riot. Brixton, St. Pauls, Handsworth and Tottenham are recent examples of this and there is no reason to suppose that there will not be more. Racists like Enoch Powell find some comfort in the riots, claiming that they justify warnings about the tensions caused by introducing an "alien" culture into Britain. In fact the riots are no more than another

example (and working class history is full of them) of workers exploding, volcano-like, against the intolerable frustrations of repression, impoverishment and insecurity.

### **Racist Complaints**

One of the first elements in the racist case against immigration is that it causes overcrowding in an already over-populated country. This complaint, however, never seems to be made against white immigrants, who for some reason are not judged guilty of increasing “overcrowding”. It should be remembered that the first large scale black immigration, from the West Indies, India and Pakistan, was actively encouraged to remedy a shortage of labour in public transport, the National Health Service (including the period when Enoch Powell was Minister of Health) and the like. Since the early 1950s the population of this country has increased relatively slowly, from about 50 million to about 56 million in 1985. This has happened in spite of immigration, because in almost every year more people leave the country than are allowed in. About 4.5 per cent of the population of England and Wales live in homes whose “head” was born in the New Commonwealth; if all these people were black it would amount to a total of something like 2.5 million. This hardly represents a threat of “overcrowding” or, in Margaret Thatcher's words, “swamping”. If there is a problem of absorption, it is not in the fact of black immigration but in the prejudiced reaction of the racists.

Another point of racist attack is that black immigrants cause unemployment among white workers through a willingness to do “white” jobs for less pay. The National Front publication *Spearhead* of April 1970 alleged that:

the Department of Employment has been extending special treatment to unemployed coloured immigrants; that is, going to extra pains to secure jobs for immigrants that would otherwise go to Britons.

But this theory simply does not fit the facts. During the 1920s and 1930s, when the average annual rate of unemployment was almost 13 per cent, there were virtually no black migrants to this country. Between 1948 and 1962, when the first Commonwealth Immigration Act was passed, unemployment averaged 1.7 per cent a year. Whatever arguments were advanced to support the 1962 Act they could not have included the smear that immigrants caused unemployment. In fact unemployment has risen as more stringent restrictions on immigration have been imposed; as immigration has fallen the jobless figures have risen. In 1984, an all-time low of 51,000 people were allowed entry to the United Kingdom for settlement, of which nearly 25,000 were from Africa and Asia, while unemployment reached up to the 3.5 million mark. The fact is that unemployment rises and falls with the level of economic activity within capitalism - in accordance with the cycle of boom and slump. This process is endemic in capitalism and it operates all the time and all over the world, regardless of any migratory workers. Rather than being the cause of unemployment, migrants are usually on the move to escape from it.

It is over housing that the prejudices of racism operate most blatantly and fearsomely; the arson attacks we mentioned earlier were accompanied with the daubing of slogans against rehousing black workers. When the *National Front News* announced in October 1976 that “thousands” of Asian immigrants were being given “immediate priority” over homeless British families, it was echoing a prejudice which is pretty popular. Black people are also supposed to take over entire neighbourhoods and then, with exotic cooking, deafening music and unhygienic habits, terrorise the remaining few whites, who always seem to be elderly widows whose frailty is accentuated through regular muggings. What actually happens is that immigrants in the mass usually gravitate towards the more run-down parts of a town and, as they become able to move out, they come into competition with other workers for housing.

This happens with any large scale population movement, regardless of the colour of the migrants. Even more, it has nothing to do with immigration as such; basically it is an effect of the competition among impoverished workers for scarce resources, which is an unavoidable part of working class life. It is not true that a large influx of black workers brings disturbance and decay. In the case of Southall, in West London, the immigrants went some way to revitalising a place which seemed doomed. Apart from their effect on the economy of the place, the Asians established in Southall a comprehensive network of community involvement and support. It was only racist bigots who objected to such a rise in social morale.

It will also be useful to consider two other examples of the effect of black settlement. In the 1960s a great many people from India and Pakistan were encouraged to make their way to Bradford where the textile industry, at a time of labour shortages, was looking for low-wage workers. At first intending to be temporary sojourners, the immigrants had little choice but to move into areas of dilapidated housing which were being abandoned by white workers. But whether they wanted to or not the immigrants were prevented from returning home by their low pay. They now make up about 50,000 of a total city population of 450,000 and they are overwhelmingly clustered in four of Bradford's wards, where in some places they represent two-thirds of the population. A prejudiced observer might see this as a premeditated take-over when in fact it is a typically stressful stage in capitalism's process of worker exploitation.

Willesden, in North West London, is another area which received a large influx of immigrants from the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent. This part of London sprouted as a typical dormitory suburb with the laying down of the railway in the 19th century and with the erection of a large estate of munitions factories during the first world war. It was, then, an area with a constant demand for labour, attracting immigrants who placed extra pressure on resources such as housing. The early arrivals were from Wales and Ireland - especially the latter - and during the 1950s the black workers came. In the Borough of Brent, which includes Willesden, nearly 54 per cent of all households are "headed" by people born overseas, mainly Asia, East Africa, the Caribbean and the Irish Republic.

Willesden is not an attractive place and its problems existed a long time before the first black immigrants set foot there. It has had what is officially admitted to be a housing problem for some 60 years; during the 1930s the local council reported that overcrowding was a substantial, persistent concern. Nowadays over half the rented properties in some parts of Willesden are overcrowded or lack what the census-takers regard as basic amenities. The economic down-turn of the 1970s has hit the nearby industrial estates on which the area depends. Between 1971 and 1973 about 6,000 jobs in manufacturing were lost in the Borough of Brent, most of them in Willesden; in 1985 unemployment in Brent had quadrupled over five years to 14 per cent of the workforce. The Borough is officially assessed as the eighth poorest in Britain and three of its wards as among the eight most deprived in London. The depth of poverty which typifies and disfigures Willesden cannot have been eased by the pressures of large scale immigration but it was not caused by it. The immigrants were enticed to the area by industries which needed to exploit their labour, and in the hope that they would find employers to exploit them. Similar poverty - slums, unemployment, urban decay, emotional despair, cynicism - is experienced in many cities, such as Glasgow and Belfast, which have hardly any black immigrants. They are commonplace in life under capitalism.

Crime is another social malaise often laid at the door of the black immigrants. Black people, runs the prejudice, are heavily involved in prostitution, drug trafficking, and the style of street robbery known as "mugging". First of all it must be stated that there are all manner of pitfalls for anyone trying to draw conclusions, and formulate policies, based on criminal statistics. It is not even possible to judge the rise and fall of the incidence of particular offences from official figures, let alone arrive at any picture of social change from them. The reason is that

criminal statistics stem from many variable and dubious factors such as the victims' perceptions of what happened to them, their response to it (masses of crime never gets reported to the police), the current official definition of an offence, the decision of the police as to which category an offence belongs in and whether to proceed with a prosecution and so on. It might just be possible, after great difficulty, to establish that there has been a genuine increase in certain types of offences in areas which have a high proportion of black immigrants, as the police once said was the case with street offences in Brixton. Even so, this would not establish an essential link between crime and skin colour. As we have seen, immigrants gravitate towards the very places where depressed conditions breed crime. Once there, they are subjected to a bigotry which positively discourages them from identifying with the concept of an orderly, disciplined capitalist society. Deviance from the compliant norm - delinquency - is inevitable, whatever the skin colour of the deviants. Glasgow, as stated before, is a city with few black immigrants but it has long established problems of alcoholism, gang warfare and extreme violence. All the evidence indicates that crime is not racially or genetically linked but is caused by social factors, a response to repressive and hopeless conditions.

Finally, we come to the argument that black immigrants impose an unacceptable culture on Britain. Leaving aside the fact that British imperialist expansion of the 18th and 19th centuries was one of history's greatest examples of the imposition of an "alien" culture, we must question the nature of this "culture" which is under threat and whether it is worth defending. To begin with, is there such a thing as a "British way of life"? Surely how people live is determined not by their nationality but by which class they belong to? Capitalists live comfortably on the proceeds of the surplus value contributed through the labour of the workers. On the other side of the class line, workers survive at varying levels of poverty and restriction. How workers live - their "way of life" - is made up of their homes, clothes, food, recreation, education, prospects, ambitions and all of these are conditioned by their social relationships as members of the working class. This also applies to workers abroad, so that any immigrants to this country bring with them the same basic elements of "culture" as

British workers are already experiencing. Of course there may be incidental differences in things like food, clothes and language but these are modified and absorbed, or accepted, without any evident social damage. Second and third generation black immigrants are growing up in identical terms to the children of "native" British people, whose "culture" is, in any case, itself the outcome of centuries of mingling and cross-fertilisation.

We must not forget either that British workers have been among the world's prime migrants. Very often they have left this country under the illusion that once they get abroad they will not suffer poverty and stress. But poverty and stress are common to workers everywhere. Clearly, the need is for international working class unity to abolish the cause of the problem.

## CHAPTER 7: THE MIGRATION OF WORKERS

In previous chapters we have considered some racist theories. All of these assert that they are dealing with an urgent human problem, that the existence of different groups of people is a threat to the group which the racist defines as superior. But of course this threat operates only when there is the potential of racial mixing, so that the racist solution has to be one aimed at separation. In its most extreme form, this solution is one of genocide, such as the Nazis attempted. In less extreme forms it is a policy like the apartheid of South Africa, or the repatriation advocated by British organisations like the National Front. These less extreme policies are based on the theory that human beings should not stray from their place of origin and that those who do stray should be sent back as quickly as possible. The argument is that it is perfectly efficient and desirable for people to stay forever in closed-off communities, never mixing for fear of modifying each other's cultural habits, never inter-breeding because this would lead to the devastation of racial purity.

There is absolutely no basis in reality for these ideas. There are very few examples of groups of people being able - or being forced - to carry on a separate, exclusive existence. Human beings have needed to be migrants, under the pressure of whichever social system they lived in. In primitive society, when life was precarious, humans had to move around to find new sources of food. Slavery introduced another style of migration, albeit one of brutally enforced transport of humans. Other episodes of enforced migration have happened through acts of conquest or of expulsion, as with the Jews and the Huguenots, or as attempts to escape from persecution or famine. If human history can be seen as a chain reaction, sparked off by changes in the mode of production, human migration has its place as one of the energising impulses. Capitalist society in particular provides not only the means of rapid and world-wide migration, but also a pressure to migrate, by its very nature as a social system. To attempt to stand apart from this is to stagnate; indeed the consequence of separation and exclusiveness has been backwardness. On the other hand, as we have seen, the evidence is that social and cultural mixing is progressive and advantageous for human beings.

The rise of capitalism, displacing the social relationships of feudalism - a society of small agricultural communities producing for themselves and a surplus for barons, priests and warriors - has provided the most powerful impulse yet to migration. It would be true to say that the capitalist industrialisation of the 19th century could not have happened but for migration - the free movement of reserves of labour power. Economic growth was fertilised by this labour, for it offered the prospect of lower wages and a consequent downward influence on wages in general, with an upward pressure on rates of profit. To begin with, the reserves of labour power were to be found in rural areas, in the evicted peasants and the artisans whose living had been undermined by the new production methods. These desperate people poured into the expanding towns to join the proletariat who were already experiencing life under capitalist terms of employment. As the more local reserves of labour were exhausted the employers turned their attention further afield - to abroad. Over four centuries there was a massive movement of peoples, concentrated especially in the century from 1830 to 1930, consisting mainly of emigration from Europe to America. During that time over 60 million people left Europe, 40 million of them to settle permanently in North and South America, Australia and New Zealand. This was not entirely a movement of people from a primitive area to an advanced one, for up to 1860 about two-thirds of emigrants originated in Britain, then the most industrially advanced country. Throughout the 19th century European people migrated both overseas and within Europe, in response to the demands of capitalist industrialisation. During the decades before the First World War hundreds of thousands from Italy, Spain and Poland went to the Americas but large numbers also went to Germany, France

and Switzerland. In the case of Italy, nearly half the 15 million who left between 1876 and 1920 migrated to other European countries. Of course it was not accidental that this all happened at a time of a rapid advance in productive techniques creating the demand for migratory labour and the means of transport to enable that demand to be satisfied. But however it happened and in whichever direction, it is clear that human migration is an established fact of life. Even if it were useful to do so, it cannot now be undone; it cannot be unravelled so as to return everyone to their place of origin (even supposing this could be determined).

### Migrant flows<sup>1</sup>: by age and citizenship

<i>United Kingdom</i>							Thousands
	British	Old Commonwealth	Indian sub-continent <sup>3</sup>	New Commonwealth and Pakistan (NCWP) Other	European Community <sup>2</sup>	Other foreign	All countries
<b>Into the United Kingdom</b>							
<b>1971</b>	92	17	18	18	13	41	200
<b>1976</b>	87	16	21	21	12	34	191
<b>1981</b>	60	11	21	14	10	36	153
<b>1984</b>	95	15	18	17	15	41	201
<b>1985</b>	110	19	17	18	20	48	232
<b>Out of the United Kingdom</b>							
<b>1971</b>	171	13	6	11	14	26	240
<b>1976</b>	137	15	4	10	15	29	210
<b>1981</b>	164	13	2	14	13	26	233
<b>1984</b>	103	10	4	12	8	28	164
<b>1985</b>	108	12	3	12	10	28	174

Nevertheless repatriation still finds support among people who observe some of the effects of immigration and draw incorrect conclusions. For example workers who depend on state benefits have been known to vent their insecurity and frustration on black workers who are forced to submit themselves to the same humiliating process. The same thing can happen when workers have to wait for treatment at a hospital, or when they go to plead their case at the Housing Department of their local council. At such times, they have an understandable resentment against all competition for scarce resources. When the competition can be distinguished by some physical characteristic such as skin colour, the resentment may lead to false ideas about the characteristics of black workers which compel them to be indolent and demanding, to the cost of white native workers who should have first pick of "our" hospitals, "our" housing, "our" social security benefits. The development of this prejudice is that we need only send the black workers back to their country of origin for all to be well - for there to be plenty of medical attention, housing and money for everyone. In fact, bad housing, difficulty of access to medical treatment, lack of money are typical - and chronic - working

<sup>1</sup> Excludes the movement between United Kingdom and Irish Republic.

<sup>2</sup> Excludes Denmark and Irish Republic in 1971 and Greece in 1971 and 1976.

<sup>3</sup> India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

*Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.*

class problems. They are a consequence of the essential poverty of all people who depend on being employed in order to live. There was never a time when life was easy for workers. Immigrants did not create the problems; they came here in the false hope of avoiding them but found they had to share them. And if we look at an example of large scale migration of white people, we shall see that it produced the same kind of effects - and the same kinds of responses - as are now attributed, on grounds of racial character, to black workers.

### **Irish Migration**

Britain was involved in a considerable intake of migrants during the 19th century. The reserves of labour from the rural areas were quickly exhausted by the Industrial Revolution and the employers had to turn their attention to Ireland, where economic conditions had created a "surplus" of labour power. Domestic Irish industry had been damaged by the 1800 Act of Union. In addition there was a pyramidal system of ownership in agriculture under which less than one per cent of the total population held 80 per cent of the cultivated land and below them the leaseholders, the middlemen and finally the tenants. This ensured that life for those at the base of the pyramid was precarious in the extreme. The tenants themselves were divided into three groups; none of them were secure and those at the bottom - the labourers - were condemned to live in desperate squalor. To make matters worse, the repeal of the Corn Laws, which was to the benefit of the industrial capitalists of England, encouraged the Irish landlords to turn their estates to grazing, which meant enclosing the land and evicting the tenants. For some time, there had been a steady trickle of emigrants trying to escape from those conditions - by the year 1770 about 9000 were leaving Ireland each year for America - and the famines of 1822, 1846 and 1847 were enough to turn this into a flood. During 1846-47 one million Irish people died of starvation. By 1851 there were 727,326 Irish in Britain, making up almost three per cent of the population of England and Wales and over seven per cent of the population of Scotland. The immigrants settled in the cities - Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow - and constituted a significant part of the labour force in the less skilled jobs in the textile and building trades.

The fact that the staple food of the Irish was potatoes enabled them to live more cheaply than English workers (in a normal season in Ireland an acre of potatoes was enough to feed six children and their parents for nine months of the year) and the resultant downward pressure on wages caused a great deal of resentment among English workers. Many employers were obliged to keep the two groups apart for fear of trouble between them. There were numerous riots and some pitched battles between the English and the Irish which could rage for several days. The lower wages of the Irish workers condemned them to the most fetid slums, which were worsened by poor public hygiene facilities in a cramped urban environment.

There was no happier story for those Irish who went further afield to America. The immigrant ships were notorious for their accommodation, with the passengers in some cases so packed in that it was necessary for some to die before they could all have a sleeping berth. Fever raged and rats swarmed in the steerage accommodation, shut in from the light and the air as it was. A medical officer at Grosse Isle, where the immigrant vessels were held in quarantine, saw from one "a stream of foul air issuing from the hatches as dense and as palpable as seen on a foggy day from a dung heap". These conditions, combined with a deficient diet (each immigrant passenger was allowed 7lbs. of provisions a week), were responsible for a terrible death rate; typical figures for voyages in the late 1840s were on the *Larch*, where 108 of 440 passengers died at sea, and on the *Virginian*, which lost 158 out of 476. Those who survived the crossing landed in a desperate plight: "spectre-like wretches", "cadaverous", "feeble"; the ships reached the end of their frightful journey with "not one really healthy person on board". Perhaps their experiences on the voyage prepared the immigrants for what was awaiting them on shore. Their predecessors, although not exactly welcomed to America, had at least been in comparatively good health and, as had happened in England, they had supplied much of the

physical muscle to cut the canals and lay down the railways and the roads. But the famine refugees were in no state to do such work; they had little choice but to make for the cities like Chicago, New York and Boston. Not a very attractive prospect to the employers, they rapidly settled into the most squalid of living conditions. To some extent their background as impoverished peasants had hardened them to such privations - which was to the advantage of speculative builders. Untrammelled by any laws about space or light or drainage or water supply, the builders covered any available ground - gardens, backyards, alleyways - with tumble-down shacks, which at times completely encased the original house. The houses themselves were partitioned into tiny cubicles and untold numbers of wretched Irish people were crammed into these spaces. Even worse were the cellars, entirely below ground and without light, air or drainage. In Boston, many of the cellars were flooded with every incoming tide, and others from time to time, with the waters of Back Bay, which was no better than a scum-covered cess pit. Yet the cellars too were crowded with immigrants; indeed one opinion was that without the cellars Boston could not have accommodated its new population. In 1894 a Committee of Internal Health reported on how the Irish were living in Boston: "without comforts and mostly without common necessities; in many cases huddled together like brutes . . . sullen indifference and despair, or disorder, intemperance and utter degradation reign supreme".

It is useful to consider the history of Irish migration for what it tells us about the movement of workers around the world and about racial prejudice. Living in relative backwardness, fleeing from intolerable impoverishment, starvation and disease, they represented either an opportunity or a threat, depending on which side of the class barrier they were viewed from. For the landlords and the employers they were an opportunity; desperate for employment and somewhere to live, they were vulnerable almost to the point of being defenceless and could be manipulated for a more intense exploitation of the "native" workers. In that way they were a threat, for they were competitors for jobs, housing and for scarce public resources. Inevitably their presence exerted a retrograde influence on working class conditions and, just as inevitably, they became feared and hated and the butt of a prejudice flavoured with ogreish myths. We have already described some of the features which these myths attributed to Irish people as ineradicable, hereditary disadvantages. But the passage of time has exposed the myths; Irish workers have been absorbed into the general process of working class existence under capitalism. They no longer live a cess-pit existence; they no longer dispose of their rubbish out of the windows, or drag themselves about the streets half-naked and half-starved. There are no longer anti-Irish riots or running battles with them, lasting for days on end.

### **Shifting Prejudices**

To some degree, many of the fears, myths and prejudices which were once directed against the Irish are now turned on black immigrants with the same justifications given - that they are an alien, primitive people who are biologically incapable of adaptation. The history of the Irish people shows that there is no scientific reason for these theories, that the living conditions associated with Asian and West Indian immigrants are not racially determined but the product of historical, social and economic influences. In other words, these conditions have nothing to do with skin colour. They are the inexorable product of capitalism's inadequacies.

It is not then unusual for migrant groups to be blamed for extreme poverty, slum housing, rampant disease and the like, even though they are trying to escape from those very problems. Established workers in the "host" countries resent the immigrants as competitors, taking no account of the fact that the things they compete for are scarce only to workers. People who are in the capitalist - the privileged - class do not need to be rivals for housing, or a place in the queue for social security benefit. Working class problems did not arrive with the arrival of immigrants; they are part and parcel of the class division of capitalist society. The resentment against immigrants which is expressed as racial prejudice is, then, a class matter.

## CHAPTER 8: WHY RACISM?

**W**e have been concerned with an examination of the background of racism, its history (or parts of it) and its theoretical basis. We have also looked at some examples of racism in operation. It is clear that no supportable case for racism exists and that what arguments are advanced in its favour are little more than a misguided interpretation of, or response to, social and historical factors. Racism is not rooted in biological fact; it is an idea which human beings impose on themselves, at considerable cost to their own interests. This leaves us with an important question: if racism is neither logical nor useful, why is it so popular and widespread?

There are, of course, innumerable ideas and theories which are popular but which have no basis in fact and are quite useless in explaining and understanding reality. Capitalism abounds in them; as a social system which operates in the interests of a parasite minority it cannot justify itself in any logical way. To understand such ideas - in this case, racism - we need to refer to the basis of capitalism, the soil where they take root and which nurtures them.

### **Capitalism and Class**

We use the term capitalism to describe the social system which operates on the basis of capital or wealth invested in order to produce goods and services for sale at a profit. This mode of production results from the private, or class, ownership or monopoly of the means of production and distribution. It gives wealth the particular social character of the commodity - things which are produced for sale with a view to profit. Some of these features existed in social systems before capitalism, but capitalism is distinguished by the fact that such features are dominant. Class ownership means that a minority live by their monopoly of the means of life, leaving the rest, who are the overwhelming majority, to live through being employed by the minority. This is usually called "work" but it is more accurately called "employment", a social relationship involving the majority selling their mental and physical abilities to the owners for a wage or a salary and then applying those abilities in the production of commodities.

A person's class is determined, not by the size of their income or by their accent or by where they went to school, but by their ownership or non-ownership of the means of production and distribution. The class barrier marks a line of conflict, for the interest of those on one side are opposed to those on the other. As long as capitalism lasts, this conflict will be over the division of wealth and will be expressed in the industrial field in strikes, working to rule, lock-outs and the like. But the ultimate expression of class conflict is on the political field, to dispossess the capitalist minority and establish socialism - a society based on the common ownership and democratic control of all that is involved in the production and distribution of wealth. Socialism will be in glaring contrast to capitalism for it will be the most efficient and humane society possible, making the maximum use of human productive abilities to the benefit of the whole community. Its wealth will be produced solely to meet human needs and the whole of society will have free access to that wealth, each individual according to their self-determined needs. It will be a world of one people, without national frontiers or other artificial barriers. It will be a democratically administered society.

The propaganda for capitalism asserts that it is the best system the human race can design. It denies the class struggle and argues that everyone has the same interest in making capitalism run smoothly as a profit-based society. So what are the facts? According to the Inland Revenue, in Britain in 1982 the top five per cent of the population owned 41 per cent of the marketable wealth - that is things which can be bought and sold such as housing, land, stocks

and shares - while the bottom 50 per cent owned only 4 per cent of that wealth. Put another way, the top one per cent of the population owned more than the bottom 75 per cent put together. It is the same in other countries; the *Wall Street Journal* of 12 December 1985 quoted Federal Reserve Data which showed that in 1983 the ownership of American government and corporate bonds was confined to four per cent of all households and that the richest two per cent of all households owned 71 per cent of all outstanding shares. There are, of course, countries such as Russia which claim to be socialist because their industry is not capitalised through stocks and shares. But the fact that in some cases it is not possible to express the class monopoly of the means of life through such exact percentages does not prove that monopoly does not exist. In Russia there is a privileged class who have access to the highest standard of living and another class who have to sell their working abilities in order to live; there is, in other words, wage labour and capital. It makes no difference that investment, production and distribution are carried out through the state; it only means that such countries are more accurately described as state capitalist.

### **Wealth and Poverty**

Capitalism exists throughout the modern world. Its inequalities can be seen in the contrasting life styles and expectations of the members of each class. The British Royal Family, for example, display their enormous wealth partly by owning four palaces, four other stately homes, a yacht, three helicopters and three aircraft and by employing over 300 staff to wait on and work for them. One of the richest people in Britain is the Duke of Westminster, who owns some 138,000 acres of the world's most expensive land, including highly valuable areas like Belgravia, Mayfair and Westminster. One estimate puts Westminster's income at £3 every second - or getting on for £100 million a year. The Cavendish family, whose head is the Duke of Devonshire, own a collection of stately homes and estates - Chatsworth, Hardwick Hall, Bolton Abbey, Lismore, Compton Place, Devonshire House. Landed aristocrats form only part of the ruling class; there are others whose wealth comes more from industry, such as the Guinnesses, the Vesteyes, the Cowdrays. The attitudes of this class were succinctly stated by Alan Clark, M.P. and millionaire estate owner, who is noted for his open contempt for the working class:

I don't need to get any richer. Once you have a certain amount of money you are really better off living on the income - or preferably on the income of the income. (*Guardian* 1 February 1986)

On the other side of the class divide are the wage and salary earners. How do they live in today's society? According to the 1983 Department of Health and Social Security *Family Expenditure Survey*, some 15 million people were living "on the margins" of the official poverty line. At the same time the Child Poverty Action Group found 3.75 million children living at that level and half a million actually existing below it - below the level of Supplementary Benefit. A 1983 survey by Market and Opinion Research estimated that about 7.5 million people have to do without some essential item of clothing; seven million do not have enough for their food needs; about ten million cannot afford any sort of holiday other than staying with relatives. For these people - who are members of the useful, productive class in society - there can be very little ambition or security. In contrast to capitalists like Alan Clark their lives are a ceaseless struggle to make ends meet interspersed with desperate crises such as being homeless. A 1986 report - *Children Today* - by the National Children's Home, described the lives of some members of the working class in a typical town:

Poverty in this area is relentless - there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Families live in damp, sub-standard housing that they can't afford to heat properly. They survive on the basics and there is no comfort. Sometimes the pressures overwhelm them. They haven't the energy to be angry about it - their energies go into surviving.

The fact that these are examples of the lower strata of working class existence should not obscure the fact that poverty, in some measure, is a problem for the entire class. As we have said, workers depend for their living on employment by the capitalists. The worst poverty is usually suffered by those who for some reason - unemployment, old age, sickness, single parenthood - are unable to get a job and a wage. But this does not mean that those who have a job are secure and prosperous. In order that surplus value - which is the source of the capitalists' profit - may be produced, wages must be restricted by the value of the workers' labour power. In general terms, wages must amount to what is required in prevailing social conditions to reproduce labour power. Wages enable workers to buy food, clothes, housing and to have access to education, entertainment and health care. When these have been paid for there is very little left and the vast majority of workers die as poor as they were born.

The irony of this situation is that the workers are condemned to this restricted access to lower quality goods in spite of the fact that they produce the world's wealth, including goods of the highest quality. They live in slums or neurotic estates of semis while they design and build palaces. They turn out the finest food and clothes for exclusive shops but themselves scratch around in the humiliation of mass production chain stores and supermarkets. They are raised in the expectation that life will be harsh and competitive and they will have to struggle against each other for jobs, housing and essential services such as medical care. They are conditioned to assume that this competition is a natural fact of life; there is very little awareness that the problem could be eradicated through a basic change in society. Instead the tendency is to blame the need to compete on the competitors and to argue that if they could be eliminated the problem would go away. For these reasons male workers have resisted the employment of women or have attempted to surround female workers with all sorts of barriers or to confine them to the more menial, repetitive, less demanding jobs. For the same reason the miners objected, just after the war, to the introduction of foreign workers into the mines and, in the 1950s, workers in several industries took action against the employment of immigrants from Asia and the West Indies.

### **Nationalism and Racism**

Such prejudices are by no means discouraged by the ruling class propaganda which, in general terms, asserts that British exports (or in America, American exports; in Japan, Japanese exports and so on) could dominate world markets. During economic and financial crises, foreigners are often blamed for sabotaging the prosperity of "the nation". Just after the second world war, for example, the Labour government told us that they were prevented from giving us the prosperity they had promised by something called the "dollar gap" - in other words by the domination of world markets by American exports. A few years later the culprit had been widened into the less specific "balance of trade" - the generally poor competition offered by British exports against those from other countries. After that the villains became foreign currency speculators who were manipulating a decline in the exchange rate of sterling and who were immortalised in the menacing shapes of the Gnomes of Zurich.

In wartime we are bombarded with remorseless racist and nationalist propaganda to regard the current "enemy" as inhuman savages and the current "ally" as peaceable and humane. During 1939-45 the Germans and Japanese were considered deserving victims of any degree of horror; their battle casualties were gleefully reported (and often exaggerated) and the indiscriminate slaughter of their civilian population in air raids was justified on the grounds that it was their just deserts. A few years after the war, when the capitalist powers had formed themselves into different alliances, the propaganda changed to fit in with the new "allies" in Japan and West Germany and the new "enemies" in Russia and China. More recently, British ruling class propaganda vilified Argentinian workers, in the most offensive and prejudiced

terms, as fit for any depths of butchery that British workers could be misled into inflicting on them.

### **The Myth of Scarcity**

Workers who accept this type of propaganda are allowing themselves to be diverted from the real reasons for their problems. A lot of nationalist paranoia is stimulated by the idea that poverty is caused through there not being enough to go round, and therefore each nation must compete for the wealth available. But the scarcities of capitalism bear no relation to the productive potential of the world; they are artificial, imposed on us by the profit priorities of capitalism. There are huge “surpluses” of food in the world. In the EEC countries in early 1987 there were stockpiles of 1.5 million tonnes of butter, one million tonnes of skimmed milk powder, 0.6 million tonnes of beef, and 18 million tonnes of grain. In some cases, financial subsidies are on offer which actually persuade farmers not to produce food; in 1982 in the USA, 82 million acres were taken out of production in this way. These “surpluses” of land and produce do not exist because human needs are already fully satisfied. Each year tens of millions die from, or suffer the effects of, malnutrition to the despair of organisations like Oxfam which aim to eradicate hunger. In the same way the problem of homelessness and of unsatisfactory housing continues, keeping bodies like Shelter and CHAR in activity, while there is a “surplus” of bricks and while skilled building workers languish on the dole. The coal strike of 1984-85 was fought over the issue of pit closures and after the miners' defeat the National Coal Board carried on apace with the programme of closures, aiming to cease production at 26 more pits and put some 20,000 miners out of the industry. The motive for this was not that everyone was able to heat their homes adequately, for each winter tens of thousands of workers - especially old age pensioners - confront the choice of a warm house or food to eat. Many old people - the exact figure is difficult to judge but some authorities say it runs into thousands - actually die of cold. Of course British Coal is aware of all this; their argument for cutting back production is not based on human need but on the need for “economic” (i.e. profitable) pits.

Poverty represented as scarcity, combined with the pressure to compete for those “scarce” resources, is a recipe for prejudice and discriminatory conflict - for nationalist pride, for racism. Of course, as we have seen in previous chapters, the advent and development of capitalism has in many ways worked against racism and reacted against the restrictions which racism puts on the free movement and availability of wage labour. But the capitalist social system may also at times be a fertile breeding ground for racism. This may seem like a contradiction but that is how it is, for capitalism is riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies. It cannot be a system of human harmony; division and conflict are in its very nature. It has to try to explain away its shortcomings. In wartime, for example, it would not be possible to admit that workers were being urged to kill each other in the interests of their exploiters. It would not be possible to concede that capitalism is anarchic, that it moves from boom to slump to boom out of all control and that the politicians' promises to do something about it are obvious deceit.

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The combination of these ingredients produces a prejudice like racism but it does not end there. As long as the working class reject the logical analysis of capitalism which exposes how it operates they will not only subsist intellectually on a diet of prejudice but become dependent on it. Racism has its own momentum and can become hardened almost into permanency, beyond the original intentions of its instigators. In Nazi Germany a working class driven to cynical despair by the crises of capitalism, and the impotence of the conventional political parties to ease them, were prepared to condone and enthusiastically

support a prolonged act of genocide which in the end was quite foreign to the needs of the capitalist system.

Racism is an issue for the working class. They must deal with it, as an obstacle to their progress to a sane, free, humane social system. Having no basis in biology or any other physical science, in concept and operation it is a social matter. Like all the other ailments of capitalism it has a political solution and will disappear with the socialist revolution.

## CHAPTER 9: THE EFFECTS OF RACISM

An easy, perhaps instinctive, reaction to capitalism is moral indignation at what it does to people. Much of the apparent opposition to the system has that kind of basis, as well as perhaps a feeling that capitalism has destroyed an older and more harmonious way of life. Such attitudes are far from correct. Capitalism could not have been avoided - it has been an essential stage in social evolution. Its results have included a massive expansion in productive power giving us the potential to meet all human needs and a development in the means of communication, which has made it possible to think of world unity in immediate terms. Yet at the same time capitalism has divided humanity and has been unable to satisfy people's needs. It is a society of conflict between classes, nations and peoples, often exacerbated by the very technical developments which we have mentioned. While providing the material means to unite all people, capitalism works against that unity. Its wars, for example, are international affairs, often fought across vast areas of the world with weapons manufactured a long way from the battle zones or which travel immense distances to reach their target.

Racism too is a similar painful contradiction thrown up by capitalism. Historically it has not simply meant one group of people being less well-treated or provided for than another. All too often it has led to genocide, to deliberate policies of wiping out people for the single reason that they belong to a particular group. This policy was not born with the Nazis in Germany; it was practiced long before that, in the name of imperialist expansion, economic advantage and appropriation of land.

### **The Colonising of Australia**

An important episode in the British mercantile expansion into the Pacific of the 18th and 19th centuries was the colonising of Australia. The centre of that country was a place where Europeans could not easily survive but on the coasts the colonists prospered. It was a ruthless, sordid, get-rich-quick episode. After about 50 years the place began to conform to the European pattern, as the native bush was ripped out to make way for English-style farms where English crops and animals could be raised. However, the native inhabitants - the aborigines - could not be torn out so easily. As the tribal hunting grounds, which had been theirs to use freely, were taken from them, they had the choice of resisting or of declining into apathy. The theft of their land caused the collapse of their tribal culture and they could not conform to the new European culture which replaced it. Some aborigines were killed by imported diseases; others by violence inflicted upon them when they tried to stop their land being taken away. In 1788, according to one estimate, there were 1500 aborigines in Sydney; soon after 1840 there were only a handful of desperate beggars. Charles Darwin mournfully commented that "wherever the European has trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal".

Bad as this was, it was outdone by the pitiless massacre of the aborigines in Tasmania. The cooler climate of that island attracted many of the new settlers and by the 1830s they numbered (including the transported convicts) about 13,000. All of them wanted to grab land and they were not disposed to let the aborigines stand in their way. But the Tasmanian natives did not succumb like those on the mainland. As their land was taken over, they responded with attacks on the settlers and on their homes. One settler warned: "The natives have become very troublesome and treacherous, spearing and murdering all they find in the least unprotected . . . the only alternative now is, if they do not readily become friendly, to annihilate them at once". By "friendly" he meant, of course, compliant to being forcibly deprived of access to the land and accepting a completely different legal and moral code.

The meaning of “annihilation” is all too clear and that was exactly what happened, with no attempt to disguise the fact. Martial law was declared in 1830 and a manhunt began, with the object of eliminating the aborigines. A line of armed beaters was formed across the island; a surgeon on a French whaler described the aborigines being “continually hunted and tracked down like fallow deer”. Those who survived through being able to slip through the cordon were demoralised by the savagery of it all. In 1835 the last of them - a couple of hundred of the original 5,000 - were shipped out. Away from their hunting grounds they could not sustain any sort of existence and the last of them died in 1876.

### **The Rape of the Congo**

As that genocidal episode closed, another began. In that same year, in Brussels, a “conference of humanitarians and travellers” met at the initiative of the Belgian King Leopold II. As a result another organisation, with an equally euphemistic name, was formed - the International African Association - with the professed aim of opening up the Congo to “civilisation”. In truth the Association was mainly an organisation of the Belgian ruling class, with Leopold as its president. It was not recorded how the innocent natives of the Congo regarded the approaching promise of “civilisation”; in any case they soon found out what this meant to them. The real object of the “civilising” mission was to grab the Congo's rubber and, such were the profits promised, that years of bestial atrocities were committed. The justification for those unspeakably horrible acts is by now terrifyingly familiar - that the Congo natives were racially inferior, stupid and lazy, and therefore fit subjects for repression and exploitation by the “superior” races of Europe.

Piece by piece, through a series of dubiously negotiated treaties, the land of the Congo was stolen by the Belgian capitalists. It was no longer in tribal communal ownership but in the ownership of the Association. In 1885, in another outburst of euphemisms, the Belgian Prime Minister Beernaert declared that the newly established Congo Free State would ensure “absolute freedom of commerce, freedom of property, freedom of navigation”. These words foretold an unhappy future for the natives of the Congo, who were robbed, degraded, tortured, mutilated and murdered on a massive scale in order to extract from them the maximum production of rubber. By any standards it was a shameful story.

The production of rubber was administered through a network of agents who were not only under some powerful material incentives to gather as much as possible but were allowed to do much as they liked to ensure this happened. “I give you carte blanche” stated one circular from a District Commissioner to the agents, “to procure 4,000 kilos of rubber a month . . . Employ gentleness at first, and if they persist in resisting the demands of the State, employ force of arms”. In practice, this meant the wholesale slaughter of natives who failed to bring in their quota and ferocious reprisals against any retaliation from them. In one typical incident, in the village of Mummumbula, an agent was responsible for the killing of 150 men and the crucifixion of the village women and children. Another described being “sent into a village to ascertain if the natives were collecting rubber, and in the contrary case to murder all, including men, women and children”. From such expeditions, to discourage wastage of ammunition, it was required that for every expended cartridge a right hand would be brought back. Agents made their way through the jungle, along the rivers, accompanied by baskets full of severed hands. And when they shot animals they covered the deficit in cartridges by cutting the hands off living people.

By 1909 the riverside population of the Congo had fallen from 806,000 to under 50,000. Villages such as Ikoko and Irebo lost thousands of their inhabitants; in the *Men's Magazine* of January 1916 E.D. Morel described the devastation: “Compared with 30 years ago, the Congo is a desert”. There is another statistic by which the misery of the Congo may be measured. Between 1896 and 1905 Leopold II personally wrung some £2.8 million from the country.

The horrors of the Congo resulted in an international protest which led to some control and so to a measure of improvement in the lives of what natives remained. But racist genocide continues to disfigure human history.

### **Genocide on Biafra**

When Nigeria was declared independent from British rule in October 1960 it was widely expected it would assume a position of considerable power and influence among the emerging states of Africa. In fact the history of the country worked against this. During the late 19th and early 20th century it had been taken over piecemeal by the British capitalist class which enforced the amalgamation of several antagonistic tribal groups. The final stage in this was on 1 January 1914 when, on grounds of “economy”, North and South Nigeria were joined in an arrangement which gave most of the power to the tribes of the North.

After independence Nigeria quickly proved to be seriously unstable. It was harassed by one crisis after another, was a turmoil of ethnic friction and riots and riven by corruption. In January 1966 a military coup took place, followed by a counter coup in July by a group of Northern army officers. In that year there was also a series of pogroms against the Eastern Nigerians, in which some 30,000 of them were killed and thousands more maimed and wounded. A million Easterners became refugees from the terror. As a climax to this crisis, in May 1967, the leaders of Eastern Nigeria declared it a sovereign and independent state -Biafra. In response the North declared what proved to be a genocidal war and gradually, over the next 2½ years, the borders of Biafra were pressed inwards until in January 1970 the state ceased to exist. Millions of Biafrans died in the war, in combat, through being murdered or by starvation or disease. The North's pitiless war of attrition was supported by arms from Russia and from Britain, which was at the time under the Wilson Labour government. The plight of the Biafrans aroused plenty of protests and charitable efforts aimed at tinkering with the scale of the suffering. But the Labour government resisted all the protests. Biafra has become another episode in capitalism's wretched history of human suffering.

### **The Nazi Holocaust**

The act of genocide to which all others are compared is that of the Nazis against the Jews -well documented if imperfectly understood. The 1939-45 war, it was said, was fought to ensure that such outrages would never happen again but, as we have seen, this promise has not been kept. Racist ideas were rife in Europe as the Nazi movement was born. It was a time of economic and social chaos, of post war cynicism and of frustrated nationalist delusions among the workers of the different powers. Compared to other parts of Europe, Germany did not have a large Jewish population - some 400,000 against 700,000 in Hungary, one million in Romania and three million in Poland. But such was the chaos in Germany that the Nazis could successfully blame it all - Germany's defeat, the Treaty of Versailles, the post war economic and financial crises - on the Jews. A campaign of boycotts, discriminatory laws, fines and levies against the property of Jews, harassment, imprisonment and brutality came to a climax in the “Final Solution”. At first this seemed to entail expelling all Jews to somewhere like Madagascar but after 1941 it developed into a coldly organised, large scale campaign in which six million were put to death simply because they were Jews.

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It should not be necessary to do more than describe such episodes as these. They condemn themselves. Mass murder and repression, which are the logical outcome of racism, result in a massive burden of pain and distress. They are simply indefensible and even more so when, as we said in the opening of this chapter, they happen when society has the means to unite humanity. For the present, what must concern us is that racism denies the real division of

capitalist society - the class division - and the opposing interests which it sets up. It denies the urgent need for workers everywhere to cooperate in the overthrow of capitalism. Workers who are racist, or patriotic, are erecting artificial barriers to human progress while they ignore those which actually exist and which must be dismantled. Racism feeds off the problems of capitalism while it diverts attention from the pressing need to abolish the cause of those problems.

The solution to those problems, and the dismantling of the barriers will mean the abolition of capitalism and the end of racism. It will mean the establishment of a social order based on common ownership of the means of life, in which every human being will have free access to wealth according to self-determined needs. That society must operate on the basis of human unity and cooperation for the common benefit. Its values and morals will stand in direct contrast to those of capitalism.

## CHAPTER 10: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

One explanation for racism is that it thrives when capitalism is in phase of retrenchment. There is something to be said for this: at times of economic boom and expansion, as we have seen, capitalist industries call on the reserve army of unemployed. There is a demand for migrant labour and a pressure on workers in the host area to accept the influx of workers from another part of the country or from the abroad. In a slump it is rather different. There is a further competition for jobs, housing and services and a more intense insecurity bears down on workers. Their reaction, in an absence of understanding, is defensive and divisive. Scapegoats are there to hand, a relief for the paranoid confusion.

One merit of this sort of theory is that it presents racism as an idea with social roots, to be related to and explained by the economic anarchy of capitalism. Its fault is that it is only a partial explanation, encouraging the delusion that racism can be eliminated by ironing out the humps and troughs of capitalism's economic cycle, perhaps through some skilful juggling by clever politicians and "experts". But the roots of racism, as this pamphlet has attempted to show, go deeper than that. This has been an exercise in diagnosis and it has reached certain conclusions. There is no scientific foundation for racism, which is groundless prejudice diverting the working class from facing the real cause of modern society's problems; racism is a response to social ailments but it is irrelevant to those ailments and therefore is neither useful nor supportable; to get to the root cause of racism we must consider the basis of capitalist society, which leads to the conclusion that the only cure for racism is the abolition of capitalism.

The abolition of capitalism will be followed by the establishment of a different social system. Just as capitalism is founded on the private, or class, ownership of the means of production and distribution, so socialism will be based on common ownership. Just as capitalism's wealth takes the form of commodities - things produced for sale and profit - so socialism's wealth will be use values, things made solely to meet human needs. Just as capitalism is a society of class privilege, so socialism will be one of equal rights of free access. Just as capitalism is a coercive, repressive society so socialism will be democratic, with full participation by its people. Just as capitalism promotes and aggravates conflict such as racism so will socialism be organised on the basis of human co-operation for the common benefit.

Capitalism is an inefficient and wasteful society. Although it has the immediate potential to satisfy human needs, its social organisation and relationships make it incapable of doing so. Production for profit often means that production is cut back, or even stopped altogether, because of an "overstocked" market or of legal restrictions like patent laws. It means that all sorts of things which by any reasonable standards ought to be done - like feeding starving people, or ensuring that old people do not die of cold in the winter - are not done because it is not "economically viable". Capitalism wastes resources on an immense scale. It wastes them in building up armed forces and huge arsenals of weapons, whose only function is to kill and destroy. It wastes the abilities of tens of millions of people who are in jobs which may be necessary in a society of commodity wealth but which are unproductive and socially useless - for example, jobs in the police and armed forces, as accountants, salespeople and bank workers. Capitalism's slumps are obscenely wasteful for they make millions of workers idle and cause masses of materials and productive forces to lie unused when there is an obvious human need for them to be working. Land is taken out of cultivation and food destroyed while millions are starving; "surplus" bricks are stockpiled and building workers are on the dole although in this country alone tens of thousands are homeless and many more live in unfit

housing. Finally, capitalism cannot be a democratic society. It cannot allow freedom of information and a full, active participation in decision-taking. It is a competitive society and must be secretive, private and coercive, for only in that way can the processes of commodity production and sale, and the privileges of the ruling class, be protected.

The other class in society, who have no significant ownership in the means of life and who endure all the problems of capitalism, are the working class - the class who depend on employment for their living. Capitalism works against working class interests but, although they are exploited, repressed and degraded by the system, the workers give support to capitalism and actually co-operate in their own degradation. At election after election millions of workers vote for one or another of the parties pledged to run capitalism; they base their electoral "choice" on trivial differences between the parties' plans to tinker with some unimportant aspects of the way the system is organised and operated. They do this because they do not think there is an alternative to capitalism. Furthermore they see escape from the miseries of working class life as an individual matter - winning the pools, getting promotion, building up their own business. However this idea ignores the fact that the working class are the vast majority under capitalism and that it must be they who run the system, who design, make and operate everything in it and who even administer their own exploitation. Socialism will come about when the working class realise such facts and understand that they have the power to change society through cooperative, revolutionary political action.

Socialism will be a basically simple society for it will operate solely and completely on the basis of human needs. Everything which socialist society makes and does will be related to those needs and will therefore be to everyone's benefit. Socialism will be free of capitalism's profit motive, which causes the demands and capacities of the market to take precedence over human need. It will be a society in which people can behave just as humans would were it not for the restrictions and insecurities of capitalism. Human talents will be set free, to design and make the best that is possible, on the single incentive of satisfying human needs and so of benefiting the community. Socialism will mean the greatest flowering of imagination, creativeness and achievement in history. The nature of socialism will mean that unavoidable natural disasters or extremes of climate will be dealt with in the most urgent and efficient way.

Will all this be possible? Can we really have a world where abundance and freedom are taken for granted? Capitalism has brought scientific and technological advance to the point at which the plentiful production of wealth is a possibility. It is only the social relationships of this system, stemming from the class ownership of the means of production, which prevent abundance and instead condemn millions to poverty, malnutrition and famine. Not only socialists point out the absurdity of a world where computers are commonplace and which can probe out to Saturn and Mars yet also allows tens of millions to die every year of starvation and untold millions from avoidable diseases. Capitalism's productive resources are actually used in such a way as to place extra stress on people - in polluting the atmosphere, in the demands of the production line and in the alienation of the worker. Socialism's production will harmonise with human interests because, free of the anarchies and restraints of commodity production for the market, the new society will be able to plan its work, what it makes and how it must be distributed to meet human needs.

An essential part of that planning will be the democracy which socialism will introduce into human society. Socialism will not happen, and cannot work, unless the world's people want it. They must understand how and why it operates and must opt for it in that understanding. It cannot be imposed on society by a minority or by a group of political leaders. By the same token when a majority of people have established socialism no minority will be able to take it away from them. Having set up socialism the majority will not lose interest; they will continue to operate society on the same basis of informed democratic decisions. This is again

something which has been facilitated by capitalism, through the development of things like satellite communication which enable opinions to be assessed worldwide literally in hours. Decisions could be taken only when everyone is fully informed; socialism's democracy will entail the free availability of all information and knowledge. It will be a society vibrant with debate.

All these things will contribute to socialism's values. From one generation to another the assumptions and the strengths of a society of communal ownership, free access, co-operation and harmony will be handed on. People will relate to each other as equals, as caring sisters and brothers. Co-operation will be the norm and not an eccentricity; security will be an everyday, established reality and not an impossible dream.

This is all possible, virtually at once, if the working class were to recognise their own immense power to transform society. At present they deny themselves this power, effectively handing it over to the capitalist class by their support for capitalism and cruel delusions such as racism. Socialism will be the end of racism; it will be a world free of social conflict in which human beings live and work in unity without distinction of sex or race.