

Socialism and Black Liberation



**The
revolutionary
struggle against
racism**

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The revolutionary struggle against racism



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Cover:
June 1995:
Left—Picket of Kennington
police station against
murder of Brian Douglas
Right—Asian youth in
Bradford resist police
harassment

Back Cover:
(Clockwise)
Protest in the USA, Somali
youth in Sheffield fight
police harassment,
Burnsalls strikers, West
Midlands, Fighting racist
immigration laws.

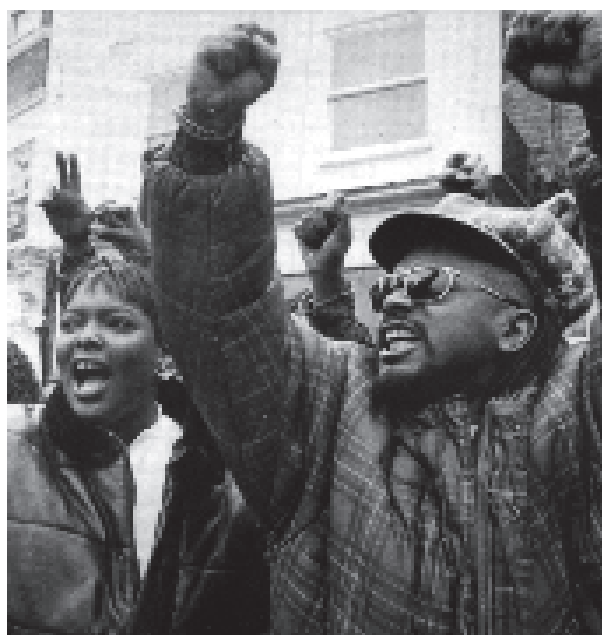
Opposite:
On strike at Ford
Dagenham, East London.

“For three years these people, normal people, put shit through my letterbox, spat on me, kicked my child’s push-chair, screamed at our visitors. There were women, you know, other mothers. So nice to each other. Animals to us.”

(Shaida, Asian mother)

“Thirty per cent of London Underground workers are from ethnic minorities, but 97% of the managers are white. In 1990, 250 new management jobs came up. Nearly 90% went to white applicants.”

“In 1990, 16% of all male prisoners were from ethnic minority groups. 28% of all women prisoners were from ethnic minority groups. People from ethnic minorities make up only 4.8% of Britain’s population.”



Racism: what it is and how to fight it

The three examples of racism quoted above are not isolated. Racist attacks are on the increase; racist employment practices are rife; black youth are being systematically criminalised. Racist immigration laws reduce large numbers of black people in Britain to second class citizenship. Racial abuse is an everyday experience for black people.

The problem is international. All over Europe far right parties are growing, and the traditional parties are openly pandering to racism.

But what causes racism? Is it “human nature”? Is it genetically determined? Is it a product of “evil” or deviant individual behaviour? Can the cause be traced to laws, social structures and traditions—or a combination of all of these?

Understanding the cause of racism

is crucial if we want to eradicate it. Otherwise anti-racism becomes a mere gesture. Take this statement:

“I want a society that encourages each and every one to fulfil his or her potential to the utmost . . . Let me say here and now that I regard any barrier built on race to be pernicious.”

The words belong to John Major, the Tory prime minister in charge of the racist system!

Even the Metropolitan Police spends hundreds of thousands of pounds on “anti-racist” advertising campaigns.

But genuine, consistent anti-racism flows from an understanding of the causes of racism. It means implementing a strategy that can totally eradicate it from society.

Workers Power, as revolutionary socialists, believe that racism is built into the capitalist system. We believe its

foundation stone lies within the structure of the imperialist world system. The anti-racist struggle can only achieve complete victory through the working class struggle for socialism.

Many committed anti-racists disagree. Reformists and liberal anti-racists think that racism can be eradicated through legal measures and education within the present system. Some black nationalists and separatists believe that racism is part of human nature and that it can never be eradicated. Some socialists believe that racism is just an ideological hangover from the past, or is caused by the unfamiliarity of white populations with recent black immigrants.

In every case the strategy and tactics of different political currents in the anti-racist struggle are dictated by their understanding of the root cause.

1★WHAT IS RACISM?



To understand racism in modern capitalist society we have to understand its origins, its history and its material roots. Marxists believe that all ideas—especially the ideas that govern people's social and political behaviour—are, ultimately, a reflection of real material conditions in society.

If we look at the three examples of racism quoted above, we can see that only one of them, the first, is directly a problem of the ideas and behaviour of a few active racist individuals.

Black workers in London Underground are not only held back by the racist prejudices of their top managers. They are also discriminated against in many aspects of training and education. They are disadvantaged by a promotion system which claims to be "colour blind" but which is really only blind to racism.

Similarly the huge numbers of black people in prison does not happen just because the police and the judges are racist—though they are. The whole system of deprivation in housing, education and employment pushes sections of black youth into crime.

The rich and powerful decide what constitutes a crime in this society. Thus the police killers of Joy Gardner walk free while black youth are jailed for minor offences.

The problem is not simply one of racist ideas and racist language or even of the racist propaganda peddled by the Tory press. It goes deeper.

Society is not racist because of people's racist ideas—it is the other way round. Racist ideology is nurtured and perpetuated by the social system.

A system of racist discrimination inhabits every area of social life.

Coupled with the incessant insults, the subtle racist codes and symbols in the media, and the rising wave of racist attacks this constitutes a systematic, material **racial oppression**.

So what causes racial oppression?

The roots of racism

Human society has changed dramatically during the thousands of years since it began. Distinct forms of class society have existed, from the "slave societies" of ancient Greece and Rome, to the feudalism of the Middle Ages, through to the current capitalist system. Capitalism itself—the system of production for profit based on constant technological innovation and factory production—went through several distinct phases of development.

In each of these successive forms of human society there were relationships of exploitation and oppression. Always a rich minority dominated society, accumulating wealth and inflicting poverty on the majority.

The ruling classes exploit and oppress us not because they are inherently evil or greedy. Their actions are always a function of their class position—their relationship to the means of production.

The very same applies to the majority but in reverse. It has always struggled against the ruling elite in order to defend itself from poverty and to combat its own exploitation at the hands of the ruling class. History has always been driven forward by the class struggle.

At first sight it seems obvious that the early forms of class society—tribalism, nomadism, the marauding hordes of horsemen who swept across continents—must have been racist. These were superstitious societies where life was cheap and economic survival depended on killing and enslaving rival tribes. It is also well known that both the Greeks and Romans had stereotypes and prejudices against other peoples (including each other).

Many people conclude from this that racial oppression is as old as human society itself. Marxists reject this idea; not because we see former societies as nicer, friendlier places than modern Britain, but because we make a distinction between ignorance, prejudice and fear of the unknown and systematic racial oppression.

The point about prejudice and fear of strangers in pre-capitalist society is that it was indiscriminate, not systematic, and was often based directly on different class interests.

In ancient Greece the philosopher Aristotle did advance a pseudo-racial justification for slavery:

"Those who are so much inferior to others as . . . beasts to men are by their nature slaves and benefit like all inferiors from the rule of a master."

But this was rejected by most Greeks in theory, in law and in practice. Greeks could be slaves and non-Greek slaves could buy their freedom.

The prejudices of pre-capitalist so-

cieties were not systematic. There were black (Arab and African) generals in the feudal armies. Societies which conquered other peoples often assimilated them and sometimes even abandoned their own language and culture and adopted those of the people they had conquered.

Genocide was carried out by the feudal rulers not just against other peoples, but against whole communities of their own peasants who tried to throw off the rule of the landlords.

All of this does not mean that racial prejudice was absent in pre-capitalist societies, or that there were no laws of racial discrimination. But the history of the Jews in feudal Europe shows how these prejudices and laws were always based on other, more fundamental, class conflicts.

While Jews were always subjected to anti-Semitic prejudice from the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, their social position underwent dramatic changes according to their social role in the feudal society which the Church presided over.

At certain times, when it suited the economic interests of feudal land owners, the Jews enjoyed relative freedom from persecution. At other times they were viciously persecuted, especially when their economic interests clashed with those of the landowners. This was because—unlike any "ethnic minority" in modern society—Jews as a people fulfilled a specific class function, as small traders, merchants and bankers.

What is unique about the racist prejudices and laws under modern capitalism is that they are pure, systematic. They become transformed from disconnected prejudices into a pervasive system of racial oppression.

The whole development of capitalism was a process of the creation of a racist system, a system of oppression which has changed radically even during the life of capitalism itself, but which is deeply rooted in the needs of the capitalists to make a profit.

Capitalism

Capitalism arose as a system in conflict with dying feudalism. Its first phase, the epoch of **merchant capitalism**, saw the capitalists fighting to create unified nation states at home—under the banner of universal human rights. At the same time they were conquering colonies for plunder and raw materials, using the late feudal system of "indentured" labour (see below) and later re-introducing slavery.

Systematic racial oppression and the racist ideologies which came with it were created by the very contradictions of this early capitalist development.

The act of establishing unified nation states with national consciousness

sowed the seeds of systematic racism. Rights within the nation were to be accorded only to “nationals”, not foreigners. But the nation could only be defined “ethnically”, through a common language and culture. Thus the earliest attempts to build modern capitalist nations—in Britain and Spain for example—led to racist and exclusionist laws against sections of the population held to be “alien”.

In the 16th century we see the Spanish monarchy imposing the “limpieza de sangre” (purity of blood) laws. These were designed to exclude people of Jewish ancestry, who had converted to Christianity, from holding public office. Later we see the imposition of “inquisitions” against Jews and Spanish Moors (people of Arab descent) to drive them from the country.

In Britain the prolonged wars of colonisation of Ireland were accompanied by the rise of an ideology which condemned the Irish as uncivilised and barbaric. Under Elizabeth I the first laws were introduced ordering “blackamoors” to be expelled from the country.

Alongside the oppressive results of the formation of the nation at home, we see the emergence of early forms of racial oppression in the treatment of indigenous populations in the newly conquered colonies. Ireland is a case in point, where its Catholic population was systematically denied rights throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In Latin America the Spanish Conquistadors wiped out the Inca and Aztec populations with the justification that:

“The Spanish are as much above the Indians as man above the ape”.

These early examples have to be seen as a form of “proto-racial oppression”, elements of oppression that anticipated the later generalised racial oppression of more developed capitalism. Whilst resulting from the emergence of capitalism they also, to an ex-

tent, rested on earlier, economically-based conflicts and religious prejudices.

It is with the emergence of slavery that the contradiction between capitalism’s ideology of universal rights and its need for cheap colonial labour develops into a complete system of racial oppression.

Slavery

Slavery had died out in ancient societies because, fundamentally, it was a less efficient form of production than the feudal farming society which replaced it. So why did early capitalism bring back slavery with a vengeance, one thousand years after it died out in ancient Greece and Rome?

The early capitalists represented a new dynamic form of production, based on wage labour and the generalised production of commodities for the market.

During the earliest period of accumulating capital by the plunder of indigenous societies and the exploitation of colonial raw materials capitalists began to trade in and utilise slaves.

Initially the racism was not systematic. Francis Drake, one of the earliest slave raiders, also formed armies of “maroons” from the indigenous people of the Caribbean, to fight the Spanish. These were not armies of slaves. Likewise, the Spanish Conquistadors, who perpetrated terrible crimes against the Incas and Aztecs, also included in their ranks black African and Arab officers.

It is with the rise of a mass market for plantation products—like tobacco, coffee, sugar and cotton—that systematic slavery is introduced.

At first the colonialists tried to work their plantations with “indentured labourers”. These were people who had sold themselves into temporary slavery in return for the promise of land at the end of 12 years or more. The majority were whites from Europe.

But developments in Europe under-

mined the system of indentured labour. Until the late 17th century Britain controlled most of the colonies, but Holland controlled the slave trade. Then in 1667 Britain defeated Holland, taking over control of slave trading.

In the 1690s a massive expansion of slavery took place because, with rising wages in Europe and a land shortage in the colonies, fewer Europeans wanted to “indenture” themselves.

Indentured labour became uneconomic for the plantation owners. The plantation owners needed to produce for the capitalist market, with labour-intensive methods, but without the wage labour system.

Their doctrine of universal human rights stood at odds with enslaving Europeans. Meanwhile a huge supply of African slave labour was now on tap. Thus the system of black and white bonded labour was turned into a system of black lifetime slavery.

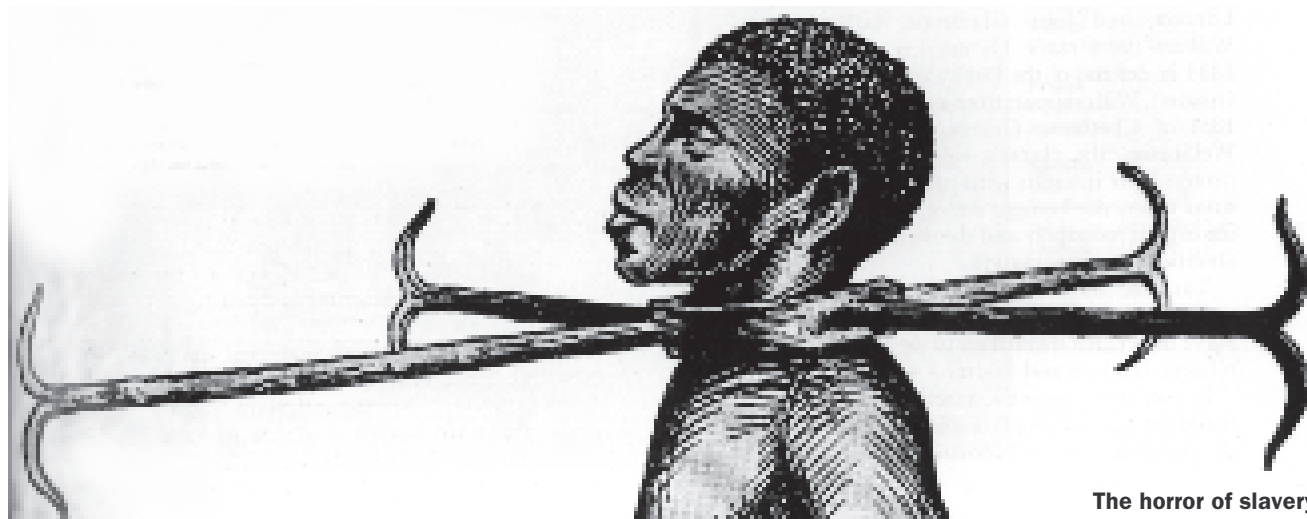
“Slavery was not born of racism; rather racism was the consequence of slavery” writes African-Caribbean historian Eric Williams (*Capitalism and Slavery*). It was an essential part of the first phase of capitalist development.

The horrors of the slave trade are well documented. Overall it is estimated that 115 million black people were seized and taken out of Africa during the era of the slave trade, and that 75 million died either en route to the colonies or soon after their arrival.

The only “problem” the capitalists had with this system of mass slavery was how to justify it.

Despite their murderous system of exploitation, the capitalists saw themselves as progressive, even revolutionary opponents of feudalism, a system ruled by religious prejudice and legal inequality. Under feudalism the explanation for everything reactionary was simple: it was the will of God and his representatives on earth, the landed aristocrats. Social class was defined by law.

The early capitalists could not have



The horror of slavery

1★WHAT IS RACISM?

built a dynamic new society based on learning, technological innovation and political democracy if they had rested content with the feudal system. Instead they had to evolve their own ideological justification for the new system.

They demanded “freedom” for the peasants tied to their landlord’s land so that they could exploit them as wage labourers. They demanded political equality for themselves and introduced, for the first time in history, the idea of universal human rights.

But how could they explain their “right” to own slaves and to plunder the non-European world? Only through a new, racist ideology.

To explain the right of “Christians” to trade in and own other humans, to rule their countries, to kill them at random, those other humans had to be defined as sub-human. Black Africans, native Americans, Indians, Aborigines were all grouped together as sub-human savages.

The specific social traits and traditions of their societies, which were a product of their social backwardness, were seen as products of genetic backwardness, of “savagery”.

The cultural legacy of black African societies was, quite literally, erased, hidden from history. Yet, the often subservient behaviour and mentality imposed on Africans by a life of degrading slavery, where individuality is systematically obliterated, were seen by the Europeans as the “natural” features of black people.

Slavery and colonial plunder were the material foundations of systematic racial oppression and systematic racist ideology.

This new racist ideology was developed by the colonial plantation owning capitalists and spread by them, through books, newspapers and political agitation, to the rest of the capitalist class. According to Zig Layton-Henry:

“Early stereotyping of Africans as savage, heathen and uncivilised intensified as the major contact with West Africans involved enslavement. Comparisons between negroes and chimpanzees, who also inhabited West Africa, became more frequent as did portrayal of Africans as having lustful and unrestrained appetites . . . Biological theories of racial inferiority were clearly needed to justify such an abhorrent and anti-Christian trade and to salve the consciences of those European traders reaping such rich rewards from slavery . . . They were described, for example, by Thomas Carlyle as ‘indolent two-legged cattle’.” (*The Politics of Race in Britain*)

Colonialism

As capitalism emerged out of its early

stage—what Karl Marx called “primitive accumulation”—it developed less haphazard forms of profit making than slavery, pillage and piracy.

The generalised form of exploitation—wage labour by workers who are “free” to work for any employer—was promoted by the capitalists themselves. They converted the countries where a kind of early capitalist gun law ruled into “colonies”—replacing the rule of individual capitalist companies by the rule of the British, Dutch or French capitalist governments.

But racism did not disappear. In the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century the European capitalists were engaged in a political struggle against the old rulers, the landed aristocrats. Their slogans were “the rights of man”, “liberty, equality and fraternity”.

When it suited them in their struggle to prise away the colonies of a rival capitalist country, they occasionally said these rights should be given to the black people of the Caribbean, India and Africa. But in general they did not grant such rights.

How could this be justified? Only by the racist theory, dreamed up to legitimise colonial rule, that the non-European peoples of the world were in a childlike state of savagery and could not be trusted to run their own affairs.

Thus the myth of the “white man’s burden” was born. The white European capitalists had the “burden” of running things for the black inhabitants of their colonies because black people, explicitly compared to children, were incapable of doing so.

Despite this many socialists in the mid to late nineteenth century assumed that the development of this **free competition** phase of capitalism would eventually lead to the eradication of all forms of racial oppression.



1922 Demo against British rule in India

The mid-19th century saw determined and even revolutionary struggles by the bourgeoisie and middle classes of the emerging capitalist nations for outright political control of the system. They fought against the alliance of slave owners, aristocrats and merchants which had dominated the previous phase of development.

The 19th century saw the emancipation of slaves in Europe, a civil war between industrial and plantation capitalism in North America, legal emancipation of the Jews in the emerging industrialised countries, and in Britain, the lifting of many legal repressive measures against Irish Catholics.

Those who saw a future without racism in the development of the fully fledged capitalist market, were dramatically wrong.

By the 1880s the free competition system of capitalism was giving way to a new phase of capitalist development, the imperialist epoch, which was to see racism intensified and generalised.

Imperialism

The final phase in the development of systematic racial oppression under capitalism occurs in the **imperialist** epoch.

The 20th century has seen genocide practised on a systematic, even “scientific” basis. It has seen the pollution of the working class movement with support for racism. To understand why, we have to grasp the crucial role of the nation state in capitalist development.

Before capitalism the nation state did not exist—i.e. the formation of a single political entity, a state, coinciding with a more or less unified ethnic group sharing the same language and culture.

Under feudalism the German speaking peoples were divided up into hundreds of states at war with each other, often with their armies staffed by non-Germans. In feudal England the ruling class spoke a completely different language to the peasantry.

In order to develop the capitalist economy the rising bourgeoisie created the modern nation state. They fought for the unification of countries like Britain, Germany and Italy, for the rule of law throughout the nation, for a national economy protected by trade restrictions, customs, borders etc. They also created a bourgeois national culture and language, designed to identify the people of a nation state with each other and separate them off from their enemies and competitors.

Historically the development of the nation state represented progress.

It was the necessary political form of the development of the capitalist economy. But in the imperialist twen-

tieth century the nation state has become an **obstacle** to the development of the economy, with dramatic repercussions for racism and nationalist ideology.

For Marxists the word “imperialism” does not just mean one country conquering another and building an empire. It means the degeneration of capitalism into a global system of rival imperialist powers and their subjugation of all the non-imperialist countries either directly (colonies) or indirectly (semi-colonies). It means the existence of a deep rooted sickness in the capitalist economy leading, periodically, to economic catastrophes, world wars and revolutionary upheavals.

Having divided up whole continents in the 1880s, these imperialist powers fought wars, killing millions, to re-divide their conquered territories and markets.

We have a world economy divided up into competing nation states and dominated by the rulers of a tiny handful of the richest, imperialist powers. We have seen the emergence of a world economy: world trade, a world division of labour. Capitalism itself created this.

But it cannot create the **political form** that can progressively develop the world economy: a world state.

It cannot do this because each national ruling class is tied to its own nation’s economic interests which are, in turn, in conflict with the interests of other nations or blocs of nations.

The development of this imperialist system, and specifically the transformation of the role of the nation state, had several effects on racism within capitalist society.

As rival imperialists clashed they fought hard to instil the working class with blind loyalty to their own country. Difficult as it is to imagine today, the workers of the early nineteenth century held little spontaneous allegiance to “King and Country”. They were also the least imbued with racial prejudice. In nineteenth century Britain there was widespread working class support for runaway slaves, and for the Northern, anti-slavery forces in the American Civil War. There was also widespread support for revolutionary socialism.

To change this state of affairs the imperialist bosses consciously fostered the emergence of a layer within the working class whose conditions of work, income and control over production processes gave them a lifestyle very different to the rags, dirt and starvation of most unskilled workers. Marxists labelled this layer the “labour aristocracy”. To buy the loyalty of this section of workers the imperialists used the huge profits accrued from exploitation of cheap raw materials and cheap labour in the colonies.

In 1895 Cecil Rhodes, the coloniser



USA: The Ku Klux Klan (disbanded in 1869) was refounded in 1915 and grew to a membership of millions.

of Zimbabwe and South Africa, witnessed a mass meeting of the unemployed in London’s East End. He said:

“On my way home I pondered over the scene and I became more than ever convinced of the importance of imperialism . . . in order to save the 40 million inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists.”

Rhodes, along with Joseph Chamberlain, another self proclaimed “social imperialist” who became the British Colonial Secretary in 1895, set about selling the idea of “gas and water” amenities for the skilled workers, paid for by the profits of Empire and rewarded by the unstinting loyalty and votes of the workers themselves.

The organised working class movement, the trade unions, was heavily dominated by the ideological outlook of the labour aristocracy and developed much of its early politics as a form of working class Liberalism, called Lib-Labism. And there were plenty of racist theorists to provide the early workers’ leaders with a rationale for racism and national chauvinism.

Starting with Dr Robert Knox’s *The Races of Men* in 1850 and reaching its height in the works of Benjamin Kidd, whose book *Social Evolution* sold a quarter of a million copies in 1894, Social Darwinism—a racist perversion

of Darwin’s theories of evolution—added its weight to all the other forms of racist ideology.

Because Europeans had conquered the world, said the “scientific” racists, they must be a “master race”, because it is only a question of the survival of the fittest. All serious scientific evidence shows that Social Darwinism is pure rubbish. But it embodied a grim racist logic that led in a straight line to the gas chambers of Nazi Germany.

The claims of scientific justification for racism, the categorisation of entire “races” on a ladder from ape to Englishman, was only the ideological reflection of a real, material change in the nature of racism in the imperialist epoch.

With the emergence of intense national rivalry and national chauvinism, the “nation” was increasingly defined ethnically. The previous ideologies of anti-black racism, anti-Irish racism and anti-Semitism in Britain, for example, were included and subsumed in the jingoistic, national chauvinist sentiment that all “aliens” were potential enemies.

The concomitant of the rise of mass racism and national chauvinism was the identification of anybody “alien” to the nation as a real or potential enemy. Since the nations of Europe had been formed out of a mixture of all kinds of “ethnic” peoples, bourgeois nationalist ideology had to construct a “racial” type, a ladder of racial supremacy.

Thus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries we see the onset, across the world, of sustained attacks on the racially oppressed: the renewal of pogroms against the Jews in the Russian empire, the overturning of reforms granted to freed slaves in the southern USA, the genocide against Native Americans, the anti-Semitic outcry prompted by the Dreyfus case in France, the passing of the first Aliens Act in Britain in response to the influx of East European refugees and racist attacks on the black communities of Liverpool and Cardiff by white mobs.

Mass racist organisations emerged to enforce white supremacy with violence. Whipped up by the bosses, but drawn from the middle classes and the poorest and least organised labourers in the towns and countryside, these movements formed the prototypes for later fascist organisations.

In Russia there was the Union of Russian Peoples: misleadingly called “Black Hundreds”, these were in fact white anti-Jewish mobs. In the USA the Ku Klux Klan (disbanded in 1869) was refounded in 1915 and grew to a membership of millions. In Britain the British Brothers League was founded, dedicated to the defence of the British Empire and to mass street demos against Jewish immigrants in London’s

1★WHAT IS RACISM?

East End. It played a major part in forcing the implementation of the Aliens Act (1906).

Capitalism created and developed racism, first through slavery and colonial plunder, then through the myth of the “white man’s burden” and through imperialism, the creation of a “labour aristocracy” and a pseudo scientific theory of racial stereotypes and hierarchies.

Imperialism’s contribution to the development of racism was to systematise and generalise all the preceding forms of racism, whether spurred by colonialism, slavery or anti-Semitism, and fuse them under the banner of virulent national chauvinism.

Imperialism brought a massive intensification of racism and its ideological generalisation and systematisation. It did this despite the nineteenth century’s eradication of much of the original material bases of racist ideology: e.g. slavery and the legal repression of Jews.

This generalised and systematised character of racism is what explains modern capitalism’s ability to reproduce racism constantly. Modern capitalism continually finds and categorises new minorities and scapegoats. It maintains colonialist ideology long after most of the “colonies” have been converted into self governing semi-colonies. It maintains a vicious system of racial oppression even as “positive images” of black athletes, businessmen and musicians swarm across our TV screens.

The root cause of this is the ultimately degenerate and reactionary role of capitalism itself. It can no longer develop the world economy in a progressive way. Its nation state system is strangling the world economy. Its demand for a world labour market draws millions of non-white workers into the imperialist countries only to condemn them to a life of second class citizenship, harassment and oppression.

The imperialist epoch fused and systematised previous forms of racism and relations of oppression under the common racism inherent in national chauvinism.

And by plunging humanity into devastating world wars, by arbitrarily drawing the boundaries of states right through the middle of emerging Third World nations, by detonating repeated economic crises which impoverish millions and set them off in a frantic search for scapegoats, the imperialist system provided humanity with ample opportunity to exercise this new and generalised form of social oppression.

Racist ideas are the ideological reflection of racial oppression, a material social system. Systematic racial oppression is intrinsic to the capitalist system. It can only be destroyed by

destroying that system, and the division of the world into nation states that it has engendered.

The working class

Who can destroy the system that creates and reproduces racial oppression?

For Marxists the answer is the working class.

Irrespective of the workers’ level of political and anti-racist consciousness at any one time, it is the material interests of the working class which convince us of this.

The working class—those who work for a wage, with no money-making property like shares, or business premises—will have to sweep away capitalism in order to provide itself, and the rest of society, with a life free from poverty, hardship, and unemployment.

While it might seem that the capitalists are an “international” class—jetting about the world to meetings and holiday locations, with a finger in the pie of a dozen countries, speaking different languages—in fact the only really internationalist class is the working class.

The capitalists are tied to national formations of capital. The workers, in the famous words of Karl Marx, have no fatherland.

To make socialism work the working class will have to abolish national boundaries, planning production across continents and the globe. It cannot build socialism in one country, as the bitter experience of the former USSR shows.

The working class has a material interest in the abolition of imperialism and capitalist exploitation, which are the root causes of racism.

“But many white workers are racist” comes the objection. “And perhaps the majority are at best only passive anti-racists”.

This is true. But it is not permanent. Racist ideology in the working class is not evenly spread. It is stronger in certain sections. It is weakest, and can be overcome most easily, wherever workers are in struggle.

Capitalist culture constantly bombards workers with racist propaganda.

It varies from the subtle intonations of BBC presenters to the overt bigotry of Murdoch journalists like Richard Littlejohn. But if it were just a case of capitalist propaganda, racism would not be so deep rooted, so easily rekindled and re-created.

The bosses’ racist propaganda finds roots in the minds of workers because there are material divisions within the working class. The most prevalent form of these divisions is the everyday competition between working class people for resources, services, houses. When

capitalism enters periods of stagnant growth and economic crisis—as it has since the early 1970s—it becomes a question of “my son’s council house means your son is homeless”, or “my job versus yours”.

The elementary solution to the competition between workers which capitalism fosters is solidarity. When working class people stand together and fight for houses and jobs for all, or more often against job cuts and poor housing, they stop competing with each other and start to see who the real enemy is.

Competition amongst workers is always encouraged by the bosses, and where possible many of them use racism to stir up such competition and weaken the working class as a whole.

Racial oppression is based on systematic disadvantage. It is easy to see why white workers can experience a short term, temporary, material benefit as a result, and why some can be induced to participate in maintaining the racist system.

The experience of Tower Hamlets, in particular the Isle of Dogs where the fascist Derek Beackon was briefly elected as a Nazi councillor in 1993, shows how a combination of propaganda and short term benefits, real and imaginary, lead to the growth of racism.

The main issue on the Isle of Dogs was housing. The working class community, living in the shadow of Canary Wharf, the symbol of Thatcherite capitalism, suffered from sub-standard housing and, more urgently, a shortage of housing for those starting new families.

For years the local Labour and Liberal administrations had refrained from placing Bangladeshi immigrants on the “Island” because they feared stirring up prejudice amongst the largely white workers there.

Thus, from the start, the Isle of Dogs was a monument to racist housing policy. When black workers did start to be housed there it provoked a growing wave of racist resentment. This was partly fuelled by the BNP’s intervention, but overwhelmingly it was spontaneous racism, not overt Nazism. It was a racism that the official working class movement—long since weakened by the demise of the well organised London Docks—did little to counter.

The local white working class was fighting to maintain a racist compromise or concession it had held for years: unlike the rest of the borough of Tower Hamlets it was to be “spared” an influx of Bangladeshi migrants, leaving “local” young families a better chance of getting a council house. Of course on top of this there were all sorts of illusory ideas that white “islanders” would gain from the exclusion of blacks.

But it would be ludicrous to deny that a small scrap of short term material benefit resulted from the council's preferential treatment of whites in its housing policy.

That was the material root of the active racism of a section of workers on the Isle of Dogs. Generalised to the level of society it is obvious that if one section is discriminated against—as black people are in jobs, housing, education, justice—another section can feel a short term material benefit from this oppression.

Another important factor in the maintenance of working class racism is the existence of a relatively privileged layer of workers whose lifestyles and incomes separate them off from the rest of the working class and allow them to be the conveyor belt for racism.

Most of the white racist workers on the Isle of Dogs were not privileged “labour aristocrats”. But many of the most vehement organisers of racism **are**—in the Isle of Dogs and throughout the country.

The racist football hooligan—with his designer clothes, well paid office job or skilled self-employed status—may be a caricature; but it is one based on fact.

The fact is that the bosses use such layers of the working class to disseminate all their ideas—racism, nationalism, reformism.

However today, unlike when Lenin and Engels discussed the emergence of this privileged, pro-capitalist layer, the capitalists also have other conduits for racist and pro-capitalist ideas, notably a mass education system and the capitalist-controlled mass media.

The point of discussing the material roots of racism within the working class is to prepare ourselves for the fact that, like it or not, some sections will be more resistant than others to the power of solidarity against the common enemy, the bosses.

Nevertheless experience shows that there is nothing absolute or permanent about working class racism. It can be eradicated, or at least marginalised, through struggle.

Workers are susceptible to racist ideology because they are bombarded with it daily, because they are forced into competition with one another and because systematic disadvantage for blacks can mean short term advantages for some whites. This is not the same as saying that all white workers “benefit” from their relative privileges in relation to semi-colonial workers. We reject the idea that all the workers of the imperialist countries are racist or that they form, *en masse*, a labour aristocracy.

Long term it is possible and necessary for the vast majority of white workers to learn, through struggle and



Black and white workers unite to fight redundancies at Leyland Daf

solidarity, that the real enemy is the capitalists, and that racism only weakens and poisons the working class struggle.

Black liberation

Because racism is rooted in capitalist society and the imperialist system, **racism can be destroyed.**

Ours is not a strategy for living with racism, for softening it, or for withdrawing from racist society to start again somewhere else. It is a strategy for overthrowing capitalism, imperialism and racism through workers' revolution.

Socialism will abolish class exploitation and the exploitation of the Third World by the imperialist multi-nationals. International socialism will break down national borders and destroy the breeding-ground for national chauvinism and bigotry. Our strategy for black

liberation is our strategy for socialism. The two cannot be separated for a single moment.

Only the working class has the material interest in overthrowing capitalism. And only the working class has the social power to destroy capitalism. Nothing happens in society without the workers. Through collective action the workers can bring capitalist society to a standstill, defeat the forces of repression through their own armed, revolutionary struggle, and start to run society in the interests of the vast majority.

But the majority of the working class in Britain is white, and many white workers are racist. Even those who are not overtly racist harbour lurking prejudices.

Does that mean that black liberation has to come as an afterthought in the revolutionary struggle? There are many in the working class movement—even some calling themselves revolu-



tionaries—who would say so. They say: “if only black and white workers fight alongside each other, now, for things like wages and conditions, then racism will start to disappear automatically.”

We reject that view. Racism will not disappear automatically, because it is a reflection of real divisions—within society and within the working class.

When black and white workers live alongside each other and struggle together, the barriers of racism can begin to be broken down.

But to win the working class as a whole to the fight for black liberation, a **conscious** struggle against racism is necessary.

The struggle has to be based on the maximum unity of the working class. But black workers should never have to wait until sufficient numbers of white workers break from racism before they themselves fight back.

Racism rears its head even within the workers’ own organisations.

For that reason we support the right of black workers to organise within the labour and trade union movement, to identify racism and challenge it, at work, in society and in their own trade unions.

Far from dividing the working class, this form of black workers’ organisation is essential if a fighting unity is to be built.

Black self organisation within the working class is a key weapon in the

struggle for black liberation.

The revolutionary socialist programme for black liberation is tied to the wider goal of socialism. Its aim is to turn today’s struggle against every manifestation of oppression and exploitation into a general struggle against the root cause—capitalism.

That does not mean we ignore struggles to get a better deal in the here and now. Revolutionaries—black and white—have to be in the forefront of those struggles.

But whereas the reformists and the “community leaders” will fight a deportation struggle as a “special case” we will try to turn it into a fight against all racist deportations.

Whereas the “respectable” black leaders will use the increase in racist attacks to call for better police-community liaison, we will use it to step up the fight for organised self defence.

And as for leadership, revolutionary socialists unashamedly fight to become the leaders of the struggle against racism. But for us leadership means something radically different than what it means for the careerists, the MPs and the bureaucrats.

The people who will lead the socialist revolution are the workers themselves. Black people are destined to play a major role in that revolutionary struggle.

Revolutionary socialists fight for organisations and methods of struggle

that can allow the vast mass of ordinary people to lead their own struggles: workers’ councils, workplace and estate committees, community defence associations and so on.

But to fight to make revolutionary leadership a reality we need a revolutionary workers’ party.

Our fight for socialism and black liberation will only succeed through dedicated and determined struggle.

Victory will not be handed to us on a plate.

That is why we need an integrated, black and white, working class party that is organised for action.

Within the revolutionary party there should be full rights for black people to caucus separately and positive action to bring black people into full participation at every level.

But because our goals of socialism and black liberation are intertwined we reject the idea, canvassed by some black socialists, of a separate black socialist party.

This implies a separate black revolution.

In Britain, indeed in any capitalist country in which black people are an oppressed minority, it is absurd. It would not even be half a revolution.

We want a full blown revolution, and for that we need the majority of the working class, and a united revolutionary party—united against racism and united against capitalism.■

Labour's black MPs: Diane Abbott, Keith Vaz, Paul Boateng, Bernie Grant



Reforming the system?

Assimilation, integration, Labour and multiculturalism

Marxists are **revolutionary integrationists**. We reject the demand for black people “assimilate” into white society. We reject the strategy that calls for black people simply to “integrate”, through equal opportunity policies, into the capitalist system

Instead we fight for the integration of black workers and youth into the working class movement.

This is very different from the assimilation and integration demanded by the capitalists. The experience of black people in Britain since the war shows why both this form of assimilation and capitalist integrationism are false strategies for fighting racism.

The “cricket test”

It is commonplace in Western Europe and the USA for ethnic and national minorities to be confronted with tremendous pressure to assimilate into the majority population. This has been especially true in post-war Britain.

A cornerstone of post-war establishment “Race Relations” was the call on immigrant communities to abandon their existing culture - their language, mode of dress, music, traditions, indeed any patterns of social behaviour that were particular to their national or ethnic group. Instead they were supposed to embrace the prevailing culture in their new country of residence.

While this approach went decidedly out of vogue in Britain in the 1970s, to be replaced in the education system and local authorities by the doctrine of multiculturalism (see below), it has been making something of a come back over recent years. The right-wing Tory politician and former minister Norman Tebbit summed this up with his infamous “Cricket Test”.

According to Tebbit it was understandable if first generation immigrants should support India, Pakistan or the West Indies when they play England at cricket, but if their children do the same then there is a problem: they are not assimilating. This petty example was carefully chosen by Tebbit to make a deadly serious point. Black people were being told that if they encounter disadvantage in Britain, it is a natural consequence of being “different”, “alien”, and of somehow refusing to change. The argument is an excuse and justification for British racism.

Yet from the onset of post-war immigration there were many black people who at first attempted to assimilate, and even some who argued that a gradual process of assimilation was the best way to erode the racist attitudes and discrimination they encountered in Britain.

This approach was soon revealed to be a totally inadequate response to racism.

Marxists put no obstacles in the path

of genuinely **free and voluntary** assimilation of peoples. Our aim is a world free of borders and nation states, in which the resources of the entire planet and the labour of all humanity can be applied to meet the needs of everybody. That is why revolutionary socialists call for the broadest possible interaction and solidarity between working people of different nations and ethnic groups.

Far from upholding hallowed “national traditions”, let alone actively promoting any bourgeois national culture (even that of an oppressed nationality), we look to a future in which humanity will at last have the possibility of creating a new culture - voluntarily combining all the best from national cultures and abandoning those elements that are based on the ignorance, oppression and despair of the past.

This is what the Russian revolutionary leader, Lenin, meant when he wrote of “the international culture of democracy and of the world working class movement”, a culture which would take “*from each national culture only its democratic and socialist elements*”, whilst opposing each and every reactionary element or violation of the rights of one nation by another.

But the British establishment’s repeated demand on immigrants to assimilate has nothing in common with the democratic and internationalist principle of free and voluntary integra-

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tion. On the contrary the demand is based on force, fraud and racism.

Encouragement to assimilate was founded on the carefully cultivated myth that Britain was a land of unbounded opportunity, in which prospects for advancement were available to all citizens on an equal basis, irrespective of national or ethnic origin. The predominant culture itself - the culture of British capitalism - contained deeply embedded assumptions of black racial inferiority that had been promoted from the earliest days of colonialism and slavery.

Coercion was widely used to compel certain forms of assimilation, such as in the spheres of language and dress. And above all, black immigrants who at first genuinely attempted to assimilate were obstructed at every turn by systematic racist discrimination.

The “zcolour bar”

Many black immigrants from the Caribbean in the 1950s expected a swift and easy path into the mainstream of British life. In Jamaica and Barbados the colonial authorities had practiced a policy of **Anglicisation** since the abolition of slavery - incorporating British cultural, political and social attitudes into the education system and religious institutions on a vast scale. Many West Indians had fought for Britain in the world wars; the Queen's birthday was one of the main festival days.

School children were saturated with the notion that they were British: they saluted the British flag every morning, sang English songs, were taught “proper” English in place of their own language, played cricket as their principal sport etc. They were taught how the British parliament had abolished the slave trade.

Their teachers did not dwell on which nation had developed and profited from the slave trade.

This forcible grafting of a ready-made national culture on to a subject colonial people could not be maintained indefinitely. That it could be attempted at all - quite unlike the circumstances that confronted the British colonialists in India - was a direct result of the violent uprooting and dissolution of the pre-colonial culture of African-Caribbeans.

The traumatic severing of the black slaves from their prior social system and culture, and the social atomisation of them as slaves, enabled the colonial authorities to attempt the systematic implantation of the culture of Victorian England.

The large scale migration of the 1950s exposed this fraud to the cold light of the English day. Between 1953 and 30 June 1962 265,737 immigrants

arrived from the West Indies.

They encountered systematic discrimination in all walks of life. The worst paid and most demeaning jobs were reserved for them. Job discrimination, quotas and even outright colour bars were widespread across industry.

Extensive job downgrading occurred as racist employment practices kept the bulk of the skilled jobs white. Black clerical and professional employees suffered acutely. Only a handful found skilled or professional work; the overwhelming majority were forced to take the lowest paid manual jobs, semi-skilled or unskilled.

In the allocation of housing, racist discrimination was even more acute. Surveys in the 1950s revealed that only one in every six landlords in London would accept black tenants; in Birmingham the figure was only 15 in every 1000. The infamous signs stating “No Blacks” proliferated at rented properties across the major cities. Overcrowded in temporary accommodation, able to secure only the worst-maintained housing, prey to profiteering landlords and estate agents offering properties only at extra fees, the inevitable result was to concentrate black people in distinct, run-down areas of the inner cities.

The very “assimilation” that formed the sum total of establishment advice to the black immigrant was being obstructed at every turn by colour prejudice and institutionalised racial oppression.

Above all, popular white racism reinforced the lesson that the prevailing national culture itself constituted an insuperable obstacle to the assimilation of black immigrants.

Abuse was a daily event. Racist strikes took place against the “competition” posed by black workers in industry. Transport workers in the West Bromwich and Wolverhampton Corpo-

rations struck against the employment of black workers and in favour of stricter quotas on the numbers of black employees. By 1958 white racist antagonism to the increased presence of black immigrants in the workplace and in the urban environment flared into violence, with the return of racist rioting to the streets of the cities. Gangs of whites attacked blacks in simultaneous outbursts in Nottingham and in Notting Hill in West London.

Very much the same pattern existed for Asians, especially from the sub-continent. Encouraged to come to Britain to do menial jobs, they were then subject to ghettoisation and racism. The epicentre of the British Commonwealth, which they had been taught was the centre of civilisation, was soon exposed as the crucible of racism.

Four decades on, the prospects for a gradual process of assimilation into British capitalist society as a solution to racism look even more distant than in the 1950s.

Whereas Race Relations legislation, introduced by Labour governments in 1965, 1968 and 1976, brought in some legal restrictions on race discrimination, the post-war years witnessed a simultaneous process of the tightening of immigration controls against black immigrants from Commonwealth countries. Although tendencies towards assimilation have been significant, with increased instances of intermarriage, a degree of integration in schools and workplaces and a discernible process of cultural assimilation among the more middle class black people, this is far from being a uniform or even a predominant pattern.

Why? Because racism is not declining. It is on the rise.

Continuing discrimination in jobs and education can be seen from the unemployment figures. In 1991 the national unemployment rate was 9%.



Immigrant workers queue for food, South London, 1948

Bradford, June 1995: Asian youth resist police harassment



For African-Caribbeans it was 16%, and among Bangladeshis and Pakistanis an extraordinary one in four were out of work. The Labour Force Survey of 1993 showed that the unemployment rate had reached 28% for African-Caribbeans and 35% for Asians, with black workers generally being seven times more likely than whites to lose their jobs. Opportunities for promotion remain far more restricted - white workers are twice as likely to rise out of manual and unskilled positions.

The criminal justice system continues to discriminate against black defendants both in the rate of convictions and in sentencing.

The continuing effect of immigration and nationality legislation is to identify black people as outsiders or aliens, to discriminate against families whose relatives wish to join them in Britain, and to subject black communities to routine harassment and violence by police and immigration officials.

Racial attacks continue to spiral, increasing year on year to the point where, by 1993, there were an estimated 140,000 such incidents.

But the myth of peaceful, gradualist assimilation is far from dead. Indeed "liberal" capitalism has every interest in promoting this myth. It continues to receive assistance from the small black-British bourgeoisie, for whom the concept of a viable anti-racist capitalism has obvious attractions.

The principal mouthpiece of black bourgeoisification, *The Voice* newspaper, went so far as to revive the language of the colonial Anglicisation policy when it claimed in its review of 1989 that:

"The eighties have brought us closer to a goal we have long been pursuing: integration into British society. As it ends, we are now generally more prosperous, secure and settled into the

'mother country'."

For the mass of black people in Britain, the notion that assimilation into British national culture is the answer to racism has been proved utterly wrong.

It is a reactionary utopia: utopian because the prevailing culture is itself racist, presenting black people with enormous obstacles to full and free integration, reactionary because it raises the inherently racist demand to abandon of the cultural legacy of Caribbean, African and Asian societies in favour of a purportedly "superior" British culture.

Above all, assimilation is not an option for the majority of the racially oppressed. Skin colour cannot be changed, and it remains key to racist discrimination. Even generations of mixed marriages in areas where black communities have lived in Britain for over a century, such as Cardiff and Liverpool, have not lessened or overcome racism.

Whilst the "assimilation" of ethnic minorities is at one level a process which proceeds spontaneously in capitalist society, it does not proceed smoothly, uninterrupted, without coercion or in a single direction. The tendency of the capitalist system towards economic crisis, the sharpening of antagonisms and rivalries between bourgeois nation states, and the continuing domination and super-exploitation by the advanced capitalist states of the entire semi-colonial world, is strengthening racism.

The end of the Cold War and the old bi-polar world order has sharpened tendencies towards the emergence and consolidation of rival imperialist blocs. The increased pace of the drive towards European economic and political union has brought in its wake a renewed wave of restrictive racist

border controls - the rise of "Fortress Europe" - as well as giving impetus to the development of avowedly racist far-right and fascist parties in every one of the European powers.

This has happened before. In the 1930s, those Jews who imagined that assimilation into bourgeois society alone would protect them from the ravages of anti-Semitism were to be freed from this illusion in the most barbaric manner imaginable. If the assimilated Jews - whose identity was by no means as immediately visible as that of black people today - were subjected under the doctrine of "racial purity" to ruthless investigations of ethnic origin which disregarded supposed "assimilation", how much less can this be a realistic option for black people today?

Black capitalism?

Escape into the capitalist class is not an option for the millions of black people in Britain. Under-investment, competition and plain racist discrimination profoundly limit the prospects even for those few who have the capital to start a serious business venture.

What is more, racist ideas remain necessary today for capitalism to justify its economic enslavement of the black semi-colonies and to keep the working class itself divided along racial lines. Thus even black capitalists have been disappointed to find that their newly acquired class brothers and sisters in the bourgeoisie are not colour-blind.

Money, capital and social status cannot wholly obliterate the experience of racism even for the tiny minority of black people that possess them. What is more, the material interests of black capitalists will of necessity become separate from and opposed to the interests of the working class black majority.

The example of George Ward, black newspaper proprietor and boss of the notorious anti-union Grunwicks company in London, is instructive.

Recounting a personal experience that will be familiar to countless black applicants for professional posts today, he wrote:

"I had an unpleasant taste of racial discrimination when I pursued my luck in interviews with one or two small accounting firms that no doubt imagined, from my name, that I was purely English [i.e. white]. I got an immediate rebuff when they saw the colour of my skin."

But Ward's subsequent career only confirms the Marxist view that black capitalists are no friends of black workers.

In 1977 Ward's small film processing company - Grunwicks - became a household name as his refusal to grant

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Muhmamed Idrish fought and won against deportation - with union backing

trade union rights to his predominantly Asian workforce became a focal point for resistance by the trade union and anti-racist movement. No matter how bitter one's personal experience of racism may be, it is impossible to become and remain a private capitalist without maintaining a ruthless exploitation of the workforce.

The creation of a small black bourgeoisie and a growing black middle class has political consequences for the movement for black liberation. It provides the material foundation for the growth of ideologies within the black community that both support the economic and political status quo, and seek to limit the struggle of the mass of black people within a framework acceptable to that status quo.

In Britain today the black middle class and the small layer of black capitalists form the material foundations for black MPs, such as the lawyers Paul Boateng and Keith Vaz, who do precious little to repay their black working class voters for their expensive suits and beautiful homes. Neither of them have spoken out against the constant wave of racist deportations, and Boateng's days as a critic of police harassment of the black community are over. Both are uncritical supporters of Labour's leader Tony Blair, who is fixed on abandoning even the most limited of Labour's commitments to the interests of poorest sections of society.

Capitalism inflicted slavery, colonial rule, segregation and discrimination on black people; they are arguably capitalism's greatest victims.

Joining the capitalist class is an op-

tion available only to a tiny minority of black people, and in availing themselves of this option they take up a stance which is opposed to the liberation of the majority of black people.

For the working class majority of black people there is no possibility of joining the exploiters and oppressors.

They can rise only with their class, not out of their class.

The Labour Party

There are two sides to racist ideology: an overt, vicious racism and a disguised "liberal" racism.

The latter manifests itself in reformism. Reformist socialism aims to win crumbs from the capitalists' table, and limits itself to peaceful protest and parliamentary rhetoric. In Britain, the reformist Labour Party commands the electoral support of the overwhelming majority of African-Caribbean and Asian voters.

The reason for this is that the majority of black people in Britain are working class. Since its foundation, the Labour Party has remained tied at every level to the trade unions, the bedrock organisations of the working class.

As far back as 1906, the political and trade union organisation of the workers in Trinidad - the Trinidad Workingmen's Association - affiliated to the British Labour Party and conducted a campaign in the British West Indies for economic and political goals, such as shorter working hours, sick leave, and against the "colour bar".

In post-war Britain high concentra-

tions of black workers in low-paid, unskilled jobs and in industries with large concentrated workforces - such as transport, the health service, textiles and manufacturing - have seen high proportions of African-Caribbean workers belonging to trade unions compared with whites. The election of Bill Morris as the first black leader of a British trade union, the TGWU, is in part a reflection of this high union membership amongst African-Caribbeans.

Asians are a partial exception to the pattern as far as union membership is concerned, principally because of the high levels of part-time and home working among Asian women. But they have consistently voted, in their overwhelming majority, for Labour. In general elections the Labour Party has come to rely heavily on the votes of its black supporters and, alone among the parliamentary political parties, it currently has five black MPs - though if the black 5% of the population were represented proportionally, there would be over 30 black MPs.

How has Labour repaid its debt to black working class people? In power Labour has time and again introduced restrictions on black immigration, supported racist policing and defended racist employment policies.

In August 1965 the Labour government of Harold Wilson renewed the Tories' 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, specifically adding a rule restricting "coloured immigration". In 1968 Labour brought in the Kenyan Asian Act which banned most of the Asians, who held British passports, from entering Britain through a discriminatory work-related voucher system. This left 150,000 Asians stateless. Wilson hypocritically claimed that the reasons for this were not racial but "geographical".

In 1969 James Callaghan, then Labour Home Secretary, bowed to Tory pressure and barred citizens from the "New Commonwealth" - countries with predominantly black populations - from entering Britain to marry their fiancées. In 1971 the Tories finished the job by banning primary immigration altogether.

Back in office in 1974 Wilson and Callaghan took up where the Tories had left off. Despite the Labour Party conference having voted to repeal the 1971 Act, they kept it in place. Labour Minister, Merlyn Rees, admitted that the laws were designed to stop black people coming in and declared that they would be toughened. Under Labour disgusting "virginity tests" were introduced on Asian women arriving to marry their fiancées.

In 1976 a Labour Green Paper on nationality laid the groundwork for the Tories' 1981 Nationality Act. Michael

Foot - a so-called "left winger" - issued a Department of Employment memorandum saying that work permits for blacks should not be renewed if a white worker could be found who was available for the job.

Why has the Labour Party introduced this succession of racist laws? The reason is that Labour is bound, hand and foot, to the interests of the capitalist class.

During the long boom, and the consequent labour shortage, after the Second World War, British capitalism was keen to encourage workers from the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent to come to Britain as cheap labour. As popular racism rose in Britain in the early 1960s and as the period of post-war economic expansion drew to a close at the end of the decade, the capitalists reversed their policy.

The Labour Party, despite claiming to stand for the interests of working people, is firmly committed to working within and maintaining the capitalist system.

They leave the power of big business and the unelected state bureaucracy and civil service untouched. They can only govern with the consent of the ruling class. Thus they uphold the fictitious "national interest" - in reality the interests of the capitalists - as opposed to those of the workers they claim to represent.

In the face of the sharp rise in racism in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Labour Party studiously avoided championing the interests of the black working class in order to avoid losing votes from white racists.

Today, after years of anti-racist campaigning, an increased degree of integration in the schools and the workplaces, and above all a new awareness of the importance of the black vote, Labour presents an anti-racist image to the electorate.

In local authorities throughout the 1980s Labour administrations promoted equal opportunities policies challenging the more overt forms of racial discrimination in employment.

The new ideology which Labour shares with many other mainstream politicians, educationalists and institutions such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) is that of **multiculturalism**.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism stresses the need for inter-racial harmony, and declares its aim to be a society that tolerates a diversity of cultures. Black and white should therefore have equal rights and equal opportunities before the law, it says.

In this way, multiculturalists think that racial prejudice can be progres-

sively undermined through education, until it vanishes altogether. People of different national origins, different colours, religions and cultures, will gradually learn to accept each other; the whole of society will be enriched in the process.

Clearly revolutionary socialists share these aims. Yet we reject multiculturalism as a strategy for black liberation. Why?

The answer lies in our understanding of the root causes of racism, what it is that gives rise to it and reproduces it, year in, year out, generation after generation.

Multiculturalism works on the assumption that racism is a mere prejudice without any material foundation, a hangover from the past.

It can, according to this view, be progressively eradicated through education. It is an irrational prejudice that will die out once it is exposed to the compelling force of rational argument, just as the idea that the earth is flat died out.

One big billboard advertisement from the Commission for Racial Equality summed this up. Under the words, "There are some places where racism doesn't exist", it showed a picture of three babies, with the words "here, here and here" written across on their heads.

Now it is true - despite the arguments of the racists - that very young children show no innate predisposition towards racial prejudice. But the multiculturalists of the CRE are suggesting something more: that only poor education and exposure to the surviving remnants of racist ideas changes this situation and turns white kids into racists in later life.

The conclusion to be drawn from the multiculturalist approach is that education and legal reform will create inter-racial harmony, without any need to make fundamental changes to the economic system or the institutions of the state.

It is a blueprint for inter-racial harmony under capitalism.

Capitalist society constantly re-creates the conditions for racism. We support every legal reform and education programme that genuinely lessens the impact of racial discrimination. But we should never lose sight of what it is that created the racist ideology in the first place: capitalism, colonialism, the slave trade and imperialism.

In the sphere of education - both in the schools and, more widely, through the media - multiculturalism provides information and knowledge about different cultures, nationalities and traditions, in order to present them on an equal footing, as "equally valid".

This is fine as far as it goes - which is not very far at all. It is one thing to teach primary school children about Ramadan and Diwali, but quite another to expose how black people are discriminated against in housing, employment and the criminal justice system.

That would mean going beyond an education on the "equal validity" of different cultures towards explaining the systematic oppression of black people. It would mean going beyond *multicultural* education to *anti-racist* education.

This may seem like a small step - but it is a step too far for the multicultural establishment, because it is directly political. It would be illegal under the Education Act - it would mean "bringing politics into the schools". Mean-



Filipino hospital workers fight deportation

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1984: Bangladeshi widow Afia Begum and child are deported

while the Tories are able to introduce a new national curriculum focusing on the “achievements of Britain in history” - all “non-political” of course.

A similar approach can be seen in the multiculturalists’ stress on “positive images”.

The idea here is that images on television and in the media should get away from stereotyped racist images of black people and focus on black success stories. In this way, they believe, not only will whites accept black people more easily, but black youth will have “role models” as examples to aspire to.

But the persistent images of successful black executives, businessmen and women conceal rather than challenge the realities of racism.

Black youth are less likely to get work and promotion than their white counterparts not because they lack “role models” but because there is racial discrimination built into the system. They will not get jobs or promotion just by showing more images of successful black people on TV.

On the contrary, the effect of this approach is to deny that any real obstacles to black advancement exist.

Ultimately “positive images” suffers from the same weakness as the strategy of building up black capitalism - it is based on the lie that every individual really has the same chance to succeed. We just need to be told “you can do it” and the door will be open.

For millions the door won’t open. It has to be kicked down by the working class, black and white.

What about legal reforms? Labour’s

1991 document *Opportunity Britain* - a thoroughly multiculturalist document - supports the recommendations of the CRE to extend the Race Equality Act into government, the police, prisons and the immigration service, and to give local authorities the specific duty to combat racism.

Ethnic monitoring is to ensure equal opportunities legislation is put into practice. The police will, we are told, be made to follow up cases of racial harassment sympathetically.

But the weakness of “equality before the law” as a solution can be seen on any High Street in a black area. Police flag down expensive cars driven by black people and systematically harass them. Brian Douglas, a black man murdered by police in South London in May 1995 was stopped for an alleged motoring offence.

Yet the motoring laws of this country are technically “colour blind”.

Similarly, racial discrimination by employers is against the law.

But the problems of proving to the satisfaction of a judge or industrial tribunal that an employer discriminated against somebody *on racial grounds* are immense - a whole pattern of blatant discrimination has to be proved. And of course, hiring and firing remains in the hands of employers.

One final, and major feature of reformist multiculturalism is its reactionary attitude to immigration control. Labour politician Roy Hattersley once summed this up famously:

“Without integration, limitation [of immigration] is inexcusable; without limitation, integration is impossible.”

This means: in order to have good race relations there have to be strict immigration controls. The priority here is not to defeat racism, but to maintain “inter-racial harmony”.

Immigration laws are aimed at calming the fears of white racists about a black influx into Britain. And this lets the cat out of the bag. It is an admission that all immigration controls are racist, that they are aimed specifically at stopping black people entering Britain.

At root multiculturalism sees the presence of a black population in Britain as an historical accident, a once-only event which is the prime cause of modern racism.

Since the existence of a black minority is what causes or “stirs up” racism, the white racists have to be assured that there will be no further waves of black migration in the future. It assumes that if white people are given time to adjust, to work with black people in the workplace and live with them on the estates, eventually racism will disappear altogether.

Multiculturalism is bourgeois integrationism. It would never have gained support in the first place if it had not corresponded to one element of reality.

Capitalism has integrated black people into the workforce. The overt racism and petty apartheid in pubs, clubs and rented accommodation which were the forms racism took in the 1950s and 1960s are less widespread now - though they have not disappeared completely.

And there has been a section of the African-Caribbean, and in particular the Asian population, which is developing as a small but relatively prosperous petit-bourgeois layer, concentrated in the professions and small businesses.

But multiculturalism cannot give a coherent explanation of the fact that in the Britain of the 1990s racism is nevertheless on the rise, as is racial inequality in jobs, housing and education.

In periods of capitalist prosperity multiculturalism is, at best, an inadequate programme of reforms. In periods of crisis and recession it is reduced to sheer utopianism, and even to concealing the extent and nature of racial discrimination and prejudice in society.

Above all, it is a strategy to be carried out from above, by politicians in parliament and the council chamber, by media professionals and educationists.

It is more liberal than Tebbit’s cricket test, but useless as a means of achieving black liberation.

Like its political counterpart, reformism, it has no place for the struggle against racism from below, least of all by working class black people themselves.■

The legacy of black nationalism

The 1990s have seen an upsurge of interest in black leaders of the past. Many American black leaders from previous decades have become symbols of resistance today, none more so than Malcolm X. Yet you only have to attend one political meeting to realise that there are many different interpretations of the ideas and strategies which these leaders represented. To draw on what was best and most progressive from such thinkers and fighters we need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their strategies for black liberation.

Marcus Garvey Back to Africa?

A persistent strain of thought in black movements argues that racism cannot be defeated in the predominantly white societies of Europe and the USA.

The fundamental problem, they reason, is that the African slaves were long ago separated from their culture, tradition and land. Their descendants will be second class citizens for as long as they remain divided into several disparate communities scattered in foreign lands.

The only answer, according to this trend, is to reverse the world-historic effects of slavery. The Black diaspora must return to Africa. There black people are a majority, apparently unencumbered by the oppression, crisis of identity and lack of status that afflicts blacks in the West.

This ideology of Returnism emerged with great force in the USA through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), led by Marcus Garvey. The UNIA had begun as a small grouping in Jamaica, organising only a few scores of people, but began to grow rapidly when Garvey moved to Harlem in 1916.

Garvey accepted the capitalist myth that opportunities were there to be taken by enterprising blacks who wanted to get rich, and believed this to be the key to "black improvement".

He argued that "in the individual himself is that resilient power that can be turned to usefulness". For Garvey, the tragedy was that unlike more successful peoples, black people had sim-



Marcus Garvey

ply not understood this. In one sense he blamed black people themselves, not racism, for their plight. He argued:

"The realisation of this makes one man great, makes the race successful and powerful; while the lack of this reasoning makes a man impotent, helpless, blaming all and sundry for his fate.

It makes a race incompetent, and incapable of successfully competing with others, thus meriting the misfortunes and misery attendant upon such lack of reasoning and healthy thinking . . ."

Garvey's UNIA placed great emphasis on promoting black businesses, including the Negro Factories Corporation and the Black Star shipping line.

Ironically, some of these businesses were relatively successful precisely because of the legal segregation that reinforced the second-class status of blacks under "Jim Crow", the name

3★LEGACY OF BLACK NATIONALISM

given to apartheid in the USA.

The spread of racial segregation around the turn of century forced new black-owned business to look not for white patrons but for custom within the black community. Between 1904 and 1914, at the height of the Jim Crow restrictions, the number of black businesses actually doubled in the USA.

This explains why separatist ideas—that it was in the interests of blacks to develop separately and apart from whites—gained support among all classes of the black population in the US at that time. Garvey gave voice to this. Initially he focused on efforts to persuade Britain—the world's leading colonial and imperialist power of the day—to grant black people a separate state.

But by the end of the war Garvey was starting to look elsewhere. Stressing self-improvement and relying on no other force but black people themselves, he called for a "return" of US and West Indian blacks to Africa and the establishment there of a black state. The Black Star Line specialised in conveying black people to Africa.

The UNIA attracted tremendous support and mushroomed into a real mass political movement of the US blacks. By the beginning of the 1920s the UNIA had several hundred branches across America and an estimated 350,000 members in New York alone. The UNIA not only organised rallies and meetings, but a wide range of social and welfare organisations, fusing itself with the daily lives of black people.

The reason for this growth was not just Garvey's preparedness to make very radical statements and speeches, calling for direct action to give lynch mobs a taste of their own medicine.

The call for self-help and a return to Africa expressed black pride and self-confidence in the face of the degradation of racism.

The black Trotskyist, C. L. R. James, observed in a conversation with the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky in April 1939 that despite his Returnist rhetoric, Garvey's real appeal was that his stress on dignity and self-reliance seemed to offer the prospect of resistance to racism:

"Garvey raised the slogan 'Back to Africa', but the Negroes who followed him did not believe for the most part that they were really going back to Africa. We know that those in the West Indies who were following him had not the slightest intention of going back to Africa, but they were glad to follow a militant leadership. And there is the case of the black woman who was pushed by a white woman in a street car and said to her, 'You wait until Marcus gets into power and all you people will be treated the way you de-

serve'. Obviously she was not thinking of Africa."

The UNIA failed to live up to its promise. Crucially, those few who travelled to Africa from the USA—and the still fewer that departed from the Caribbean—were confronted with circumstances very different from the image propagated by Garvey and the UNIA.

Prospects for economic development and social advancement were extremely limited, not only by direct colonial rule across the continent but by the subordination to the interests of the

"It takes ten years for a bill to go through parliament, right, and nothing happens. So if you give them a good dig and all that like, it might send a couple of them home . . . They might think, oh, you know like, we've had enough, we're going home. So we're doing our bit." (Skinhead, quoted in *Race in Britain*, ed. Charles Husband.)

"These are our options:

- 1. Live in fear of Ethnic Cleansing, Racial Attacks and Murder*
 - 2. Wait to be deported or repatriated in shame.*
 - 3. Prepare to resettle with Pride and Dignity."*
- (Leaflet from Caricom International plc, an agency promoting resettlement of black people from Britain.)*

" . . . the Black American can no more be at home in an African milieu than the American Jew in the Middle East. And the forced cultivation of a purely African persona can only damage the Black American psyche even further and lead to the sort of obsessive, inward looking nationalism which one has come to identify with the Zionists."

(A. Sivanandan, Culture and Identity, June 1970)

major imperialist nations of even formally independent African states such as Liberia.

What is more, the crisis of identity experienced by US and West Indian black people was still not overcome by the return to Africa.

Black people in America and the Caribbean had not lived in a vacuum since slavery, but—despite racist barriers to integration—developed their own distinct cultures under widely different national, social and economic conditions. Black people had grown up

with the heavy industry and advanced agricultural techniques of US economic life and had widely different habits and expectations from the working populations of African states. They did not fit in as they had expected they would. Migration to Africa remained low and dwindled still further with the decline of the UNIA.

Nor could Garvey's ideology provide a coherent rallying point for long. Radical statements and aspirations co-existed uneasily with thoroughly reactionary views.

Garvey could express admiration for both the communist Lenin and the fascist Mussolini at the same time. At one point he even claimed to have invented fascism personally. (see *Black Moses, the Story of Marcus Garvey*, E David Cronon, Wisconsin, 1969, p190)

Garvey's illusions in the role of Britain continued into the 1920s; he shared the widespread view, encouraged by the British in his native Jamaica, that Queen Victoria—the Empress of India—was a friend of black people who had abolished slavery. Hence his reference in a speech as late as 1928 to "a woman by the name of Victoria the Good".

Worst of all, agitation for black people to leave America had a logic of its own, leading directly into the arms of reactionaries and racists.

Blazing a sorry trail that some later proponents of separation would also follow—including the Nation of Islam—he held a joint meeting with the racist white supremacists of the Ku Klux Klan. He went so far as to argue that the Klan and other such groupings were "better friends of the race than all other groups of hypocritical whites put together."

This was no accident, no mere personal aberration on Garvey's part. Strange as it may at first seem, accommodation to the most virulent forms of racism is a common theme of Returnist currents. The Jewish Zionists sought agreements with Von Plehve, the organiser of the Russian Tsar's anti-Semitic pogroms. The Nation of Islam in the 1960s also combined agitation for racial separation and a black state in the USA with joint meetings with white supremacists. Why?

Though it has an entirely different starting point and represents different interests, Returnism shares a central theoretical premise with the most extreme proponents of racism. Both believe that it is impossible for different peoples or "races" to live together, and regard any form of integration and assimilation as inherently wrong—however voluntarily it may occur, for example in the case of mixed marriages.

In order to convince a settled but oppressed community to uproot itself and migrate to another land Returnist

ideologies have to stress the hopelessness of genuine resistance to racism. Indeed, they must present racism—as do the racists themselves—as “natural” and unconquerable.

Inhumanity and injustice are described as part of “human nature”, whereas humanity’s natural and historic propensity to **fight** oppression is downplayed as a futile waste of time. They must do this in order to “prove” that there is no solution for oppressed nations and peoples other than accepting the very aim that the most violent and uncompromising racists are pursuing—to get black people out of “their” countries.

Returnism has never recaptured the strength it once attained through the UNIA. Although it re-emerged under Ethiopian national colours via the growth of Rastafarianism in the 1970s, this too acted far more as a potent cultural and religious symbol of resistance for young blacks in Jamaica and Britain than as an effective movement for resettlement.

Rasta communities in Ethiopia remain small and far from integrated into the Ethiopian nation as a whole. The Ethiopian workers and peasants have far greater cause to loathe the memory of the despotic and privileged ruler, Haile Selassie, than to revere him as a living god.

And in Britain, the geographical patterns of black post-war settlement and the relative degree of integration when compared with the USA have contributed to the weakness of Returnism as a genuine option for black workers and youth.

Though there have been recent attempts to revive resettlement programmes, these have been half-hearted.

The Black Labour MP Bernie Grant was pilloried by many from within the black community in Britain when he issued a call for resettlement in 1993. Though he later tried to backtrack, claiming that he had simply called for resettlement grants, he was unable to explain quite why anyone should want to actively encourage black people to leave Britain.

But the agency established by West Indian governments to attract investment and skilled labour from Britain, Caricom International plc, responded to Grant’s statements by issuing promotional material carrying the age old argument of all forms of Returnism.

One leaflet (quoted opposite) was quite clear: black people can either put up with racial violence and wait to be deported, or pack up and leave of their own accord, with their “pride and dignity” apparently intact.

This is just what the far-right and racial attackers are trying to achieve. But passive acceptance of oppression,

or fleeing from it, are not the only options, let alone the best ones.

As black people in Britain and the USA have proved time and again, from Notting Hill in 1958, the civil rights

movement in the 1960s, the urban rebellions across Britain’s cities in 1981 and 1985, to the Los Angeles Uprising of 1992:

You don’t have to run from racism. You can fight it!■

Martin Luther King

A dream deferred

On 4 April 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. died of gunshot wounds in Memphis Tennessee. King had gone to the southern city to lend his support to a strike by Memphis’ predominantly black refuse collection workers who were fighting for union recognition.

The supposed assassin was James Earl Ray, but it is widely believed that the US state, specifically the FBI, was responsible for the killing.

Since the assassination the US establishment has sought to incorporate King as a hero, another “great American” martyred for a noble cause. It has frequently been assisted in this by King’s surviving family members and one-time Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) aides. Despite initial opposition from President Reagan and some state legislatures, King’s birthday became a national holiday in the US in the 1980s.

Unlike that of Malcolm X, King’s life lends itself to incorporation. He gained a PhD in theology from Boston University and came from an upper middle class Atlanta family. And whereas Malcolm X is remembered for declaring that liberation should be fought for “by any means necessary”, King never broke from his belief in and strategy of non-violence.

Nevertheless, in certain respects King had begun to develop a more radical critique of US society towards the end of his life, and on some issues his views had begun to converge with those of Malcolm X.

King has long been seen by white liberals as the “acceptable” face of black struggle in the US. He is remembered as a great orator for his 1963 “I had a dream” speech. He was the leader who defused militant protest in the apartheid southern states in



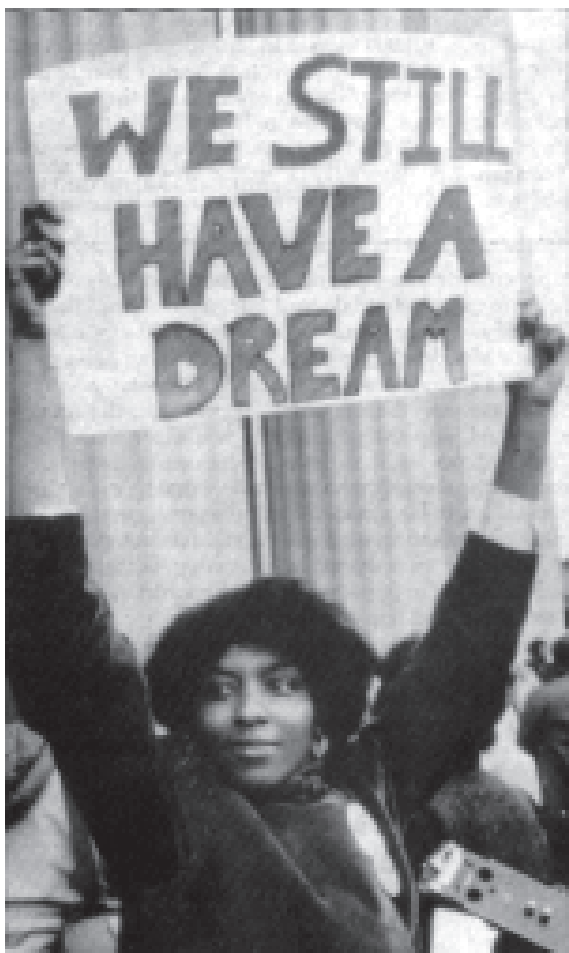
Martin Luther King Jr exchange for the promise of civil rights legislation.

But while this endeared him to white liberals it provoked a revolt amongst black youth. By 1965 a new generation of embittered militants in the northern inner city ghettos saw King as either irrelevant or as an “Uncle Tom”. He was harshly criticised by the rising black power movement.

Separatist and black nationalist ideologies were gaining increasing influence among many of those who had been at the forefront of occupations and lunch counter sit-downs for integration. After the defeat of the Selma Alabama campaign for voting rights in the spring of 1965, which was marked by two racist murders and savage attacks against blacks by police and state troopers, King and the SCLC appeared to be a spent force.

King’s central error was his resilient maintenance of a pacifist strategy in the face of racist and state violence and his belief, linked to his pacifism, that capitalism could be peacefully reformed. His demonstrations, beaten and tear-gassed before the eyes of a watching world, were intended to

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shame the US ruling class into reform.

But this strategy was a non-starter for black liberation. While it could, and to a limited extent did, remove the worst aspects of Jim Crow apartheid in the south (at a terrible human cost to the movement in terms of deaths and injury), it could not defeat racism. Ultimately it could only succeed in creating the conditions for enlarging the black middle class within US capitalism. For the majority of the ghetto would remain an escape-proof prison. Over thirty years after King described his "dream" of black equality and social justice, the life expectancy of a black man in Harlem is less than that of a peasant in Bangladesh—one of the world's poorest countries.

King's importance as a black leader, however, was his willingness to organise the black masses into a movement, which was in marked contrast to the Nation of Islam's almost total abstention from the civil rights campaign. And, in the last two years of his life King did seek to re-orient his movement towards the working class.

Many of his erstwhile allies remained comforted by his continued reformism, but disquieted by the left wing edge he began to give it with comments like:

"... we're treading in very difficult waters, because it really means that we

are saying that something is wrong with the economic system of our nation . . . It means that something is wrong with capitalism."

Southern politicians sought to paint King as a "red sympathiser" while the Kennedy administration pressured him into dropping Stanley Levinson, a Communist Party member and King's personal friend, from the SCLC staff.

In mid-1965 King gave in to pressure and backed down from some tentative criticisms of the US involvement in the Vietnam war when the majority of SCLC leaders told him to shut up for fear that public criticism of the Johnson administration would jeopardise the Voting Rights Act. But in 1967 he admitted he was wrong to retreat and broke with the open pro-imperialists in the civil rights movement:

"I backed up a little when I came out [against the war] in 1965. My

name then wouldn't have been in any book called Profiles of Courage. But now I have decided. I will not be intimidated. I will not be harassed. I will not be silent and I will be heard."

He went on to denounce the war and branded the US "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today", a move that cost him the support of many black and white allies in the Democratic Party.

Of course, King's criticisms of the US role in Vietnam flowed from his pacifist stance, but he did lay bare the hypocrisy of the white liberals who had once lavished praise on him:

"They praised us in . . . Birmingham and Selma Alabama. Oh, the press was so noble in its applause and . . . praise when I would say 'Be non-violent towards Bull Connor' [Birmingham's sheriff]. There is something strangely inconsistent about a nation and a press that would praise you when you say, 'Be non-violent toward Jim Clark' [Selma's police chief] but will curse and damn you when you say, 'Be non-violent toward little brown Vietnamese children'."

While this marked a shift by King, it was not a break from his previous strategy. When blacks in the inner cities of the US exploded into riots he blamed the cause of the riots on "nice, gentle, timid white moderates who are

more concerned about order than about justice".

But at the same time he argued that the riots themselves were misguided and counter-productive. The development of organised self-defence, espoused by the Black Panthers, was not part of King's strategy.

What he turned to was a left reformist strategy that went beyond civil rights and towards social justice. He defied advice from the ultra moderate leaders of the SCLC and sought to turn the movement's focus towards the appalling housing conditions of black workers in the northern ghettos.

In January 1966 he moved into a slum flat on Chicago's South Side, launching a campaign to win an open housing law and a massive increase in state funding.

Despite finding that his marches were once again the subject of brutal racist and police attack, and despite a growing pessimism in the ability of the whites to be persuaded of the need for equality for blacks, he held fast to his strategy of peaceful pressure on the establishment.

He remained the most prominent leader of the SCLC until his death, but supplemented it with a national Poor People's Movement, an organisation that proved unable to survive the death of its founder.

King had undoubtedly moved left, and it is equally likely that this move prompted plots by the US state to kill him.

But it would be wrong to conclude that he had moved towards a fully fledged class analysis of racism or a working class programme for defeating it. He began to criticise capitalism in explicit terms. But his argument remained tinged with a Christian critique of injustice.

Ultimately his Christianity, his reformism and his pacifism sealed the fate of his political evolution. After his death no coherent strategy bequeathed by him, and no militant movement inspired by him, survived.

His contribution was to bring shame on the brutality of racism in the US, but not to eradicate that brutality.

He built the biggest protest movement against racism in the history of the US, but his strategy blocked the ability of that movement to get beyond the fight for concessions towards the fight for liberation.

As with Malcolm X many claim King's legacy. And like Malcolm X that legacy is riven with contradictions.

Just as it is necessary for anti-racist militants today to transcend the limitations of Malcolm's nationalism, so it is necessary to transcend the limitations of King's reformism and pacifism.■

Malcolm X

“By any means necessary”

The politics of Malcolm X can only be understood against the changing background of the anti-racist struggle in the USA. Malcolm himself underwent a rapid political evolution in the last two years of his life, as the struggle developed.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Malcolm became politically active, the racist system of segregation was already facing active opposition.

By 1946 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had 450,000 members in 1,073 branches. This was the main black political movement in the USA.

In the South, blacks faced apartheid style segregation and deep poverty. Against this background Martin Luther King's reformist Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had come to the head of the desegregation struggle, initially around the Montgomery County bus boycotts of 1955 and 1956.

King's movement, dominated by the church and wedded to peaceful and legal means, sought to use non-violence to extract piecemeal reforms from US capitalist society, despite being faced with a reign of terror from white supremacists, including lynch mobs and beatings.

But another strand of black organisation was developing, one which totally rejected white society, believing it could not be reformed. This was Elijah Muhammed's Nation of Islam, founded in Detroit in 1930.

Muhammed's strategy was unequivocally nationalist and separatist. He taught that white society and white people in general were inevitably racist, and that black people in the USA should separate and form their own nation.

Muhammed called for a return to Africa, and stressed black Americans' international links with the peoples of the third world. But he also preached the possibility of a separate black territory in North America.

The strength and attraction of the



Malcolm X

Nation of Islam for many young black people was its emphasis on black pride. It taught that God was black, that whites were an inferior race. It encouraged the establishment of black businesses and celebrated African civilisation.

As long as black people had not attained national independence, Muhammed's "Muslim Programme" demanded freedom, justice and equality of opportunity. It stated:

"As long as we are not allowed to establish a state or territory of our own, we demand not only equal justice under the laws of the United States, but equal employment opportunities now!"

Yet, as the Nation of Islam grew from a sect to a mass organisation in the 1950s, this commitment to the struggle for equality within white society remained a dead letter. In practice the Black Muslims, as they were known, abstained from the actual struggle for desegregation and civil rights. Instead most of their resources were channelled into recruiting and educating the poorest sections of the black working class, especially among the large black prison population.

One of their converts was Malcolm X, who had grown up as Malcolm Little, a petty crook, in Harlem. On his release from prison in 1952, Malcolm became

one of Muhammed's leading followers. His magnetic personality and popular speaking style allowed the Nation of Islam to reach out to new layers of students and youth. By the late 1950s Malcolm X had become, through lectures, articles and televised debates, an international symbol of revolutionary black nationalism.

But both Muhammed's black nationalism and King's reformist integrationism were being put to new tests as the struggle intensified.

By 1963 King was at the head of a powerful coalition of black organisations. Alongside groups like the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC), the NAACP and King's SCLC were mobilising hundreds of thousands in direct action to defy segregation in the South, and increasingly the racism and state brutality faced by blacks in the northern cities. A March on Washington that year mobilised 250,000.

The civil rights movement was no longer simply a black protest movement. It had begun to win influence in white liberal circles and amongst organised white workers. At the same time it faced a vicious racist backlash, particularly in the South which, for thousands of youth, increasingly called non-violence into question as a strategy.

Yet the Nation of Islam remained on the sidelines. Muhammed repeatedly vetoed moves to get involved in civil rights activism. He even became embroiled in collusion with white-supremacist US fascists.

While hundreds of thousands were heeding the call to mass action by the civil rights movement, the Black Muslims' radical words remained only words.

In 1964 Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam, amidst much acrimony, and started a process of political rethinking which was to lead him to a much more radical, anti-capitalist formulation of his politics.

3★LEGACY OF BLACK NATIONALISM

It is a tribute to Malcolm X's political courage that he made not one but two political evolutions in his life. From small time hustler to national political leader, then from abstentionist black nationalism to an attempt to combine black separatism and socialism.

It was an evolution cut short when Black Muslim assassins, probably in collusion with the FBI, killed Malcolm, aged 40, on 21 February 1965.

His development away from the Nation of Islam had lasted less than two years. In this process Malcolm produced several reformulations of his political programme and philosophy and often made contradictory statements even within a single speech or interview.

This is what has allowed many differing strands within black nationalism and socialism to claim Malcolm X as their own. Even at their most developed point of evolution away from Elijah Muhammed, Malcolm's politics remain contradictory: not a fusion of the struggle for black liberation with socialism but a confusion, about both ends and means.

Malcolm X's split with Elijah Muhammed resulted from a combination of organisational, political and personal differences.

Malcolm was impatient to enter the mass movement, not in order to tail behind the pacifist leaders but to revolutionise the struggle. Muhammed wanted the Muslims to remain on the sidelines—a primarily religious sect with radical rhetoric.

In Los Angeles in April 1962, police shot seven unarmed Black Muslims, killing one. Sixteen Muslims were charged with criminal assault against the police. Malcolm X set about organising united actions against this outrage with the city's black integrationist leaders, and even appealed to whites for financial support. Muhammed quickly vetoed this, insisting on a purely legal defence campaign and no joint activity with non-Muslim blacks.

The inevitable split came in March 1964 and Malcolm announced he was setting up a new organisation, the Muslim Mosque Inc. But soon it became clear this was not just an organisational break.

George Breitman, Malcolm's biographer and a leader of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP), divides Malcolm's last years after the split into two phases. Firstly the "transition", from the split until Malcolm's return from a trip to Mecca in May 1964, and then the "final period" from June 1964 to his assassination.

Whilst there are clear political differences between Malcolm's statements in these two phases, to call only the first "transitional" is misleading. Right up to his death Malcolm's politics were changing and

remained contradictory. Breitman wanted to defend Malcolm from critics who simply labelled him a black nationalist. But his analysis also fitted in with the SWP's belief that Malcolm had become an "unconscious" revolutionary socialist and internationalist.

Today, with black nationalism and separatism gaining popularity, it is important to emphasise that Malcolm, the cultural icon of black nationalism, had consciously broken with it by the time he died.

But equally we should not idealise his later political philosophy, dressing it up as a form of Marxism, or claim it was an adequate guide to action for those who followed him.

Immediately after the break with Elijah Muhammed, Malcolm's project amounted to implementing all the secular and social aspects of the Nation of Islam programme:

"I still believe that Mr Muhammed's analysis of the problem is the most realistic and that his solution is the best one . . ." he told reporters. "But 22 million of our people who are still here in America need better food, clothing, housing, education and jobs right now. Mr Muhammed's program does point us back homeward, but it also contains within it what we could and should be doing to help solve many of our own problems while we are still here."

Like many subsequent black nationalists and separatists, Muhammed's politics sounded radical when he talked about a return to Africa or a separate state for blacks in America, but he stumbled when it came to changing things within the racist USA.

Malcolm had for years castigated white liberals for their duplicity and the white working class for its racism. He now had to face the problem of how to win black liberation in a society where white liberals ruled and white workers formed the majority.

When he launched the Muslim Mosque Inc. Malcolm declared:

"Whites can help us, but they can't join us. There can be no black-white unity until there is first some black unity. There can be no workers' solidarity until there is first some racial solidarity. We cannot think of uniting with others until we have first united among ourselves."

This "two stage" theory of black liberation is popular amongst black nationalists and separatists today.

There is a kernel of truth in it: black people do need to organise themselves within the wider working class movement in order to defeat racism and fight for their own specific needs. But the idea that a joint struggle between black and white workers should be put off until after "black unity" is achieved has proved no guide to action.

If "black unity" meant a separate

black state, as it did for Muhammed, then black people would have a long time to wait. Uncle Sam had no intention of granting that state, and blacks themselves were dispersed as a minority amongst the northern industrial cities of the USA, even if compacted into ghettos within those cities.

If "black unity" meant a single organisation it could not be achieved either. The black reformists like King and James Farmer recognised that their white liberal allies feared Malcolm X, and therefore distanced themselves from him.

Despite the repression meted out against them (including the later assassination of King), the leadership of the civil rights movement represented an embryonic black middle class, even a nascent black bourgeoisie. It was this layer which would benefit most from President Johnson's reforms in the late 1960s, while for the masses there remained poverty and oppression.

Prison, legal lynchings and being shot by the cops were the future for Malcolm's followers. The divergent strategies of reformist integrationism and militant struggle proved fundamentally incompatible.

Grappling with these problems, Malcolm evolved away from nationalism as a political principle. In March 1964 he had announced:

"Our political philosophy will be black nationalism. Our economic and social philosophy will be black nationalism."

But already he was using the term nationalism not to imply the struggle for a separate state but for black people's struggles to control their own lives and communities:

"The political philosophy of black nationalism means we must control the politics and politicians of our community. They must no longer take orders from outside forces. We will organise and sweep out of office all Negro politicians who are puppets of outside forces."

After Malcolm returned from a trip to Africa he began to break with black nationalism. Describing a meeting with a white Algerian revolutionary nationalist Malcolm said:

"He showed me where I was alienating people who were true revolutionaries, dedicated to overthrowing the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary. So I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as black nationalism? And if you've noticed, I haven't been using the expression for several months." (16 January 1965)

However Malcolm remained a black separatist in the organisational sense. Though he collaborated with elements

on the predominantly white left his project remained to build a black organisation to fight for black liberation.

After returning from Africa he posed this in a more international way. He founded the strictly secular Organisation of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), even though he himself remained a Muslim until his death.

But his organisation's aims were confused from the beginning. On the one hand he conceived it as an umbrella organisation which could unite all the civil rights and black nationalist groups. On the other hand Malcolm was obliged to build the OAAU as a separate political organisation which challenged the programme and tactics of the King/Farmer assimilationist leaders.

The Statement of Aims (June 1964) and Programme of the OAAU (February 1965) contain Malcolm's most developed statements of his political analysis and strategy.

The central flaw of the programme is its failure to understand the causes of racism—capitalism and imperialism—from a class standpoint. Consequently it contains no strategy to remove these roots of racism.

Malcolm made a number of anti-capitalist statements towards the end of his life:

"There can be no freedom for our people under capitalism, and further you can't operate a capitalist system unless you are vulturistic; you have to suck someone else's blood to be a capitalist."

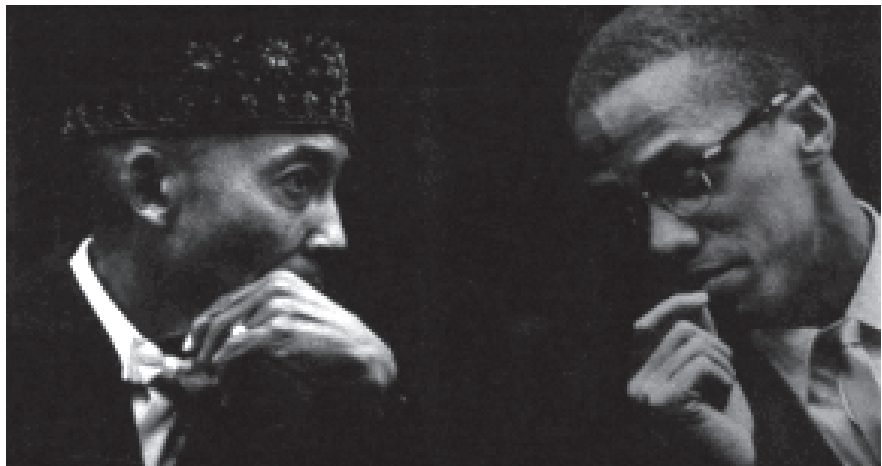
But Malcolm's programme was not overtly anti-capitalist.

The OAAU programme does expose the sham of US capitalism's "emancipation" of black people from slavery. The statement of aims identifies the "economic exploitation" of black people as "the most vicious form practised on any people in America". It denounces poor housing, job discrimination and the high cost of living in the ghetto. But nowhere does it set itself against the whole system of wage slavery: the exploitation of the worker by the employer.

Consequently its solutions to the economic plight of black people are couched as a series of reforms to the capitalist system, and militant self-organised tactics to achieve them.

The statement of aims proposes a housing self-improvement programme and a rent strike to win it. The only real economic demand in the section on "Economic Security" is for the establishment of a pool of black technicians, which would be available to the developing independent African countries, and provide work for black Americans:

"Thereby we will be developing an open market for the many skills we possess and at the same time we will be supplying Africa with the skills she can



best use. This project will be one of mutual co-operation of benefit."

This is a form of utopian socialism, reliant on the capitalist "open market" to create some form of economic stability and livelihood for the black working class in the USA. It is futile as a strategy for economic liberation.

Like all utopian socialist programmes, Malcolm's emphasises education rather than class struggle. It outlines a series of reforms in education black people must fight for: control of 10% of all schools, the right to write the textbooks, etc. The OAAU wanted to develop a skilled black working class able to compete with whites for jobs, and a black population able to overcome ignorance as one of the chains that enslaved them.

But Malcolm's economic programme contains no orientation to the workplace, strike action, occupations and picket lines—even over the specific question of job segregation and discrimination. Still less is there any strategy for building unity in action with white workers.

If at an economic level the programme is totally inadequate and reformist, it does contain a revolutionary challenge to racist state violence. All of Malcolm's programmatic statements are clear on the right to black self-defence against racist attack.

Sickened by a succession of racist murders and beatings, police attacks on peaceful marches and widespread repression against civil rights activists, Malcolm's outspoken support for black self-defence struck a chord with many young people at the time:

"In areas where the US government has shown itself unable and/or unwilling to bring to justice the racist oppressors, murderers, who kill innocent children and adults, the OAAU advocates that Afro-American people ensure ourselves that justice is done—whatever the price and by any means necessary."

But even here Malcolm's programme fails to show how to link this defensive struggle with the offensive against the whole capitalist state ma-

chine. The statement of aims betrays a startling innocence about the US constitution and various pan-national imperialist bodies. The OAAU was:

"... persuaded that the Charter of the United Nations, the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', the Constitution of the USA and the Bill of Rights are the principles in which we believe and these documents if put into practice represent the essence of mankind's hopes and good intentions."

All the democratic rights in the world are not enough to end the system of exploitation which starves Africa and reduces America's ghettos to killing fields.

Nor are they enough to overcome the imperialist state machine that is supposed to embody and protect such rights. It is impossible for US imperialism to systematically uphold these fine declarations of "hopes and good intentions" because it is committed to defending private property and the bosses' profits which rely on this exploitation.

Once we remove the myths about Malcolm X his anti-capitalism has to be seen as a mixture of utopian and reformist socialism; his internationalism as a laudable desire to help the bourgeois nationalist revolutions in the third world, but not proletarian internationalism; his revolutionary opposition to state racism devoid of a strategic goal.

Unfortunately the left has failed to point this out.

In particular George Breitman and the American SWP have spent the years since Malcolm's death peddling the myth that he was "a black nationalist plus a socialist", or at least in the process of becoming a socialist. Breitman argues that Malcolm was on the road to a "synthesis of black nationalism and socialism" and that others must complete it.

No. The best tribute to Malcolm X we can pay today is to complete the break Malcolm was making with nationalism and separatism, not dress up the confusion as a "synthesis".■

Stokely Carmichael

From Civil Rights to Black Power

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was created as the first attempt to give an organisational structure to the spontaneous revolt of black youth against segregation. In the years after its founding meeting, on 16 April 1960, it was to become one of the most radical organisations in America.

The extreme dedication and bravery of the young militants was linked to the notion, derived from Martin Luther King, that white America would be shamed into granting equal rights by demonstrations of the "capacity of black people to suffer". Under the influence of a large delegation of Nashville students committed to Gandhian principles of non-violence and to Christian pacifist ideals, SNCC adopted a code of conduct that included:

"Don't strike back or curse if abused . . . Show yourself courteous and friendly at all times . . . Report all serious incidents to your leader in a polite manner. Remember love and nonviolence."

These principles embodied the innocence of the movement in its earliest stages. It was an innocence based on the idea that America really was "the land of the free". The leaders of the movement believed that white liberals in the USA, especially those within the Democratic Party, could be gently edged towards reform.

Eventually the repression meted out to the black protesters exposed the weaknesses of pacifism in the movement. They were hounded and beaten. The authorities, including the white liberals amongst the Democrats, were not persuaded to carry out reforms. Whenever they did act it was because they were frightened into doing so by militant action and the threat of disorder.

The movement was growing up, and the innocent ideals of pacifism began to be questioned. As the struggle assumed truly mass proportions more and more radical youth were drawn in, and they were less inclined to be courteous to racist gun thugs or deferential to



1967: Black anti-war protest

Democrat politicians who sat on their hands while the racists ran riot.

The famous March on Washington was led by Martin Luther King in August 1963. Millions have heard and been moved by the vision of a society free from racism that he expressed in his historic speech that day. But there was another speech planned for that day which was never made.

SNCC's John Lewis drafted a declaration which rejected Kennedy's proposed civil rights bill as inadequate, as failing to protect people who were actively claiming and fighting for their rights in the South.

Lewis planned to tell the 250,000 people at the Washington rally:

"I want to know, which side is the federal government on?"

He intended to declare:

"... the revolution is at hand and we must free ourselves of the chains of political and economic slavery."

Though Lewis remained committed to non-violence, he wrote:

"We will not wait for the President, the Justice Department, nor Congress, but will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside of any national structure, that could and would assure us of victory."

He showed the speech to other civil rights leaders first. They told him to

change it, because otherwise the Archbishop of Washington would not appear on the platform! Reluctantly Lewis agreed, and a committee was set up to modify his declaration. But on the day Lewis still launched into a bitter attack on the Democrats and the Republicans.

Many SNCC workers, who had built the delegations to the march from the South, deeply resented the moderate slogans of the march, and the petty restrictions imposed by its organisers, such as the strict control of slogans on placards and banners. Gradually a new radicalism was beginning to permeate the younger, grass roots civil rights campaigners.

SNCC workers started to discuss and consider more favourably ideas of organised self-defence of black communities, as well as openly investigating pan-Africanist and socialistic ideas. A number of members of the SNCC staff were also members of Students for a Democratic Society, which was to become one of the main "New Left" organisations that flourished during the radicalisation of youth at the time of the Vietnam War.

By 1964 Stokely Carmichael was emerging as a leader of the radical wing of the movement. His emphasis shifted from pacifist pleading to demanding the nationalisation of the top corporations and the breaking up of large landed estates. He wanted to see "more than 100 people control over 60% of the industry". At the same time he began encouraging SNCC staff to "stop taking a defensive stand on communism." SNCC leaders began an African tour where they met, among others, Malcolm X and discussed collaboration with his newly formed Organisation of Afro-American Unity.

In early 1965 events took a sharp turn. Attempts to organise a mass march from Selma to Montgomery met with sustained police attack and barricades. On 10 March, Martin Luther King, at the head of a demonstration, angered local residents and SNCC staff by unilaterally deciding to call off the march, turn around and go back.

But SNCC, under the leadership of the militant activist Jim Forman, seized the opportunity to challenge the leadership of King and his SCLC over the mobilisation. He argued firmly for building the demos and not flinching from confrontation with the police. As Forman put it, "If we can't sit at the table of democracy, we'll knock the fucking legs off."

Also in 1965, SNCC took the highly political step of speaking out against the war being pursued by the USA in Vietnam. A statement was already in the process of being prepared when SNCC were spurred to speak out by the death of Sammy Younge, a 21-year old veteran of the US Navy who was shot to death while trying to use a whites-only rest-room at a filling station. The SNCC statement exposed US hypocrisy and explicitly linked racism in the South to imperialism overseas. A furious witch-hunt against SNCC ensued.

As an expression of the increased radicalism of the SNCC staff and volunteers, Stokely Carmichael challenged John Lewis for the position of Chair of SNCC in 1966.

Born in the West Indies, Carmichael had family and personal connections with black members of the Communist Party of the USA. When he joined the Nonviolent Action Group and then the full time SNCC staff in 1964, he brought with him both secularism and an emphasis on economic and social issues.

By 1966 he was becoming heavily influenced by ideas of black consciousness, of pride in blackness, the positive promotion of black culture and the construction of black institutions. He insisted, in response to attacks from liberals against this approach, that his position was, "... not anti-white. When you build your own house, it doesn't mean you tear down the house across the street."

But it was not until the events surrounding the Mississippi march of 1966 that this orientation began to take shape, when the new slogan of Black Power was to sweep the USA.

In June 1966 James Meredith began a solo walk across Mississippi as a demonstration of the right of black people to live without threats and fear of violence. He was shot three times and hospitalised.

Martin Luther King, Congress of Racial Equality leader Floyd McKissick and Stokely Carmichael joined forces to lead a protest march that would also boost local voter registration efforts. King viewed the march in much the same way he viewed the whole campaign—a strictly peaceful protest. But SNCC was adopting a more militant stance than before.

Sick of years of beatings, shootings and arrests, Carmichael argued that an

organisation called the Deacons of Defence provide armed protection for the march. At mass rallies across Mississippi, Carmichael spoke against the non-violence line being pursued by King, and condemned the federal government for failing to provide any real protection against racist terror. In Leflore County Carmichael told a meeting of hundreds after he had been detained in jail:

"This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested. I ain't going to jail no more . . . What we gonna start saying now is 'black power'."

What did Black Power mean? To many SNCC workers and poor blacks, from Mississippi to the ghettos of the big cities, it meant an end to compromise, to non-violence, to reliance on white liberals. Rank and file SNCC workers had seen the consequences of reliance on the support of liberal whites in failed attempts to get the Northern Democrats and the administration in

Washington to act in their support.

The liberals expected a political payoff for their support: the renunciation of the right to self-defence (something no liberal ever demanded of whites), the censoring of Lewis' speech to the Washington rally in 1963 and King's attempt to get SNCC to call off a demonstration on the Vietnam question in August 1966. As Carmichael explained:

"We will not accept someone who comes to us and says: 'If you do X, Y and Z, then I'll help you'."

This refusal to tie the movement's hands in return for the illusory support of fair-weather bourgeois allies was a real political step forward.

But the idea of Black Power, as Carmichael came to theorise it in his book of that name, co-authored with Charles V. Hamilton, also contained serious ambiguities.

When Carmichael wrote of the need for black consciousness and self-identification as a vital first step, that "only when black people fully develop this



1964: Police attack civil rights protest, New York City

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sense of community, of themselves, can they begin to deal effectively with the problems of racism in this country”, he was not just speaking of the justified need to develop pride and confidence in black culture.

He invested Black Power with another—wrong and dangerous—meaning. He was advancing the principle of black unity, irrespective of any class divisions. Unity of all black people—workers, poor farmers and the urban poor, as well as middle class and even rich blacks—became for him a precondition for an effective fight against racism. This is what he meant by his famous statement that:

“Before a group can enter open society, it must first close ranks.”

The first, and most fundamental, problem with this approach is that it downplays the central question of class. The unity of black people, as blacks, blurred the real conflicts between blacks of different classes. It blurred the differences between those who advocated reliance on the Democrats, and those who fought for militant action. It was a “unity” that contained the real possibility of holding back the black struggle.

At the same time it cut off, in advance, the possibility of building fighting unity between black and white workers against the common enemy. In far too many cases the white working class and their unions had proved themselves to be racist. Insofar as Black Power meant not holding back the struggles of black people until white workers became anti-racist it was right and justified. But for Carmichael it was not simply this.

He went on to ignore the real material difference between white workers and their white bosses, and the potential for anti-racism to be built within the white working class because of this difference. As he told a meeting in Watts, Los Angeles, “the only reason [whites] suppress us is because we are black”. For this reason white society was conceived simply as a monolith, with no fundamental contradictions between the interests of its respective classes.

While Carmichael insisted that all blacks must be united across class divisions, working class organisations, like the trade unions, were all but written off as “coalitions between the economically secure and the insecure”.

The racism of the official unions had to be acknowledged and fought. But Carmichael threw out the baby with the bath water, downgrading the rich experience of black workers who played leading roles in the rise of industrial unionism and the CIO union federation.

These experiences proved that it was both necessary and possible to challenge racism within the working

class and build unity in struggle.

For a minority, such as Julius Lester, Black Power meant an increasingly hardline separatist stance, involving rejection on principle of collaboration with whites (he gave one of his pamphlets the ironic title *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama!*).

Carmichael however did not rule out coalitions with whites, but said they could arise only after black people had united.

At the same time as relegating the importance and downplaying the possibility of common class action between black and white workers, Carmichael's conception of the black community closing ranks failed to get to grips with the political and class differentiation within that community.

As Jim Forman acutely observed when appealing to SNCC staff to recognise the ambiguities and inadequacies of the Black Power slogan:

“Are the problems we face only ones of color? . . . What is upper, lower, middle class? Do they exist among blacks? Why is there a black banker in one town and a starving Negro in the same? . . . Do the problems of a black welfare mother only arise from her blackness? If not, then what are the other causes?”

Whilst for SNCC workers and poor blacks the Black Power slogan was one of militancy, for other more moderate and conservative blacks it meant promoting black businesses, a black middle class and even bourgeoisie, rising not with their class but out of their class.

In short it meant the furthering of the development of a black middle and upper class, with the attendant danger of a layer of privileged blacks being co-opted into support for the very establishment that Carmichael and others had repeatedly risked their lives to challenge.

Thus Black Power was to become the rallying call not only of the most exploited and oppressed blacks, but also of the most conservative and bourgeois forces within the community.

That is why one Black Power conference was sponsored by black Congressman Adam Clayton Powell. He was trying to subordinate the movement to the

Democrats and, as Carmichael admitted, was “talking about stopping the throwing of Molotov cocktails and not stopping the causes that bring about the throwing of the cocktails.”

A new layer of moderate community leaders was able to consolidate around the Black Power slogan, holding conferences sponsored by, among others, the white-owned corporation Clairol.

This was in line with the attempts of US capitalism to co-opt a privileged layer of blacks as its answer to the urban uprisings and mass struggles of the 1960s. This is clear from the words of former Republican President, reactionary racist and crook, Richard Nixon:

“What most of the militants are asking is not separation but to be included in—not as supplicants, but as owners, as entrepreneurs—to have a share of the wealth and a piece of the action. And this is precisely what the federal central target of the new approach ought to be. It ought to be oriented toward more black ownership . . . black pride, black jobs, black opportunity and yes, Black Power . . .”

In the end, the Black Power slogan and the approach it represented proved not only ambiguous and capable of being adopted by conservative forces, but also disorienting for some of the most militant fighters in the civil rights movement. As SNCC declined under the twin blows of external repression and internal ideological incoherence, Carmichael himself turned to the pan-African nationalist “socialism” of Nkrumah and Sekou Toure, President of the bourgeois republic of Guinea.

Carmichael ended up accepting Toure's offer of moving to Guinea and acting as his personal secretary in 1968, taking the name of Kwame Ture and joining the leadership of Guinea's ruling party in 1972. The notion of uniting all black people before, and as a precondition for, fundamental social change allowed him to support a government which, despite its radical rhetoric, upholds the capitalist system.

Carmichael was wrong to believe that the only reason whites suppress black people is because they are black. The root cause of racism is the capitalist system of production for profit.■



Mississippi freedom ride under police attack

Black Panthers Seize the time!

In October 1966 Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, two young black militants, founded and became leaders of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, which later became known just as the Black Panther Party.

Newton and Seale grew up in the black ghetto of Oakland, a working class city in the Bay Area of California. Influenced by the teachings of Malcolm X, they quickly broke with the “cultural nationalists”.

The nationalists looked back to Africa for their inspiration and saw all whites, irrespective of their class position, as the enemy. The Panthers saw through the nationalists’ attempts to disguise the conflict of interests between black capitalists and the black poor behind the camouflage of African dress. Seale wrote:

“Huey would explain many times that if a black businessman is charging you the same prices or higher, even higher prices than exploiting white businessmen, then he himself ain’t nothing but an exploiter. So why should black people go for this kind of system?”

As the Panthers developed they collaborated with white-dominated organisations. They organised inside the unions, building Panther caucuses. Their lawyer, Charles R Garry, dubbed the “Lenin of the court room” by Seale, was white.

Not one of these actions compromised their struggle against racism and for black liberation. In contrast the separatists, on a number of occasions, seriously damaged the struggle by collaborating with black cops employed by the racist state.

While the separatists and posers talked Newton and Seale decided to act. After failing to win over the separatists in Merritt College Soul Students Advisory Council to taking up arms and building in the community Huey Newton denounced them:

“We don’t have time for you. You’re jiving in these colleges. You’re hiding behind the ivory-walled towers in the



Huey P Newton

college, and you’re shucking and you’re jiving.”

The Panthers’ foundation was the direct consequence of this split with cultural nationalism and separatism.

The Panthers’ first principle was armed black self-defence. By the brilliant exploitation of the US constitution and California state laws on the right to bear arms, the Black Panthers began to conduct armed patrols of the Oakland ghetto.

The technique was simple. So long as guns were on display and not pointing at anyone the Panthers could legally ride the streets armed to the teeth. And they did—tailing cop cars wherever they went. Of course the police tried to put a stop to this. They hadn’t counted on Newton’s knowledge of the gun laws.

Time and again the police were faced down by Panthers with pistols and shotguns. Every time the police tried to take the guns from them Huey Newton quoted the constitution, leaving them baffled. Every time the police threatened the Panthers, each one of them would click a bullet into the firing chamber and quote the law on the right

to self-defence if attacked.

The effect of these patrols on the black community was electric, and after a number of major confrontations the ranks of the party began to swell. Demonstrations and rallies against police harassment or in support of black rights were flanked by armed Panthers. The police stood by, helpless to do anything other than bitterly complain that “the niggers were twisting the Constitution round”.

The Panthers put Malcolm X’s message, “by any means necessary” into practice. But they combined their armed self-defence programme with a range of political activities that won them mass support beyond Oakland. With Eldridge Cleaver as their “Minister for Information” they produced a regular paper and built a nationwide organisation.

They initiated united front actions against fascists and ran in elections.

They developed a community programme based on satisfying the immediate needs of the poor of the ghetto—breakfasts for children, free health clinics, free education centres that taught black history. They conscientiously purged criminals and opportunists—“jackanapes”—from their ranks.

While all of these activities demarcated the Panthers from the reformist wing of the black movement, led by Martin Luther King, and earned them the trust of black communities across the USA, the Black Panther Party failed as a political organisation. The heroism and determination of the Panthers could not substitute for a clear revolutionary strategy.

Throughout their existence the Panthers remained unclear on their strategic goals. The programme, drafted by Newton and Seale, consisted of ten points, divided into “what we want” and “what we believe” sections. Its concept of “freedom” for black people to determine their own destiny went no further than a call for a “United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of the black people as to their national destiny.”

This demand conceded to the separatists and nationalists the existence of a black nation. It hampered the ability of the Panthers to develop a fully fledged class strategy for black liberation in the USA, for it left as a possibility a purely national solution. And when the Panthers were pressed to give a concrete form to this potential national solution, they ended up by projecting the utopian idea of a nation based on the disparate urban black ghettos.

In turn, flowing from the idea of the

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US black population as a series of communities constituting a nation, the Panthers increasingly turned to concepts of community control—of the police, of education, of industry.

These nationalist and communitarian projects, based on the idea of nationally separated communities, flatly contradicted the Panthers' occasional calls for socialism and workers' control.

Underpinning these confused programmatic goals was the influence of Stalinism. When the Panthers started out they got money for guns by selling Mao's "Red Book", at a profit, to the "radical leftists" on the Berkeley university campus.

But Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Castro and Guevara all began to exert considerable influence on the thinking of Newton and Seale. They embraced the Stalinist "stages theory" of revolution: first black liberation, then socialism.

In the fight against the "fascist" US state they saw the primary task as being to unify the lumpenproletariat of the ghetto.

Only after that would the struggle for socialism become possible. The lumpenproletariat were seen as the decisive force for social change. And the method for change most suitable to this class was the armed struggle in the

ghetto.

Various declarations from Huey Newton contradicted this strategy. But they remained declarations. He called for a general revolution in the "white mother-country", but developed a practice exclusively based on the struggle in the black ghettos.

Stalinism also influenced the organisation of the Black Panther Party. Franz Fanon's teachings on guerilla war were decisive in Newton and Seale's thinking.

The two of them set up the Panthers and became Minister of Defence and Chairman respectively. With more recruits they established other posts, but the organisation remained elitist and undemocratic. Huey Newton became a cult figure whose own thoughts were rarely questioned by the rank and file.

None of this detracts from the place of honour that the Black Panthers have in the history of the black liberation struggle. It merely explains that they failed to develop a political strategy that could ultimately defeat the US imperialist state.

That state took vicious revenge on the young black militants who had used the gun laws to defy its racist police and the brutalisation of the black communities. A massive FBI operation, the Counter Intelligence Programme, was

launched against the Panthers. Key militants were shot dead in deliberately provoked shoot-outs with the police.

Huey Newton was wounded in one such shoot-out and, in defiance of all the evidence, was incarcerated for murder.

Bobby Seale was framed and shipped to Chicago where, when he tried to defend himself in court, the judge ordered that he be chained to a chair and gagged throughout the trial.

Faced with this persecution many of the Panthers stood firm. To this day some of their members remain in US prisons.

Today's generation of black militants can learn from the mistakes of the Panthers. Black self defence can be a starting point, and is a vital element of the struggle.

But it has to be fought for as part of a programme to link the everyday struggles of black workers and youth to the overthrow of the capitalist system. Likewise, black self organisation has to be class based and rooted within the wider working class movement.

But as well as learning from the Panthers' mistakes, today's youth must also learn the spirit of heroism and the will to act that permeated the Black Panther Party at the height of its struggle with the US state.■



Black Panthers 1967



Race and Class

The Left and Black Liberation

To beat racism we need a strategy that can win, tactics that work, a clear plan of action, and a leadership that can be trusted.

But the history of the anti-racist struggle, in Britain and elsewhere, is a history of false strategies, failed tactics, inadequate political programmes and leaders who betrayed.

In response to this many people reject political programmes, strategies and organisations altogether. But wherever there is a fightback there will be somebody trying to lead, there will be some political strategy in operation.

Take the inner city revolts of the 1980s. These were spontaneous risings against police repression; expressions of anger aimed at punishing the police for their harassment of black communities. When the fighting had died down all sorts of self-appointed leaders stepped forward claiming to represent the community that had fought back. Many were corrupt local politicians. Their message was: if only the government would pour money into this or that scheme the anger of the youth could be contained.

Their strategy was to contain the revolt. Their tactics were police liaison committees and government hand-outs. Their programme was one of piecemeal capitalist reforms and the creation of a black middle class. As leaders they were useless.

That is why every anti-racist fighter has to take notice of the political programmes and philosophies on offer: you may not be interested in them, but they are interested in you. Unless you have a clear idea of your own strategy, your own programme and are prepared to take on a leading role in the struggle yourself, then, no matter how heroically you fight back, you

could end up being used to further somebody else's aims.

In this section we will examine the strategies on offer in Britain today which focus on class struggle as the key to victory in the struggle against racism and capitalism.

Economism:

The SWP

To convince youth and workers who are influenced by the ideas of reformism and black nationalism Marxists need to offer a credible alternative explanation of the roots of racism. This is something the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has tried to do over the last few years. It has failed.

SWP member Kevin Ovenden's book, *Malcolm X—Socialism and Black Nationalism*, was read by thousands of youth. Unfortunately, on the question of the causes of racism, its critique of black nationalism was thoroughly unconvincing.

Ovenden shows that it is not in the interests of workers to be racist. His explanation of why, despite this, many white workers are racist, is based on two points. The first, which no socialist would deny, is the conscious use of racism by the ruling class to divide the workers. But Ovenden realises that this is not enough. For Marxists, ideas are determined by social reality. So his second point is that a material basis for racism can be found in the experience of the working class:

"Racism can lodge in the minds of the workers because it appears to correspond to one part of their experience of living under capitalism—the compulsion to compete in order to get by."

According to Ovenden, capitalism also provides the solution to this problem by continually bringing black and white workers together in factories, estates and common struggles, where they can overcome the tendency to compete with each other.

But while it is true that workers are forced to compete with each other, and that common struggles provide an opportunity for socialists to overcome this, these facts alone do not constitute a Marxist explanation of racism.

Looking at a place like the Isle of Dogs, where there is competition for inadequate housing and resources, we are left with an unanswered question: why is it **black** workers who are being targeted as "competition" by white workers? Why aren't the white workers fighting each other?

If the cause of racism can be reduced to competition plus the effects of the bosses' propaganda, this leaves us with no material reason why such competition should take place on specifically "racial" lines.

Competition between workers for scarce resources is not enough to explain the material root of racism under capitalism. Even where workers come together in common struggles over wages, housing and living standards, this alone does not automatically remove the basis of racism.

In short, Ovenden's position is a piece of crude **economism**. It reduces the whole question of racism to a phenomenon that originates within the economic struggle—workers' resistance to the employers over pay, jobs and living conditions—and can be overcome on the basis of that struggle alone.

Don't take our word for it. Another SWP leader Alex Callinicos, without

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overtly mentioning Ovenden's book, wrote in *International Socialism Journal* (ISJ) No 52, soon after the book was published:

"The mere fact of economic competition between different groups of workers is not enough to explain racial antagonisms."

So much for Ovenden's analysis. But what then is the root cause of racism? If we are not to be left with the crude view that workers are racist simply because of the bosses' propaganda we must look for the real material roots of racism in capitalist society.

Callinicos develops his position in "Race and Class", an article in ISJ 55. The article includes a critique of black nationalism and reformism, much of which we would agree with.

For example, Callinicos is right to insist that racism is not a mere "ideological hangover" from past material conditions, as Peter Fryer has argued, but thrives on the material conditions of modern capitalism.

He also correctly rejects the view, held by many black nationalist theorists, that racism has always existed. For Marxists, systematic racial oppression, as opposed to prejudice, ignorance and xenophobia, began with the rise of capitalism. It took different forms, materially and ideologically, in different epochs of capitalist development: from slavery, through colonialism to the pseudo-scientific racism of the imperialist epoch.

But just what is it that perpetuates racism in modern capitalism? Here Callinicos gets into difficulties. He tries to distil three factors from Karl Marx's description of the English attitude to the Irish in the nineteenth century:

"(i) Economic competition between workers . . .

(ii) The appeal of racist ideology to white workers . . .

(iii) The efforts of the capitalist class to establish and maintain racial divisions among workers."

Looked at closely, points (i) and (iii) are similar to those raised by Ovenden. We are left with point (ii), the appeal of racist ideology. But why does racist ideology appeal to white workers?

Here Callinicos and the SWP have to confront the existence of systematic social oppression. When we look at the position of women in class society we can see that the ideology of sexism is rooted in the material, social oppression of women in the family. So it is with the systematic oppression of "racial minorities" in capitalist society. The ideology of racism is a product of racial oppression.

This distinction does not appear in Ovenden's book. But Callinicos does speak of, "oppression, of systematic inequalities in power and life chances stemming from an exploitative social structure."

The problem is that Callinicos provides us with no explanation of just how and why capitalism spontaneously generates this racial oppression. He produces a critique of the black nationalist explanation, but no positive explanation of his own.

He identifies the time and place of the development of modern racism as being:

"... in the advanced capitalist countries . . . in the late nineteenth century, as part of the process through which the European ruling classes sought to incorporate newly enfranchised, increasingly organised workers within the same community. Against a background of growing competition among the imperialist powers, workers were encouraged to identify their interests with those of 'their' ruling classes."

The question arises: by what means, other than propaganda, did the bosses "encourage" organised workers to identify with their own imperialist ruling class?

Lenin gave a straight answer to this question: it happened through the creation of a "labour aristocracy" of relatively privileged workers, through which bourgeois ideas, specifically national chauvinism and reformism, could be spread amongst the mass of workers.

But Callinicos refuses to link the rise of racism to the material privileges of a stratum of British workers. He does so because he is obliged to reject the idea that white workers benefit from racism. He writes:

"Perhaps the single most important difference between Marxists and black nationalists is that the latter believe that white workers materially benefit from racism."

Callinicos goes on to attack, correctly, the widespread view, shared by Maoists and "Third Worldists" as well as black nationalists, that all white or western workers form "a privileged labour aristocracy benefiting from the imperialist super-profits extracted from Third World toilers". Against their claims that Lenin supported such a view, Callinicos points out that Lenin's theory, "was an attempt to explain reformism by arguing that it reflected the material interests of a layer of the western working class."

But despite clarifying this, Callinicos goes on to reject Lenin's entire theory of the labour aristocracy as a basis for understanding racism.

Lenin's theory refers to a materially privileged stratum of workers and union officials. It is crucial to an understanding of the material roots of racism within modern capitalism.

At the heart of modern capitalism—imperialism—lies the contradiction between an international economy and the political form of its development, the nation state. The system of competi-

ing nation states strangles the potential of the world economy and repeatedly plunges humanity into barbaric acts of war, destruction and genocide.

At the very dawn of this epoch, Lenin grasped the interlinked character of reformism, racism and national chauvinism:

"It is perfectly obvious that social chauvinism's basic ideological and political content fully coincides with the foundations of opportunism [i.e. reformism—WP]. It is one and the same tendency."

For Lenin, the source of these phenomena was the relative privileges which the bosses in the imperialist countries were able to grant to a layer of workers. They could do this because of the super-profits that the imperialist powers accrued through their domination of the world market and their exploitation of the colonies.

Callinicos is extremely wary when it comes to revealing his attitude to Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy. He states that it is a "poor guide" to the behaviour of skilled workers in the west during the years of revolutionary upheaval in the early twentieth century. He refers to "flaws in its economic arguments".

If he were honest he should say clearly, as SWP members Kevin Corr and Andy Brown did in ISJ 59, that Lenin's theory is "fatally flawed"—i.e. wrong—and that this, as Tony Cliff has written, "invalidates the whole of Lenin's analysis of reformism". (*Neither Washington Nor Moscow* 1982).

Callinicos, Cliff and most SWP theoreticians reject Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy because it implies that some workers have a short term interest in the maintenance of capitalism, and that some white workers do benefit from colonialism.

So do white workers benefit from racism in any way? Let us look at Callinicos' own attempt to define oppression: "systematic inequalities of power and life chances".

Every black working class person knows what this means in practice. It means preferential treatment for white schoolmates, white job applicants, white criminal suspects. It means huge differences in the rate of unemployment, even in areas of high white working class unemployment.

Somebody benefits from systematic inequality, and it is not only the perpetrators of it, the bosses. There is nothing anti-Marxist or "nationalist" about the statement that some white workers benefit, in the short term, from racial oppression. Yet Callinicos and the SWP leaders reject the idea altogether. Why?

The reason is that they think that even to recognise such short-term interests must lead to separatism on the question of black oppression and to

feminism on the question of women's oppression. But there is no reason why it should. It certainly did not as far as Lenin and Trotsky were concerned and it need not do so for revolutionary Marxists today.

It simply means that a revolutionary party has to **fight** the sectional ideas that arise from the experience of such privileges and win the working class to a programme that expresses our common historic interests.

The SWP however, rejects this. They believe that the working class develops revolutionary socialist consciousness spontaneously. That is why they have to deny the very existence of benefits which generate the opposite kind of consciousness—reactionary ideas such as racism and sexism. To preserve their “spontaneist” theory, they have to deny the very existence of material privileges that are common knowledge to every black person discriminated against at a job interview and every woman who has to cook the whole family's tea after a hard day's work.

Does this mean that white workers themselves become the oppressors, as the black nationalists claim? No. The entire capitalist system is the fundamental cause of this oppression. However, we have to say that white workers, at certain times and places, **participate** in the bosses' oppression of black people.

If SWP members recoil in horror at this suggestion they should remember the dockers' march to support Enoch Powell in the 1960s—a march by the same dockers who later helped bring down Ted Heath's Industrial Relations Act through mass strike action.

Of course not all white workers consciously collaborate with racism. Quite the opposite. The vast majority of organised workers think of themselves as anti-racist.

In the course of struggle itself, and with effective propaganda by a revolutionary socialist party, the mass of the working class can and will see through the false and reactionary ideas which capitalist schools, churches, newspapers and media have taught them.

Both Ovenden and Callinicos bring forward figures from US sociologists (V Perlo, A Szymanski) to support the idea that, in the long run, white workers have no interest in racism. At the level of wage earnings Szymanski found that “the greater the discrimination against [blacks and Hispanics] the higher the inequality amongst whites”. Conversely, where black earnings were higher, white workers earnings were higher too.

What does this evidence really tell us? It tells us that where the bosses use racism successfully to divide the working class, they weaken the entire working class, black and white. It is a pattern borne out for example in Northern

Ireland, between Catholics and Protestants.

But even Szymanski's conclusion—that white inequality was higher where blacks were most oppressed—does not disprove the assertion that some white workers benefit from the oppression of black people, through preferential access to education, housing, health care and employment.

Callinicos' is unable to find a material answer to the question: why does racist ideology appeal to white workers?

This leads him off in the direction of an **idealist** explanation for racism, one that is not rooted in material reality but in ideology alone. For all Callinicos' hostility to the “black radical” tradition which has attempted to fuse Marxism and black separatism, he is eager to take on board one of its main theories—that of the “psychological wage”.

W.E.B. Du Bois' assertion that, in the southern USA, white workers received “a sort of public and psychological wage” in return for their actual low wages is taken up by Callinicos as a “better explanation” than the materialist theory of the labour aristocracy. By this Du Bois meant that white workers are comforted by the belief that they are “superior” to blacks—even if they don't personally receive any material advantage.

Desperate to find an alternative theoretical basis to Lenin's theory, Callinicos even tries to draw in Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism as an “imagined community”. Despite Anderson's own wish to distinguish between racism and nationalism, Callinicos claims that Anderson's description of nationalism—“a deep horizontal comradeship transcending actual inequality and exploitation”—is applicable to modern racism.

It might well be—but only as a description of ideas, as a tool for understanding the psychology of modern racism. Neither Anderson's theory, nor the idea of a “psychological wage” provides a materialist explanation of the roots of white workers' racism. It is an explanation which says ideas determine material reality, not the other way round.

However there is a germ of truth within Du Bois' theory of the “public and psychological wage” and, when we examine it, it supports the Leninist view of the labour aristocracy and the material roots of racism.

The “psychological wage” could not stick if it was mere trickery. There has to be some material basis for it. This, presumably, is what Du Bois means by the “public” wage for poor whites in the southern USA. This “public” wage is described over and over again in the books, films and music of black Americans. White workers could use bars,

swimming pools, public transport, cafes and cinemas from which black workers were barred.

To say that white workers' wages are depressed by class divisions is not the same as to say they do not derive immediate material privileges from those divisions. It is precisely the threat to those short-term privileges which winds up racist workers and drives them into the arms of open racist politicians—from Alabama to the Isle of Dogs.

The benefits we are talking about are relative and temporary: white workers receive better wages but that is no use when you lose your job. On the Isle of Dogs white workers fought for preferential treatment—but even the best houses available were in poor condition.

The differences are of course not as great as the differences between the working class and the ruling class. But they do produce divisions between white workers and black workers, just as they do between men and women, and they are based in a real, material stratification of the working class, not only on ideas that the bosses put in our heads.

These relative privileges, these temporary benefits do not alter the fact that it is in the material interest of all workers to fight all forms of oppression.

But simply to assert that without first recognising the differential effects of that oppression is crude and abstract, denying the real experience of black and white workers.

SWP members, when they hear Cliff and Callinicos assert “we are the real Marxists, the real Leninists”, should reflect on the implications of the SWP's theory of racial oppression.

The SWP want to deny that some white workers gain short term benefits from racism, just as they deny that some male workers gain from the oppression of women.

Ultimately we are left with the assertion that there is no material reason for workers' racism other than “competition”. This leads them a step further—if we abandon Lenin's idea of a labour aristocracy based on crumbs from the table of imperialist super-profits, then we are left with no material reason for reformism either.

Racism thrives on the nationalist poison generated by imperialism. The international system, which drags millions of workers from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean to work in the imperialist heartlands, also creates their systematic oppression within those heartlands. White working class racism is perpetuated, yes, by a “public and psychological wage”, but that in turn is rooted in real short term advantages for some white workers. It is perpetuated by today's labour

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aristocrats and “petit-bourgeoisified” sections of the working class, such as well paid office workers and skilled tradesmen.

But the working class has no strategic interest in racism. The workers of the Isle of Dogs have been weakened in their ability to fight their real enemies, the bosses, by the racism which has flourished there. As long as they remain divided, housing, employment and education will get worse for all—not better.

Revolutionary socialists have to build a united party and a united fight, involving black and white workers. But we have to do so using a strategy based on a correct understanding of reality. If we understand racism’s roots in imperialism, national chauvinism and reformist opportunism, we can do it and we will win. But by rejecting that Leninist theory out of hand, the SWP turn their backs on reality, and will fail.

Class & Community:

A.Sivanandan

The name of Ambalavaner Sivanandan is not familiar to many on the British left. It should be. He has become the most influential black political thinker in Britain. His writings have shaped the outlook of a whole layer of black activists.

Sivanandan is a long time scourge of the British left on the question of black struggles against oppression. When Sivanandan derides the “white left” for its tendency “to view working class racism as an aberration” (*Race and Class* Vol. 35, 1994) he hits the mark as far as the two largest far left organisations, Militant and the SWP, are concerned.

They share the notion, typical of economism, that racism is simply a question of workers competing with each other over jobs and resources. Once “black and white unite and fight” around economic questions, they believe, racism will spontaneously disappear.

Another target of Sivanandan’s criticism has been the declining and crisis-ridden Eurocommunist tradition, and its key black intellectual, Stuart Hall. Sivanandan’s “The Hokum of New Times”, is a scathing polemic in which he ridicules the ideological underpinnings of the Communist Party’s collapse into liberalism:

“New Times is a mirror image of Thatcherism passing for socialism. New Times is Thatcherism in drag.”

A third distinctive feature of Sivanandan’s politics is his opposition to the liberal “race relations” industry and its left wing offshoots, the “Ethnic Minorities Units” set up by many Labour councils in the 1980s. According to Sivanandan this was simply:



Sivanandan

“Government moneys for pluralist ploys—the development of a parallel power structure for black people, separate development, bantustans—a strategy to keep race issues from contaminating class issues.”

When we look at these targets of Sivanandan’s criticism it is easy to understand his appeal. But, viewed critically, Sivanandan’s work does not present a coherent strategy for black liberation or socialism.

Like revolutionary socialists, Sivanandan sees an understanding of imperialism as crucial to understanding racism in Britain. But his understanding of imperialism is wrong, leading him to locate the “Third World” as the centre of the struggle for socialism:

“I do not think it is our business to be sectarian, to take sides between liberating movements to tell them how to conduct their struggles. We try in *Race and Class* to guard against left cultural imperialism: the tendency to extrapolate from the western experience onto Third World societies.” (*Communities of Resistance*)

In practice this translates into an accommodation to a range of Stalinist-influenced and petit-bourgeois nationalist leaders. Sivanandan berates one left wing writer’s “inability to distinguish between reactionary (bourgeois) nationalism and the revolutionary nationalisms of Ho, Fidel and Cabral and Mao”. It is to Vietnam and Cuba that Sivanandan refers when he talks about “the workers and peasants having a bash at socialism”.

The Stalinist-led national liberation movements were fighting a just struggle against imperialism. But by reserving a place for the “anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie in the struggle and limiting the revolution to a democratic stage, they systematically held back workers’ struggles. Even in Vietnam and Cuba it was not socialism they introduced, but stagnant regimes modelled on the bureaucratic planning and dictatorship of

the Stalinist USSR, often practising racism against minorities of their own. It is not “Eurocentrism” to point out that “Third World” Stalinism was essentially no different from the Stalinism of the European and US Communist Parties. Sivanandan’s model of Third World “socialism” has failed.

This incomplete break with the Eurocommunists can even be seen in Sivanandan’s savage attacks on *New Times*:

“The working class was decomposing under the impact of new forces of production and old forms of labour organisation were becoming frangible [fragile]. The old Marxists . . . had for so long been fighting for the emancipation of Labour from Capital that they could not bear to think that it was Capital that was now being emancipated from Labour.”

Sivanandan thus accepts the basic premise of Eurocommunism, that old forms of working class struggle have been rendered obsolete. But instead of accepting the neo-liberal, pacifist and cross-class conclusions of the Eurocommunists, Sivanandan called for a refocusing of both socialism and anti-racism towards, “that third of the nation which Thatcherism has dispossessed”.

According to Sivanandan the end of the traditional working class did not mean an end to class struggle, only that the terrain of battle has moved “from the economic to the political, from the base to the superstructure”.

“The battle is the same as before”, Sivanandan writes, “only it needs to be taken on at the political/ideological level and not at the economic/political level”. (*Communities of Resistance*)

Before we examine the effect of this view on Sivanandan’s anti-racist strategy, it is necessary to say that Sivanandan, along with the Eurocommunists, massively overestimated the effects of economic changes on the workers’ movement. It is not British capitalism’s “emancipation from Labour” that is the problem, it is workers’ consciousness, bureaucratic misleadership and the legacy of a decade of defeat.

That is not to deny that new forms of struggle and arenas of struggle have emerged. But socialists must reject the idea that the “economic struggle” has simply been replaced by a combination of political, ideological and cultural struggles. The economic struggle is the practical resistance of workers to their employers. It continues to involve millions, including hundreds of thousands of unionised black workers. Revolutionary Marxism aims to prosecute the class struggle in each of its forms—economic, political and theoretical—so as to organise the working class in the struggle for power. This means fighting to bring the trade unions under

rank and file control and win them to revolutionary leadership—not writing off the economic struggle and the institutions it has created as somehow a thing of the past.

Sivanandan spells out clearly what the rise of Thatcherism meant for the struggle against racism:

“The nature and function of racism was beginning to change. The recession and the movement of capital to the labour reserves of the Third World, I pointed out before, had stopped the importation of labour. The point now was to get rid of it. Hence the rationale of racism was no longer exploitation but repatriation, not oppression but repression—forged at the ideological level through the media (directly) and the schools (indirectly and in the long term) and effected on the political level through the forces of law and order.”

The black struggle, Sivanandan wrote, was no longer one between “employers and workers but the state and the workless”.

Of course there is a large measure of truth in the tendencies Sivanandan outlines, but his analysis is schematic and wooden. It was not the 1979 recession which introduced the politics of repatriation to the political mainstream but the end of a specific period of cheap labour expansion in the early 1960s. Even now the bourgeois consensus remains at the level of formal “equal opportunities” in return for strict racist immigration laws, not overt repatriation.

Certainly the street-level resistance of “second generation” unemployed and youth has become a vital arena of black politics and resistance. But the idea that the struggle between bosses and workers is no longer a concern of anti-racists is nonsense and leads directly to Sivanandan’s confused political strategy.

Sivanandan stood firm throughout the 1980s and 1990s against the rise of “identity politics” amongst the oppressed and against the fragmentation of “black as a political colour” into a variety of competing ethnic hues.

Since offering a cautious welcome to the launch of the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA), he has given short shrift to its largely self-appointed black leaders, who “tend to use [community struggles] as a means of gaining legitimacy and publicity for their own organisation—instead of putting themselves at the service of the community”. (*Race and Class* Vol. 35)

While he is a critic of the black bourgeois leadership and continues to advocate class politics, the concept of “community” is central to Sivanandan’s strategy. At times “community” seems to have an almost mystical significance in his writings, yet there is never a clear definition of the concept. Sivanandan repeatedly

documents the class stratification that has taken place within Britain’s black population.

But by not aligning himself with any political tendency, and by downplaying the role of the organised working class, black and white, Sivanandan avoids the responsibility of charting a path that can transform “dynamic, organic” local struggles.

In his analysis of the Grunwick strike of the mid-1970s, despite documenting the way in which the trade union bureaucracy used and then discarded the Asian women strikers, Sivanandan draws the wrong conclusions.

He contrasts Grunwick negatively to earlier black strikes, such as Mansfield Hosiery and Imperial Typewriters:

“The lessons of earlier strikes—that black workers needed to rally the community behind them and from that base force the unions to their side—had been temporarily unlearned by workers who had not had the benefit of that tradition.”

But this was not the lesson of Grunwick. Tens of thousands of white workers and youth rallied to the Grunwick pickets. It was the inability of rank and file workers to overcome the legalism and pacifism of their leaders and turn sympathy into solidarity strike action which led to defeat.

Certainly the vanguard layer of rank and file trade union militants that developed in the 1960s and 1970s was defeated and largely dispersed in the 1980s, creating new problems for linking community struggles against racism with the organised power of the working class. Nevertheless this remains the key to victory, a key which Sivanandan consistently discards.

Sivanandan has always been open in his support for organised self-defence by black communities under attack. So are we. The difference lies in the fact that revolutionary socialists aim to transform the isolated acts of resistance into a political movement which can challenge capitalism, whether on the street or in the factory.

Sivanandan is clearly opposed to black nationalism and to the passivity that pure cultural politics prescribes. He writes:

“. . . whilst the struggle against racism could not be subsumed to the class struggle it could not in the name of that autonomy, become separatist, inward looking or nationalist.” (*Race and Class* Vol. 35)

But Sivanandan’s politics of community resistance do imply a form of separatism—not the small world of separatist sectarian grouplets but a kind of separatist stage-ism: organise the black community first and then worry about the working class organisations.

This is self-defeating. Revolutionary

socialists fight for black workers’ self-organisation, but within and as part of the whole workers’ movement. We seek to place black struggles on the agenda of the whole working class and focus the workers’ most powerful weapons in support of these struggles. Even within the community itself a class line has to be drawn, between the working class, the middle class and the bosses. Class politics within the black community can draw in sections of the middle class, around both the fight against racism and to a limited extent economic questions like strikes. But this must never be done at the expense of dropping working class independence and the right to carry out militant, illegal direct action.

Like Sivanandan, revolutionary socialists reject reformist multiculturalism, middle class careerism and overt separatism. But we remain revolutionary integrationists. Our aim is to integrate the struggles of black working class communities into the struggles of the organised working class as a whole, revolutionising both in the process.

To do that we need the weapon of a political party—something which Sivanandan’s whole existence as an independent “tribune of the people” rebels against. Paradoxically, for all Sivanandan’s praise for politics, ideology and “subjectivity”, he fails to see that only an organised force can change the politics and subjective ideas of the working class.

Socialist separatism:

Panther and the BUFP

Many specifically “black Marxist” organisations correctly reject economism, and identify material roots for working class racism. But they draw wrong political conclusions from this.

One of the longest established of these groupings is the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP). Though they are small and lacking in influence today, the example of their method is instructive, demonstrating the weaknesses inherent in “socialist” black separatism.

The BUFP claims that “the contradiction of primary importance is that between the classes” (*BUFP Manifesto*). Therefore it is fiercely critical of black nationalism and the strategy of building a black cross-class alliance.

However when we look at the BUFP’s programme and practice we see severe shortcomings. It has an overt maximum and minimum programme - a short term list and a long term list.

The BUFP’s short term programme is little more than a radical version of the reformist multiculturalists pro-

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gramme:

“An immediate end to and a public inquiry into the brutal racist activities of the police.”

“An end to the unfair and unjust treatment of black people at the hands of the judiciary.”

“In all schools where there are black children there must be a representative number of black people on the governing boards.”

“Full employment and an end to all discriminatory practices in employment.”

In addition there are a number of more radical demands: the scrapping of racist immigration controls, the scrapping of the CRE, an end to the exploitation of women by men. Yet no link is made between the BUFP's minimum programme of reforms and their maximum goal of the seizure of state power by the working class.

Indeed it cannot make such a link, because of its insistence on black socialist organisation as an **alternative** to forging class unity at an organisational level.

When it intervenes in the class struggle it has been principally around the call to drive the “white left” out of community based campaigns, like the original Broadwater Farm defence campaign.

This cannot unite black workers with white workers in common struggle against racism.

Indeed this is not even one of the stated aims of the BUFP. Neither can it strengthen black workers' self organisation in the fight against racism within the labour movement, because its separatist approach rules out any sustained united front with other forces, including black workers in the trade unions.

Panther UK, who began as Militant Labour's black organisation, but who have now split from Militant, are no better.

“Free at last, free at last!” proclaimed the front page of *Panther* under the headline, “A declaration of independence”. The freedom being celebrated was from Panther's connections with Militant Labour.

The split in Panther UK came, we are told, after “a year long protracted debate on the crucial issue of whether the group should develop as a genuinely independent Black and Asian organisation with the perspective of becoming a party at a later stage, or whether it should operate as a campaign group, with the objective of recruiting the best elements to the Militant”.

The political results of Panther's new found “freedom” are contained in a reformulated programme. Reading this shows that the differences were not simply over Panther's independence, or its relationship to Militant. They were over central questions of the

strategy for black liberation.

Under Militant's control, Panther drew up a programme that bore all the hallmarks of a **centrist** method. By this we mean an approach that represents a half-way house between reformism and revolutionary politics.

Until 1992, Militant used to present itself as the organic left wing of the Labour Party. Instead of challenging the ideas of reformism head on, they adapted their programme to these ideas.

A revolutionary programme must include the fight for reforms and for immediate improvements in the conditions of the working class. But it links every struggle to the need for the working class to organise the fight for political power. Above all, it makes it clear that the capitalist system cannot be transformed by peaceful, constitutional means. The armed power of the state, its apparatus of coercion and oppression, will have to be smashed by the working class and replaced by the rule of democratic and accountable workers' councils defended by a workers' militia.

Militant abandoned this approach. Instead they included no link in their programme between the fight for reforms and the need for revolution. On the contrary, they even went so far as to argue that socialism could be introduced peacefully by a Labour government.

When events knocked Militant out of its forty-year groove of adaptation to Labourism, it looked for other movements and other false ideologies to adapt to.

One of those ideologies was black separatism, which was on the increase as a layer of black youth rediscovered the ideas of leaders like Malcolm X.

So instead of adapting to Labour, they adapted their politics to black separatism. Just as Militant dubiously tried to claim the heritage of Labour's founder, Keir Hardie, so Panther claimed to continue the tradition of US Black Panther leaders, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton.

Just as Militant separated the day to day struggle from the final goal, so Panther argued for justified demands against racism, but failed to link these systematically and practically to the struggle for socialism.

Crucially they failed to explain that only through uniting the working class to carry out a social revolution could black people achieve liberation.

Militant conceived the launch of Panther as a tactic. Ultimately its aim was to build a black movement politically allied to and led by Militant. There was nothing wrong with this goal. Revolutionary socialist parties should always strive to carry out special forms of work, with special organisations and papers, amongst

black people, women, youth, lesbians and gays.

What was wrong, in addition to their programmatic adaptation to separatism, was Militant's dishonest way of carrying out this work. The leaders of the original Panther continually denied any formal links with Militant in public. Many black Militant members did not even sell Panther.

This dishonest fusion of centrist “Trotskyism” with black separatism could not last. Its inner contradictions exploded to create, in the shape of Independent Panther UK, a genuine black separatist organisation.

Included in Independent Panther's programme are demands for full employment, equal pay and equal access to education, an end to discrimination in the courts and trade unions and self defence “by any means necessary”. These are all demands that revolutionary socialists support and fight for.

But when it comes to dealing with the racist state, Independent Panther proves no more revolutionary than its Militant-controlled predecessor.

One of the hallmarks of Militant was its commitment to democratising the existing capitalist state. While Marxists advocate democratic demands that weaken the ability of the state to repress the working class, black people and youth, we do not hold out the dangerous illusion that this state can be reformed to meet the needs of the working class. So in the face of police violence we always argue for self-defence organisations, as the first practical step in the here and now towards the construction in the future of a workers' militia.

Independent Panther's answer to police brutality falls far short of that. It demands:

“a) a community controlled complaints authority to investigate cases of assault on our community, with the power to give compensation and bring criminal charges against police officers

b) policy and operational control of the police by democratically elected representatives from the local communities which they serve

c) the immediate disbandment of the Instant Response Unit and other specialised units used to terrorise our communities”

Every one of these demands would, if enacted, limit the powers of the bosses' state. But for precisely that reason they will never be achieved without a fight to **smash** that state and replace it. The idea that the working class can ever control the bosses' police force like this is a utopia. No matter how many pictures you stick alongside your programme of Huey Newton with a gun, it is still a reformist utopia.

Another reformist and nationalist utopia is Independent Panther's programme on third world debt.

Revolutionary socialists always fight for the cancellation of third world debt. One of our strategic goals is an international programme of state investment to undo the damage imperialism has done to the third world. But in Independent Panther's programme this is posed in a way indistinguishable from the nationalism of bourgeois anti-imperialist movements:

"We want the cancellation of third world debt and the setting up of a fair means of trade and exchange between countries. We believe that the poverty of the so-called third world countries is because the wealth is being stolen and misused by the developed countries of the world. We want financial and technical compensation for the centuries of colonial exploitation and destruction of these countries".

The international system of imperialist exploitation is not simply a matter of one country robbing another. Nor can it be put right by restoring "fair exchange".

Imperialism leads to the combined and uneven development of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. That is what causes poverty and debt. To overthrow this system we will need to overthrow the third world capitalists as well as the imperialist rulers. The whole world economy will have to be transformed in the sphere of **ownership**, not exchange.

Then the fruits of the labour of the millions of workers and poor peasants will be in their own hands, not the multinational companies, the Western banks or their agents in capitalist third world governments.

Independent Panther's whole emphasis here—and this is the only section of its programme dealing with international questions—is on squaring its programme with the nationalist utopias peddled by Malcolm X and Nkrumah. Even Pan Africanists like Walter Rodney, as the same issue of Independent Panther points out, were able to criticise bourgeois nationalism for ignoring class. But Independent Panther's treatment of the imperialist system ignores class altogether.

Fundamentally, for Independent Panther, the struggle for socialism and black liberation are linked but separate. There is no explanation of why it is only socialism that can deliver freedom from oppression. Independent Panther deals with the link between oppression and exploitation with the same method as many "socialist feminists": there is class exploitation and socialism is the answer to that; and there is social oppression and Panther's programme is the answer to that.

Why else would Independent Panther set as its strategic goal the creation of an independent black political party?

Revolutionary socialists give full support to black self organisation within the workers' movement. We fight for the right to caucus, including inside the revolutionary party, and for black sections and conferences in the Labour Party and the trade unions. This is something neither Militant nor the original Panther would ever fight for. Independent Panther's programme says nothing about these demands either.

But revolutionary socialists do not fight for a separate black party. What different goals do black workers have that mean they need a different party, independent from white workers, to fight for socialism? If they have the same goals—a workers' revolution, black liberation and socialism—they should be in the same party.

That does not mean a working class party—even one committed to revolution—can't be infected by racism, or that struggles won't have to take place within it against instances of racism. Nor does it mean abandoning the tradition of revolutionary parties undertaking special forms of work among the victims of oppression.

What it does mean is that the black working class—a minority of the working class in Britain—will not be able to make a revolution against the capitalists on their own. For that a party must be built of black and white revolutionary workers.

What Independent Panther has outlined in its programme is a separate road to socialism for black and white workers. That is a road to nowhere.

The whole Independent Panther programme fights shy of class. For Independent Panther the working class seems not to exist—instead "oppressed and exploited" people will lead the fight for world revolution.

Panther says:

"We believe that black people and all other people will not be free until they determine their own destiny". What "other people"?

The two all important words—working class—do not appear once in Panther's programme.



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In offering these criticisms of Independent Panther UK, Workers Power does not hold up Militant Labour's approach as the one to follow. One criticism which Independent Panther levels at the left in Britain does ring true with regard both to Militant and the SWP:

"Instead of concentrating on the urgent task of raising the race consciousness of white workers left wing organisations spend all their time crudely trying to submerge the special problems of racism deep within the class struggle."

The source of this error is Militant's and the SWP's belief that united trade union struggle will spontaneously overcome racism, sexism and anti-gay bigotry—their economism.

Workers Power has consistently criticised the economism of the SWP and Militant in all the struggles of the oppressed.

Our aim is to unite the working class in struggle without downplaying the fight against racism within the working class. But if all black revolutionaries are separated off in a different party, how does that help white revolutionaries "raise the race consciousness of white workers"? It doesn't, and it is a guarantee that the "race consciousness" of mainly white socialist organisations will get worse, not better.

When Independent Panther split from Militant, demanding "self determination", they threw in their opponents faces a quote from the black revolutionary CLR James, quoted out of time and out of context. Here is another quote from CLR James which Independent Panther will have to learn from, unless they want to repeat all the mistakes of Malcolm X and the US Panthers:

"The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race would be disastrous, but to neglect the racial factor as irrelevant is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental."

Conclusion

What conclusions should then be drawn by those committed to fighting racism, who locate its origins and roots in the capitalist system and who see the working class as the only force with both the interest and the social cohesion and power to overthrow it and build a socialist alternative?

Black workers constitute a section of the working class subject to profound oppression on grounds of race. The existence of persistent racism among white workers can only be explained in a consistently Marxist fashion by pointing to the ability of the capitalist class in the most economically developed

countries to offer marginal privileges to sections of the working class as a result of imperialist super-exploitation of the semi-colonial countries (the "third world").

Any theory based on the spontaneous disappearance of racism within the working class as a result of economic struggle alone must be rejected as ignoring the powerful material counter-tendencies towards bourgeois ideology within the working class.

Lenin first identified this phenomenon when he developed his theory of the "labour aristocracy". Writing of the social roots of reformism and nationalism within the workers' movement, he observed in March 1915 that:

"Certain strata of the working class (the bureaucracy of the labour movement and the labour aristocracy, who get a fraction of the profits from the exploitation of the colonies and from the privileged position of their 'fatherlands' in the world market) as well as petty-bourgeois sympathisers within the socialist parties, have proved the social mainstay of these tendencies, and channels of bourgeois influence over the proletariat."

Yet the existence of such divisions within the ranks of the working class do not mean that the relative privileges of certain layers of workers constitute an impassable obstacle to their revolutionary development.

The fundamental error of both the economists and the "socialist separatists" is their failure to understand the contradictory processes by which class consciousness develops.

Thus the SWP reject the idea that white workers can benefit from racism because it would contradict their schema of the spontaneous evolution of class consciousness as a result of the economic struggle alone.

Similarly, others, like the BUFP, consider that the existence of material roots to racism writes off the possibility of winning white workers to consistent action against racism whilst such divisions remain in place.

There are sections and divisions within the working class - but the fundamental unity of class interests within the proletariat is not just something that exists on paper or in theory.

It propels workers - including skilled, white and "labour aristocratic" sections - into struggle again and again.

And as the widespread support for the Grunwick strike by white workers and the rallying of black workers to support for the miners' strike of 1984-85 shows, it is in struggle that ideas can change most quickly, and that workers—labour aristocratic or not—can be most effectively rallied to the ideas and programme of socialism.

Revolutionaries need to generalise

from the overall experience of the working class—of all its sections, throughout history, and in all countries—in order to develop and advance its class consciousness.

If there are also spontaneous objective pressures towards bourgeois ideology within the working class, this only makes the need for a strong revolutionary party all the more pressing. We need a party that can fight, when necessary, against the prevailing ideas, for a programme of action expressing the interests of the working class as a whole.

This means recognising the need for special forms of organisation for black workers who face particular attacks under capitalism and the indifference or even hostility of sections of white workers. Revolutionary socialists must be the most consistent defenders of the right of black workers to caucus, to hold special meetings and conferences, to organise within the workers' movement at all levels, from the workplaces through to every layer of the movement's structures. A revolutionary party will use special methods for the conduct of propaganda among the racially oppressed—just as the Russian socialists published special materials directed at Jewish workers and upheld the principle that Jewish party members should have the right to their own section of the party to carry out such special work.

Under certain circumstances it would even be necessary for revolutionaries to advocate the establishment of a movement of black workers, within which they would fight for the adoption of revolutionary socialist programme.

These methods have nothing in common with the approach of the "socialist separatists". At no point do revolutionaries conceal the fact that only a party able to unite the working class—black and white—in struggle will be able to lead the working class to socialist revolution, the overthrow capitalism and thereby, open the road to black liberation.

Black working class organisation is aimed at promoting the revolutionary struggle of the working class.

It is counterposed to the separatist idea of a separate black political party, or the idea that an all-class, community based black movement must be built before the working class can unite.

The black working class of Britain is cruelly oppressed, but it constitutes under 5% of the population. United in action and with a leadership armed with a clear conception of its goals, the working class as a whole constitutes the vast majority of the population. It is a force which, purged of sectionalism, privilege, chauvinism and racism, in all their forms, can change the world.■



For black liberation and socialism

An action programme against racism

The fight against racism and for black liberation is a working class fight. Only the working class, black and white, has a consistent interest in defeating racism once and for all;

The successful conclusion of the fight against racism, and for black liberation, is impossible without socialist revolution.

On the basis of these two principles, verified time and again in the history of black struggles against oppression, we construct our programme to combat racism and to win black liberation. Our programme for black workers is, therefore, equally our programme for the whole working class. Even where particular demands for ending a particular aspect of oppression are specific to black workers, white workers have an interest in supporting such demands since they will help eradicate racism and forge class wide unity.

Likewise, the general demands of our socialist programme are fully applicable to all black workers. The revolutionary socialist programme is a programme for the entire class. What we present here is a focused action programme to combat racism.

Fight State Racism

The capitalist state serves the capitalist class, whether under a Tory or Labour government. The state has introduced legal measures against racial discrimination, but only in order to disguise its real and fundamental racist character. For every "equal opportunity" policy there are ten racist measures aimed at subjugating black people and maintaining divisions in the working class. Immigration controls, nationality acts, deportation camps and a racist police force - all of these constitute state-sponsored institutionalised racism. While we support any real pro-

gressive legal measures that help curb racism we say to black workers, don't rely on the state that maintains racism to be the state that frees you from the scourge of racism. The whole working class must fight to:

Smash all immigration controls!

All immigration controls are racist. They are designed to stop black people coming in and to make black people who live here live in fear. All such controls are aimed at blaming racism on black people by perpetuating the idea that there are "too many" black people, that they must be kept out, that those who live here are really "aliens".

Capital roves the world freely in search of profit. But workers seeking better pay and conditions, or an escape from war, famine and repression, are denied that right by capitalism's immigration laws. Every immigration and nationality act should be repealed. The Asylum Act is one of these reactionary

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laws, stigmatising people fleeing repressive regimes as “bogus” applicants for refugee status. This racist law is consistent with the British state’s traditions - a state which kept out Jews fleeing Nazi Germany because they were “bogus” applicants for refugee status. It must be scrapped along with all the immigration laws.

Fight all deportations!

Close down Campsfield and every other immigration detention centre! Disband all police and civil service units organised to enforce or process deportations!

In their bid to maintain racism the capitalist state uses its immigration laws as a justification for the relentless persecution of black people. Special police units are deployed to hunt black people thought to be “illegal immigrants”. Barbaric methods of enforcement are used, resulting in death and injury. Joy Gardner was murdered while the state was trying to deport her. Her murderers walked free from court.

The entire working class must meet every threatened deportation with action, up to and including strikes. Immigration controls begin with White Papers in parliament. They end with gags and manacles and with concentration camps like Campsfield.

Full rights for migrant workers

Alongside immigration controls the state uses a system of work permits to both exclude foreign workers and harass and intimidate them when they are allowed to stay in Britain for short periods of super-exploitation at the hands of ruthless bosses. And, while such workers are here they are denied every elementary civil and democratic right. If they are made to work in dangerous conditions, or to work for miserable wages, they have no right to protest. They can be flung out of the country at the whim of their boss. All restrictions on migrant workers must be scrapped. They must have equal rights with British citizens while they are resident. They must have the right to join unions. And unions should undertake special campaigns to recruit, organise and defend such workers. The work permit system must be abolished.

Abolish all internal controls

To maintain the climate of fear and intimidation of black people the state uses the education system, the NHS and housing allocation services to maintain checks on black people. Data is compiled which is used to harass black people, stigmatise them and aid the police and special immigration units in their grisly work. Faced with demands to relax border controls inside the European Union, the state is preparing massive increases in internal controls to compensate for

this, including a proposed identity card and the legal obligation for employers to report suspected illegal immigrants. All such internal controls should be abolished. The unions must refuse to co-operate with their use by state agencies.

Fight police harassment

The entire police force is an instrument of racist harassment of black people. The “canteen culture” of racism in the police begins with jokes and ends with beatings and killings. No amount of recruitment of black officers will change this. The police are not a neutral force in capitalist society who can be humanised or democratised or made accountable to the community. The police are defenders of the capitalist state and its racist system. They are backed up by the courts whose judges and magistrates will always treat black people as potential muggers, drug dealers and gangsters. Black people have the right to fight every aspect of this daily harassment and to stop the state criminalising whole communities. To wage this fight we demand:

- the right to organise black self defence against police and other racist attacks
- the scrapping of the Criminal Justice Act and Criminal Evidence Act, which give police the right to stop and search on “suspicion” —these are new “sus laws” and they are used to terrorise black youth
- the abolition of all the special immigration, tactical support and other units which are at the front line of the state’s offensive against black people
- against the utopia of controlling the police, through accountability or democratisation, we fight for workers’ self defence organisations, which can protect working class communities from racist attack and deal with criminal and anti-social elements within those communities
- against the investigation of racist beating and murders by the Police Complaints Authority, we fight to get state recognition of inquiries, independent of the state, into such incidents, constituted from elected representatives from working class and anti-racist organisations of the black community, the labour movement and anti-racist legal experts
- against the ingrained prejudice of a judicial system that criminalises black people we are for the election of all judges and magistrates, as a basic democratic measure and for the right to have a minimum of 50% of black people on juries in cases where the defendants are black; but even with these reforms the racist justice system can never become class neutral - and just as we are for

workers’ defence organisations we are also for workers’ tribunals

- all drugs should be legalised and made available under a state monopoly. We demand the provision of health education and high quality services for dependants and users. The state monopoly could replace the current gangsters’ monopoly. By removing their source of wealth and power the hold of drug gangs over working class estates and black communities can be broken. The police use the fact that all drugs are illegal to harass and criminalise black people and working class youth in general. Hard drugs, like heavy drinking, can ruin people’s lives. But criminalisation is no answer, just an excuse for repression. Youth who want drugs can get them, no matter if they are “hard” or “soft”. The cycle of excessive drug taking, dependence and criminality will only be broken when black people are free of racist harassment and all people can make informed choices about drug uses.

End Discrimination

Institutionalised racism, sponsored by the state, leads directly to discrimination in all fields of life for black people. Whether in jobs, wages or housing allocation, black people are pushed to the bottom of the pile. The colour bar may not be as obvious as it was in the 1950s and job adverts may carry the equal opportunities logo, but the discrimination is every bit as real. We must organise in the here and now to fight against discrimination.

Abolish discrimination in jobs through workers’ control of hiring and firing

Capitalism’s equal opportunities have little effect. Racist bosses may well employ “quotas” of black people, but then deny them promotion. Only workers’ control can ensure real equality in the allocation of jobs.

Fight racism in the workplaces

Without a fight against racism amongst white workers black people will still find themselves harassed and subject to super-exploitation. Trade unions must adopt policies that ensure workers’ control of hiring and firing is free from racism. This means systematic campaigns in the workplaces, paid for and run by the unions, discipline against workers guilty of racist practice and action against bosses guilty of the same. It means carrying through this control to ensure that black people are not condemned to low paid jobs and prevented from winning promotion.

End discrimination in housing allocation and other social services

Capitalism turns workers against each

Sheffield 1995: Somali youth demonstrate against police harassment



other, making them fight over a diminishing pool of resources through cuts and capping. While fighting for workers' budgets in every town and borough to meet the needs of all workers, it is vital that workers' control over housing allocation and service provision is instituted to unite the struggle of all workers for decent housing and services and to eliminate the local apartheid systems that have created ghettos and intensified divisions between black and white workers.

For a unified comprehensive and secular education system funded by the state to meet the needs of the working class.

The racism in the education system has encouraged many black people to see separate or religious schools as the means of getting their children a decent education.

This is understandable but wrong. Religious schools indoctrinate children in reactionary mysticism and separate schools obstruct revolutionary integration. There should be no state funding for any religious schools - and that includes Catholic, Church of England and Jewish, as well as Islamic. Teacher, parent, student and labour movement control of comprehensive education can eliminate the discrimination that black students suffer.

Education must be anti-racist, not multicultural. A massive programme to eradicate racist attitudes amongst teachers and students should be funded by the state. All racist

discrimination in assessment procedures must be abolished. Discipline of black students should be monitored by trade unions and parents' representatives to ensure it is not carried out as a result of racist prejudices.

Teaching in the mother tongue or community language of black people should be provided as part of language teaching. Community liaison officers, who can speak the language of the community with whom they are liaising must be funded by the state.

The practice of discriminating against black people through state and police powers under Mental Health Acts must be abolished. The 1983 Act is a mental health "sus law" that has massively discriminated against black people.

We support provisions in education and local government for positive action to overcome difficulties, as in the case of language problems etc. However, we oppose the element implicit in Section 11 of overcoming "customs or culture barriers." Similarly, we are against educational resources for Commonwealth children being operated differently and separately from those provided by local authorities' educational departments for all other children. We defend Section 11 additional funding under threat of cuts, but this funding should be part of mainstream education. We fight for full assistance, funded within an expanded education budget, to meet special language and

other needs, of all immigrants from the Commonwealth and beyond. We are for the right of teachers and other Section 11 workers to retain their jobs on the same terms and conditions and for these jobs to be part of mainstream education .

For women's liberation!

For lesbian and gay liberation!

Racism feeds the oppression of women. Black women suffer a double burden of oppression and are frequently the most exploited section of the workforce. They are victims of sexism within their own communities as a result of cultural or religious legacies.

While we are against the state denying the right of Muslim female students wearing the veil to school or college, we are for a campaign within the black communities against such symbols of women's oppression.

We are against arranged marriages and the segregation of girls from boys in education. We are for the right to free contraception and abortion on demand for all women, black and white, and are for state financed health education programmes aimed at black women to prevent them from having their fertility controlled by men.

We are for the right of women to be treated by women doctors if they require it. We are for the provision of 24 hour creche facilities to enable women to work. Women are especially vulnerable to deportation. They are threatened with deportation if they leave violent partners. It is a direct attack on women's right to an independent life and to choose where and with whom she lives. Women have fought back against these controls. All such struggles must be supported by the labour movement.

Likewise we are for a fight against every aspect of oppression suffered by black lesbians and gay men. The right to choose your sexual orientation free from persecution, should be a basic human right. It isn't. It is thwarted at every turn. It is a right that must be fought for by the whole workers' movement.

For the complete separation of church and state

Religion is no solution to racism. The attack on Salman Rushdie by sections of the Asian community shows that it can be a dangerous diversion from the fight against racism. We are against the persecution of any religion and are in favour of the right of all to practice the religion of their choice, including the right to special diets at school and work, the right to dress in accordance with religious beliefs and the right to time and resources at schools for religious observations. But we are against any state funding to religious schools and institutions.

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We are for the abolition of all blasphemy laws, not their equalisation. Racism is the problem, not writers like Salman Rushdie. We support the struggles of groups such as Women Against Fundamentalism, against repression and persecution. We are for the repeal of all Education Acts that oblige schools to hold Christian assemblies or give preferential treatment to the Christian faith over others. Religion should not be taught in schools except as part of the study of human ideas and societies.

End the discrimination against black youth

Like women black youth face a double oppression. They are the most likely to be unemployed, to be stopped and searched, to be beaten up by racist gangs and the police. Black youth have a world to win. The struggle against the racism faced by black youth can best be

fought through the building of a mass revolutionary youth movement encompassing black and white youth in a common struggle against racism and for socialism.

Racist attacks - we fight back!

Even the doctored statistics of the police reveal that there is a racist attack in Britain every 28 minutes. Black people are beaten and killed because of the colour of their skin. The scars and the corpses are a gruesome indictment of capitalism. And while the politicians may wring their hands at such instances of street racism, those hands are stained with the blood of the victims. It is the racist capitalist system, its racist mouthpieces in the media, its

laws and its police who legitimise this reign of terror.

For the right to black self defence

When black people organise in their communities to resist racist attacks the "even-handed" police arrest them and the courts imprison them. Against this we say, self defence is no offence. It is a basic right. It is one that needs to be implemented through **organisation**, through self-defence squads capable of meeting racist violence with anti-racist violence.

Labour movement support for black self-defence and for workers' defence squads

The entire working class has a responsibility to fight racist attacks. The labour movement all too often turns to the police for protection, only to find their own heads being bashed in on marches and pickets. The labour movement must pledge support to self-defence organisations in the black communities and build its own workers' defence squads to help fight racism.

No platform for fascists

Fascist organisations like the British National Party (BNP) and Combat 18, are the shock troops of racism. Their policies of race hate are part and parcel of their entire anti-working class programme. They cannot be reasoned with: their policies are the policies of hate. We cannot respect their "democratic rights" since they are organisations dedicated to denying the democratic rights of the whole working class, and to genocide against black people. They must be fought, by black and white workers - and denied any rights whatsoever. We need a workers' united front dedicated to denying the fascists a public platform. They have to be driven off the streets by force, using organised defence squads backed up by mass action.

Revolutionary internationalism

Capitalism is a world wide system. It was built on the broken bones of the black slaves and the people of the colonial empires. It must be fought world wide, by an **international revolutionary socialist party**.

Schemes for voluntary repatriation or resettlement as, for example, Bernie Grant, the black Labour MP, recently proposed are a diversion from the struggle. They are a terrible capitulation to racism. Calls for reparations from the western governments for the crimes of the past serve no useful purpose. Who will pay for those crimes and who will be paid? In Africa many of the regimes are corrupt: all are capitalist.



If the money goes to them, the masses will never see it.

No, the way to fight racism is to say: **here to stay, here to fight**, as black youth have chanted on demonstration after demonstration. And the way to avenge the crimes against black people in the past is to fight imperialism today.

We are for the fight to **cancel the debts** of the Third World countries to the imperialist countries and their agencies like the IMF, debts which are paid for by the masses of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

We are for the **return of all the treasures** stolen by British imperialism from its former colonies and spheres of influence and for them to be placed under the control of the workers' movements in those countries.

Above all we are for 100% support to all movements or countries who come into conflict with imperialism. Practically, this means actively supporting such countries in a war against imperialism, as we did with Argentina against Britain and Iraq against the imperialist-led Coalition. At the same time we have to support the movements of workers and peasants against the reactionary regimes that rule such countries. It means demanding that Britain withdraws all of the troops it has stationed around the globe, including in Northern Ireland. Those troops are there to defend imperialism. They should get out.

Purge racism from the labour movement!

Only the working class can destroy capitalism, and with it racism. Yet the labour movement has not escaped the prejudices that permeate class society. Unions and the Labour Party are riven with racism. The handful of black MPs and the election of Bill Morris as leader of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) have not eradicated these prejudices. Indeed, the Labour Party is a party that has implemented vicious immigration laws. The unions have tolerated informal colour bars in the workplaces. Both the Labour and union leaders are enemies of black self organisation, whatever their talk of quotas and racial harmony.

For black caucuses!

Black workers in the unions and the Labour party should have the right to caucus. This is not separatism, as the bureaucrats claim. The fact that black workers are amongst the most densely unionised section of the population and have the largest number of Labour voters shows this charge to be both a lie and a racist slur. These workers have proved their loyalty to the workers' movement far more than John Monks

of the TUC and Tony Blair of the Labour party ever have. The right to caucus within the workers' movement is a way of allowing black workers to organise to fight racism in the unions.

For national, black-only caucuses in the unions

At a national level, black members' conferences should be black-only if they are to serve as effective national caucuses. We support the fight to make the TUC Black Workers' Conference a black-only delegate conference. This does not absolve the TUC from organising black and white workers together in an anti-racist struggle, including national conferences, demonstrations and campaigns.

At the same time we reject the call for three reserved seats on the general council of the TUC to be elected by the Black Workers Conference. In individual unions the same applies to reserved seats on the NECs.

The General Council of the TUC, like the NECs of individual unions, not only decide on issues concerning black workers.

The General Council should be the "general staff" of the whole workers' movement, elected by a democratically convened Congress and accountable to it, and through that to the whole movement. And union NECs should be elected by the whole membership, including any reserved seats for black members (or women) so that they too can be held to account by the whole membership.

For a massive campaign against racism in the labour movement

The battle against racist ideas needs to be constantly waged to counter the prevalent prejudices of society. Instead of weekend luxury teach-ins for bureaucrats, there should be a systematic campaign to educate shop stewards and rank and file members against racism.

Drive active racists and fascists out of the unions and Labour Party

Fascists want to destroy the workers' movement. They should never be allowed to be part of it. Racists come in different guises. Active racists, those who preach and organise racist policies within the labour movement, must be driven out as well.

Such people must be barred from holding any positions within the unions and, if, despite discipline, they cannot be broken from their prejudices, they should be expelled from the unions and from the Labour Party.

Labour must fight racism

Labour governments have repaid the support given to them by black workers with racist laws, with virginity tests on immigrant women, with the use of

the police against black strikers and communities. This must be fought. Black and white workers must demand that Labour pledges its support to black self defence, repeals all immigration controls, and replaces the Commission for Racial Equality with an anti-racist National Convention comprising delegates from the labour movement and from the fighting anti-racist organisations of the black communities in Britain.

Separatism is not the answer

The complicity of the Labour and trade union leaders in maintaining the racist system has led some black activists to reject the building of common political organisations with white workers. This is a big mistake.

The black working class of Britain constitutes, at most, six per cent of the population. To overthrow racist capitalism the closest unity of the working class majority will be necessary. Our support for the right of black workers to organise within the workers' movement, to identify and challenge racism, is aimed at strengthening the unity of the working class.

We do not support the building of separate black political parties or unions.

We reject separatism and insist on both the possibility and the necessity of black and white workers uniting in the struggle against racism and capitalism.

For an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement in the unions

The trade union bureaucracy, and this includes Bill Morris, exists to mediate between workers and bosses. This job sets the bureaucrats apart from the mass of workers and gives them privileges over those workers.

These privileges give them a stake in maintaining the capitalist system. Without this system they would be out of a job. In the end it is this material interest, rather than any personality defects, that push them to betray the struggles of the workers they represent.

Their stake in the society that exploits those workers leads them to side with it, ultimately, whenever workers clash with it.

They must be overthrown if the unions are to be changed from undemocratic organisations of compromise into democratic, fighting organisations of class struggle. Black workers have a direct interest in the fight for a rank and file movement - helping to oust a bureaucracy that is a prop of a racist society.

For a revolutionary workers' party

Labour remains the party of the trade unions, despite Blair's charge to the right. But it is really the party of the union bureaucracy, every bit as com-

mitted to the capitalist system as that bureaucracy.

At best it promotes the mild reform of the capitalist system. And as such it acts to defend that system, including that system's racism.

While we are in favour of a fight to make Labour act in the interests of the working class, we believe it will never do so in a consistent fashion.

We fight to put it into office and demand it act in the workers' interests so that it can be put to the test in front of the millions of workers, including black workers, who look to it. But that fight is part of the fight to build a different type of party.

We want a revolutionary party, part of a Revolutionary Communist International, committed to the world-wide fight against the class system that breeds, nurtures and sustains racism.

We want a party comprising the most militant fighters against capitalism and racism.

We believe that black workers have a leading role to play in that party. It is a party that will be committed not just to the action programme we have outlined here, but to the general revolutionary socialist programme aimed at:

- the destruction of capitalism and its state
- their replacement by a state based on democratic workers' councils and a workers' militia and an economy planned to meet working class needs not the profit margins of a handful of bosses.

We call on all workers to join us in the fight to build that party, so that we can bring nearer the day when humanity will look upon racism as crime of the past, not a permanent feature of the present. ■

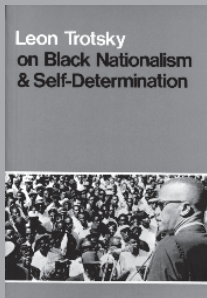
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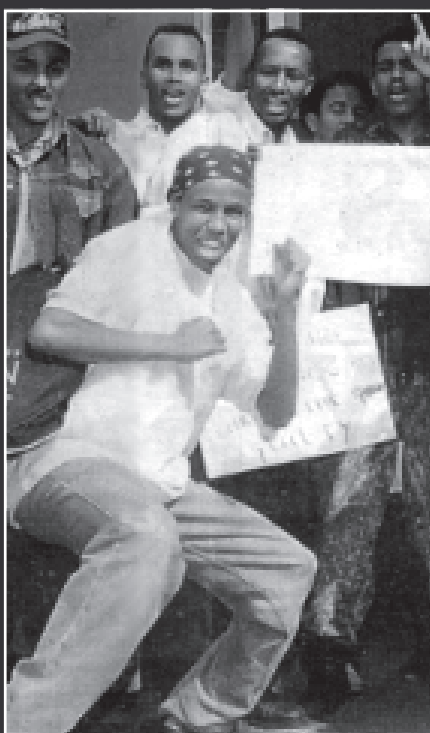
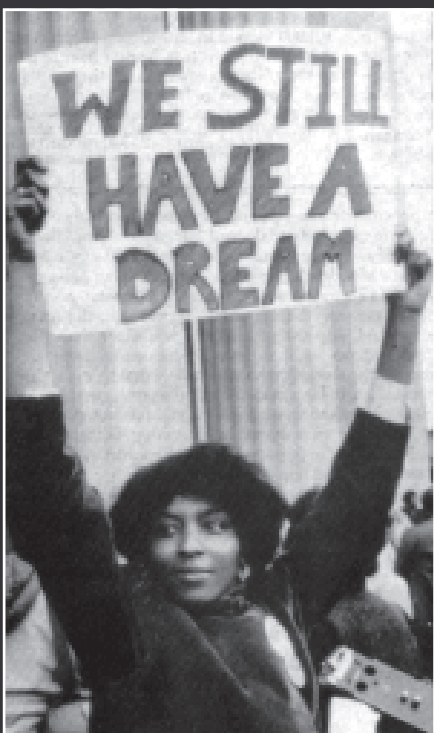
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Socialism and Black Liberation



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