

THE

NO PENCE

**SOCIALIST
CHALLENGE TO
IMMIGRATION
CONTROLS**

BY BOB PENNINGTON

ISBN 0-85 612 022-7

Published by Relgocrest Ltd., PO Box 50, London N1

Typesetting and design by F.I.Litho Ltd., 328 Upper Street, London N1.

Printed by Interlink Longraph Ltd., 45 Mitchell St., London EC1

THE SOCIALIST CHALLENGE TO IMMIGRATION CONTROLS

by Bob Pennington

Whatever the Government says, most people in Britain know that life for them is getting worse. Living standards are falling, unemployment keeps rising, the housing lists grow longer, more hospitals are being closed and inflation hits working people and pensioners more and more every day.

People who see little future for themselves, and a dole queue or an insecure, badly paid job waiting for their children when they leave school, naturally get desperate and worried. They ask: 'What causes this to happen and what can we do?'

Right now they are getting a reply to their question from a variety of sources. The National Front says 'the only remedy' is 'the obligatory repatriation of the whole immigrant and immigrant descended population...' Enoch Powell urges the 'assisted repatriation' of immigrants. The Tory leader, Whitelaw, wants tougher measures against black people coming into Britain, which would include horrendous proposals that would debar husbands joining their wives who are already in the country. The Government's Select Committee Report echoes these racist sentiments by advocating tougher and more barbaric restrictions on immigration. Even the *Financial Times* condemned the Report's language of 'double-think' and its blatant 'illiberality'.

Right across the board, from the fascist National Front to Enoch Powell, the Tory Shadow Cabinet, the Labour Cabinet and even the alleged left, Syd Bidwell MP for Southall — all favour immigration controls. No wonder the malicious lies that black people cause unemployment, are responsible for the housing shortage, and take too much out of our social services seem so plausible.

There is an inescapable conclusion once you accept the need for immigration controls, and that boils down to the argument that there would be more jobs, more houses, better schools and better hospitals if black people did not come to Britain. Such a conclusion is very handy for some people because it turns our attention away from the real cause of the problem and provides a useful scapegoat on which people can direct their frustration and anger.

Countering the Racists' Lies

One and half million people being out of work is a disaster. However, these people are not jobless because West Indian and Asian people are here. In the twenties and thirties Britain had over two million unemployed, and there was hardly a black person in the country. The worst areas for unemployment now, are Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the North East. These regions have the smallest percentage of black residents in the UK. Unemployment has hit black people harder than anyone. Since 1974, unemployment has gone up 220 per cent but for young black people it has gone up by 750 per cent.

We have an appalling housing crisis — over one million people are on the council waiting lists. No city is worse off than Glasgow, which has a minute black population. The 1966 census showed that 7.3 per cent of English families lived in furnished accommodation but 43.6 per cent of immigrant workers were renting furnished accommodation — the most expensive and insecure form of rented property. The same census showed that only 4.2 per cent of black people lived in council houses compared to 22.3 per cent of white people.

The idea peddled by racists that black people sponge off the welfare state is equally ludicrous. Large numbers of black people came to Britain as adult workers. They had already been housed, fed, clothed and educated in their country of origin which saved the British social services something like £12,000 a person. A survey done in 1971* pointed out that taking into account all expenditure on health, welfare, education, social security and housing, the average immigrant takes out 20 per cent less than the average white person does.

Inflation, which has eroded the living standards of working people, can hardly be laid at the door of the black population. You will look in vain for the sight of black faces in the high levels of the Treasury, on the boards of the big banks and insurance companies and you will not find black workers deciding the pricing policies of the monopolies. Those sacred precincts are strictly preserved for the bosses and those in the establishment who support the interests of the employers — black workers like white workers are strictly barred!

Unemployment, soaring living costs, poor and inadequate housing, and declining social services are hitting all working people — black and white. If we are to fight back against the crisis then we must decide who our allies are and where our enemy is. The employers and the Labour Government have their solutions, which boil down to the simple fact that working people must pay for the crisis in order to put 'Britain back on its feet'.

To make British goods more competitive, they have deliberately cut

**The Economic Impact of Commonwealth Immigration* — National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

real wages which they claim will stop inflation. According to that theory Calcutta should be an oasis of splendour and London a desert of isolation. All this has done is to reduce workers' living standards and helped the bosses to survive. The reason we have such bad housing conditions is because of the enormous cost of building council houses. But that is not caused by high wages. The people who keep building costs high are the building firms and the financiers who lend the money to the local authorities. In the 10 years from 1968 the cost of a £6000 house has gone up to £14,000 because the interest rate has zoomed up from 7 per cent to 14 per cent. The cuts in public expenditure, which mean less hospitals, less schools, less homes, less nurseries, less care for the old and fewer jobs, have been introduced so that the employers can restore the rate of profit. This is why the Government after cutting our living standards, gives tax handouts to the bosses, like Healey's 1974 Budget, which benefitted to big companies to the tune of over £800 million a year.

Capitalism is the Enemy

The enemy of working people is not the black family next door, but is a system that puts private profit above the interest of all working people. The working class, if it is going to fight for its own interests, cannot afford to support immigration controls and all the racist arguments that go with these laws. It is vital for working people to build the biggest and strongest united movement and that means winning to their side all those allies who have a common interest. Over 90 per cent of black people living in Britain are either workers or members of working class families.

A recent survey shows that 61 per cent of males from minority groups who are in employment are members of trade unions, compared with 47 per cent of white males. The overwhelming majority of black people have the same class interests as white workers. They are the natural allies of the working class, in contrast to the Tories and the Labour Government who put British capitalism first, and ordinary people a very poor second.

But you cannot make allies of people that you treat as second-class citizens. Nor can you have a strong united trade union movement that accepts that some of its members will have less rights than others. For example, the 1971 Immigration Act has the crude aim of stripping black workers of their most basic democratic rights. The Act stipulates a person can only come to Britain providing they have a work permit. Even if they have a job and they are allowed in the country, this still does not guarantee them the right to settle here. Each year they have to re-apply to stay for another year. Only when they have been here for five years can they then apply for citizenship. The purpose of the Act is to turn them into contract labourers without any civil or political rights. This is why they need a work permit and are not allowed to change jobs without permission. At any time they can be deported if the Home Office decides they are not of 'good character'.

When the Tories brought in this Act, they did it under the cover that it was designed to protect jobs. The opposite is true. They hoped that by establishing a pool of migrant labour, which had no rights, and lived under the fear of deportation, they could be used by the employers to lower wage levels and undermine job conditions. Of course, when a strike takes place black workers living under the shadow of such a threat are taking a much bigger risk than their white brothers and sisters when they walk out of the gate. To their eternal credit — as the workers at Grunwicks and many other places have showed — the black workers have refused to be intimidated and have often been in the *forefront* of fighting for conditions that benefit all the working class. But as long as this Act remains law it stands as a threat to all the trade union movement.

The 1971 Act like the preceding laws on immigration controls and the subsequent proposals like the Select Committee Report and the Green Paper on Nationalities have been introduced to serve the needs of the capitalist system and have been concessions to racism. For a period after the end of the second-world war Britain, like most of the capitalist countries in Europe suffered from a chronic shortage of labour. This was partly solved by recruiting people from Europe - such as displaced persons and refugees — and half a million of these came into Britain between 1946 and 1951. Britain also had another source of labour in its colonies, where, having drained their wealth and brought it back into the coffers of the British investors, it left these countries with a big labour force and very little capital with which to set that labour force to work.

In the more prosperous days of capitalism, during the late forties and fifties, black people in search of jobs migrated to the UK. In fact many of the West Indians were positively encouraged to do so when London Transport and the British Hotels and Restaurant Association started recruiting campaigns in the Caribbean Islands. Enoch Powell, when he was Minister of Health, ran a recruiting campaign for nurses in Mauritius. The recruitment of black labour suited employers and Government alike. It provided more hands that could be used to make profits for industry, and most importantly, it provided workers for those jobs which were hardest to fill. In a period of full employment, British workers naturally took full advantage of a competitive labour market to get better paid jobs and moved out of the less attractive, low-paid jobs that in tougher times they had been forced to take. The black immigrants finished up as cleaners and porters in the health service, working as kitchen hands and waiters in hotels, and in those jobs which entailed shift working like public transport.

At the economic level everything appeared to be working 'fine'. At the social level things were different. Immigrant labour had naturally gone to the places where work was available, which inevitably meant the large

Opposite: Asian workers, refusing to be intimidated, fought for trade union rights at Grunwick. Photo: Andrew Wiard (Report)

7/20/80
NATIONALLY
RECOGNISED
GIVE US
YOUR
SUPPORT

UR
Hrs

28 for 4 ”



cities and towns. But these were the places where the housing situation was worst of all. The economic needs of the employers had forced the concentration of black immigrants in the deprived and decaying areas of the urban centres.

The racists now had a target. Although these centres had been underprivileged and lack sufficient houses long before the first black person set foot in them — a point the racists conveniently ignored — they were able to whip up racist sentiments by blaming the blacks for the housing shortage. The employers had made all the financial gains from immigration, whilst black and white workers alike were left to carry the social cost. The race riots in Notting Hill in 1958 arose out of this simmering social conflict, but at that time the needs of the labour market meant that the ruling class could not allow racism to get out of hand.

Racism: A Capitalist Tool

The state dealt with the situation in two ways. Firstly, it handed out tough sentences to the white people who had gone on the racist rampage. Secondly, it decided to slow down immigration. It took the latter course because the economy was reaching a stage where it no longer needed anything like the same amount of unskilled labour. If British capitalism was to compete with the other capitalist nations it was going to have to prune its workforce and become more capital intensive. Ideally, it needed a migrant workforce which it could employ in times of a boom in the economy and ditch during recessions. Immigration controls suited that course perfectly as the complete banning of all immigration would have denied the employers a reserve pool of labour.

By the early 1960s the ruling class had set course for introducing its immigration controls. The 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, introduced by the Tories, took the first steps in limiting the rights of black people to enter the UK. Although the Labour Party opposed the Act the low turn out of Labour MPs for the vote in the House of Commons when the Act was voted on, indicated a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the opposition. Nor did Labour mount any serious campaign amongst the public against this Act. The racists now had a 'legitimate' platform and the extreme rightists in the Tory Party gleefully clambered on to the bandwagon.

As it became apparent to the more far-sighted sections of the ruling class that the economy was heading for a sharp decline, the issue of race became even more important. What they had to do was jack up the rate of profit and cut social expenditure. Controlled migrant labour seemed to fit the bill. A labour force with restricted rights of entry and which was restricted in its rights to bring in its dependents was more easy to exploit economically, and in social terms cost the state far less. When that labour force is black it can be discriminated against and the racism of the white working class can be used by capital against the interest of labour.

Social democracy had always been able to combine an acceptance of colonialism with a rhetoric of freedom and equality for all. Its acceptance of imperialist exploitation lay in the material benefits that the working class here had gained as a result of imperial plunder. Its justification lay in the claim that Britain was after all bringing progress to the colonies and was expressed in the paternalistic notions of 'responsibility' and a Commonwealth of 'equals'.

When the Tories first brought in Immigration controls a tremor of moral shock vibrated through social democracy. The Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell, was dismayed at the idea that 'our' citizens were being denied the right to be British — he was also an opponent of the EEC. But reality refused to go away. The Empire was disintegrating. To survive, British capitalism had to turn towards Europe. The idea of the mother country was no longer an advantage — in fact it has become a hindrance. The rotten ideological theory of a Commonwealth of 'equals' was crumbling under the impact of a new economic reality. The nation, so dear to the hearts of the Labour leaders and the liberals had to make a new turn. Although the odd tear dropped into the beer in the House of Common's bar or fell on the page of the *New Statesman*, the demands of 'national' survival had to come first. The alternative of fighting the ruling class, was after all too dreadful to contemplate. The opposition of the Labour leaders to immigration controls began to evaporate.

By 1965 the Labour Government had dropped its opposition to immigration controls. Prime Minister Wilson was an enthusiast for the 'technological revolution' which meant less labour — both black and white. Furthermore race had become a red-hot election issue after the defeat of Labour's projected Foreign Secretary, Patrick Gordon Walker, at the polls by a Tory who stood on an open racist platform. Wilson prepared a White Paper which proposed even tougher measures, like drastically cutting down the numbers of people entitled to vouchers to enter Britain. It also proposed stricter tests of eligibility for the entry of children between 16 and 18 and for the Home Secretary to be given powers at his or her discretion, without any court ruling, to deport any immigrant of less than five years residence.

Labour makes racism respectable

The Labour leaders had given it on a plate to the racists. By discussing how many black people should be allowed in Britain they had made race the issue. The Labour leaders had identified black people as the problem. They had fanned the flames of racism and the slippery path from calling for controls and restrictions, to hatred and violence against immigrant workers is very short indeed.

Once the Labour leaders had given that ground they were unable to resist the arguments of the National Front and the Tories, that what is

needed is even less of them. Powell's demands for a policy of repatriation take on a logic, the fascist's demand to deport all black people, including those born here, is legitimised. By 1968 Labour had gone even further with its infamous Commonwealth Immigration Act which had the purpose of denying East African Asians who held British passports, the right to live in the country of which they are officially and legally citizens. They could only come and live in Britain if they had a grandfather or parent born in the UK. As most white people in the Commonwealth *do* have either a grandparent or a parent born in the UK, and most black people do not, the Act was clearly intended to cut down on black people coming into this country. Again the Labour Government had endorsed racism and at the same time made thousands of people stateless.

The 1971 Immigration Act introduced by the Tories brought in even tougher measures, extending the powers of deportation and even making deportable offences retrospective.

These laws have been applied with particular savagery and with a callous disregard for people's rights. A social worker describes how a little boy and his father on opposite sides of the barrier were being asked about the cattle on the farm at home. As the father had been here for some time he was hardly likely to know if a cow had died or another had been sold the week before. She says the 12-year-old boy was in a 'nightmare world of glass, leather and plastic, being questioned over and over again by strangers who could not speak clearly enough for him to follow and whose tone of voice was hectoring and hostile...his father was being kept away from him, but only if he could answer the question...he would get a chance to speak to his father.' The boy was sent home, the immigration officer had decided he was not really his father's son.

Day after day, incidents like that are repeated. As Merlyn Rees admitted to *Weekend World* the purpose of Immigration Controls is to keep out *black* people, so it is little wonder that these laws are carried out with the viciousness and brutality their racist content justifies.

The Labour Opposition in the House of Commons opposed the 1971 Act. But, as in 1962, their opposition lacked the ring of conviction and they did nothing to organise against it. The demonstration and protests against these new laws was in the main organised by the black organisations, particularly bodies like the Indian Workers Association. This had the effect of stirring an opposition inside local Labour parties and in the ranks of the trade unions. At the Labour Party Conference in 1976 there was a majority vote against immigration controls. Despite its vote against the 1971 Act and the decision of its own Conference the Labour Government has done nothing to repeal that Act.

Labour MPs have ignored the decision of their own Conference. With one eye cast in the direction of the electoral hot potato — racism — they have taken another stride along the road of victimising black people. Five

Labour MPs along with five Tories produced in March 1978 a report (the Select Committee Report on Race Relations and Immigration). that recommends that children over 12 years old not born here will not be allowed to join their parents and in future right of entry may be limited to those below school age. Dependants, other than wives, and children under 16, they say should not be allowed to join their families unless accommodation and means of support is approved by the authorities, and they would not be entitled to supplementary benefits.

No wonder this report brought a smirk to the face of Enoch Powell. Send them home — the cry of Powell and the National Front — is a recommendation made to the Government by five of its own MPs. These people give Powell's suggestions a more insidious twist by putting up more obstacles to black people staying in Britain. At the same time the Government Green Paper on the Nationalities Act delivers another blow at black people's rights. If implemented, this would take away the right to vote, the right to sit on a jury, the right to a job in the civil service, of every person not classified as a citizen.

As the previous legislation has deliberately aimed at denying black immigrants citizen rights, both the Select Committee Report, and the proposed Nationalities Act, simply deliver the final blow to what few rights immigrant workers still have. These measures give racism respectability and lend strength to the fascists and their fellow travellers in the Tory Party.

Such measures are in accord with the interests of the ruling class and help them to maintain their economic, social, and political domination over working people. All immigration laws divide the working people along lines of race and subordinate the overall interest of the working class to a struggle for sectional ends. By their support for these measures, the trade union and Labour leaders fail to answer the accusations of the Tories and the National Front, and reinforce the idea that workers should not fight to change the system, but compete with each other. The aim of the state to establish a migrant work force, dependent on the ups and downs of the capitalist market, and denied its elementary rights, is institutionalised through these laws and in the long-term that can only weaken the trade union movement. Because the trade union and Labour leaders have no answer to the crisis they can only tail end the racists.

For them to effectively fight immigration controls means a battle with their own supporters because racism is not confined to the ruling class. It also runs deep inside the British working class. For years British imperialism exploited and looted the colonies. it justified this exploitation by educating through the pulpit, the schools, in parliament and through its publications, the myth of white superiority. At the same time sections of British workers gained material benefits by the imperialist policy of their own ruling class.

Although the material conditions are rapidly changing and the sun

which never set on the Empire now hardly ever shines on the British economy at all, the ideology of racism does not automatically disappear. To combat and defeat these deeply ingrained ideas in the labour movement demands a vigorous campaign. Rather than do this, the labour leaders have either gone along with the demands of the racists or buried their heads and remained silent. Even most of the Labour 'lefts' have bowed under this pressure. Bidwell, former chairperson of the *Tribune* Group told the Southall Labour Party as far back as 1963 that he agreed with the maintenance of immigration controls — no wonder Callaghan was delighted to have him on the Select Committee. Most of the 'left' can come forward with nothing better than making immigration controls more humane, which ignores the fact that you cannot humanise laws whose purpose is to discriminate against black people.

The Communist Party's 'Socialist' Controls

The Communist Party also falls into the trap set for them by the racists when it raises demands like 'Socialist Immigration Controls' or calls for immigration laws which apply equally to both black and white. The arguments of the Labour 'lefts' and the Communist Party start from the point of view that we do not have enough jobs and resources to meet the needs of people and that there is some national solution to this problem. This is wrong. Firstly, it treats the capitalist crisis as one that we all have to share responsibility for. This is why the 'lefts' and the Communist Party support import controls which are measures designed to protect a weak British capitalism from international competition and means that our allies are 'progressive' employers not workers in other countries. Secondly, immigration controls — be they draped in the cloak of humanity or applied to both black and white people — deny the working class the important right to move anywhere, at any time, with full, guaranteed democratic rights. Thirdly, we are in favour of the maximum use of *all* the labour force, because we do not believe that we have too many houses, too many schools, too many hospitals and too many essential jobs.

The problem right now is that workers are unemployed because the employers do not find it profitable to employ them. Homes are not being built because the employers and the moneylenders do not find it profitable to build them. The resources — both material and physical — are all under-used. To accept the right of the capitalists to decide what we produce, and to allow them to decide who shall work, is to abandon the interests of all the working class to the profit motive.

The failure of the traditional 'left' leaders to put forward an alternative strategy to fight the crisis has driven them into the arms of the ruling



Anti Nazi League Carnival, London May 1978.
Photo: Islington Community Press.

class. Because they, at most, stand for reforming capitalism they seek a national solution where we 'all pull together', employers and workers alike. They would simply like to distribute the national burden a little more fairly, which means they finish up arguing that while they are not against black people, maybe there are too many here.

They have also accepted the right of private capital to decide what goods and services working people should have, and how many working people can have jobs. Instead of fighting for work-sharing with no loss of pay and demanding the nationalisation — without compensation — of all firms that make workers redundant, they have meekly accepted the sacred right of the employers to close down their firms when their rate of profit is not high enough. Instead of fighting for jobs for all they finish up playing the numbers game over immigration.

To bolster British industry they have accepted the Government's

policies of hand-outs to private firms and massive cuts in public expenditure. As a result, the social services are falling apart. The health, education and housing of all working people can only get worse by such policies. Instead of opposing cuts in the social services by strikes and occupations, and demanding an increase in public expenditure linked to rises in costs, they sit around discussing where best to make cuts. Their failure to fight back and to put forward a socialist solution reinforces the argument that the crisis in the public sector is due to having too many immigrants in Britain.

There are 1½ million unemployed in this country. At the same time we are desperately short of houses, hospitals, schools and all the other essential things that working people need. Instead of giving credence to the idea that people do not have jobs because of black immigration, the labour lefts should have been campaigning for a programme of public works. This would mean that peoples' skills and energies could be directed to making the goods and buildings that are necessary.

Of course this cannot be achieved without building a mass united movement of all workers — both black and white — that has the strength to force the nationalisation without compensation, of the banks, insurance companies and the monopolies that now determine policy. By retreating from that essential fight they have permitted the ruling class to put forward its own racist solutions which divides the working class and drives workers towards competing with each other.

It is impossible to fight racism and to build a united movement of the working class and its allies without taking an unequivocal stand against immigration controls. Any retreat on that fundamental issue puts you on the ground of the racists and prevents you from putting an alternative socialist solution to the capitalist crisis. This is why socialists have a special responsibility for building an opposition against the state's plan to keep and extend the present laws.

Fight Immigration Laws

The Labour Party Conference voted against immigration laws at its 1976 Conference, but that excellent beginning has been followed by a long silence. Those Labour parties that are against immigration controls should organise a national conference to which they invite all black and immigrant organisations who are opposed to immigration controls. They should circulate the trade unions asking for their support and they should invite the local anti-racist and anti-fascist committees as well as the Anti-Nazi League to send delegates. This could start off a national, strongly based campaign, that could produce leaflets and broadsheets, organise public meetings and demonstrations and build lobbies of the TUC and the Labour Party Conference. In the local areas the campaign could organise inside the trade unions and the local Labour wards against

the re-selection of MPs like Bidwell, Moonman, Wilson, Willey and Torney, the five Labour MPs who helped to prepare the Select Committee Report. A campaign of this type would unite all the anti-racist forces and could have a real effect on breaking hundreds of thousands of working class people from racism, by showing that there is a real opposition against the Thatchers, the Powells and the nazi National Front and make clear that the Labour Government does not speak for the socialist movement on the issue of race.

A broadly based campaign like that would also be a real encouragement to immigrants fighting back against the oppression of racism, particularly if it took up a practical fight to defend black people being harassed by the immigration authorities and the local police. It could oppose discrimination in schools and housing by organising mass pickets of the schools and of the local authorities responsible for these policies. Where possible it could back up its activities by mass demonstrations and strikes in the workplace.

The big growth of the Anti-Nazi League and the outstanding success of the carnival last May shows that there is a real potential for building a massive anti-racist movement. What was particularly striking about the ANL Carnival was the presence of thousands of working class youth. The tired cynics and incurable pessimists of social democracy try to explain that away by claiming that those young people only went for the music and that they are not really interested in politics. Well it is quite understandable that they are not interested in the boring apologies that social democracy offers as its version of practical politics. But thousands and thousands of those young people marched behind the anti-racist slogans of the ANL and the different political organisations that made up the march, all the way from Trafalgar Square to Victoria Park in Hackney. OK — they also went for the music, but most of that music was based on anti-racist, anti-sexist and political themes. For the first time in many years working class youth was rallying to a political cause. That potential must be built on and extended.

To date the ANL has not taken a position against all immigration controls, but like all organisations that are mobilising against racism it will confront that issue. To make sure that it builds on its successful start the ANL must begin to discuss why the anti-racist movement has to be against all immigration laws. By doing this it can educate the newly radicalised youth on how to most effectively fight racism and how they can build real unity between black and white people.

The press of the labour and trade union movement has a really essential role to play in combatting racism. By explaining the real nature of immigration laws and by helping to build campaigns against them it can help to bring a real understanding of the anti-working class character of the immigration laws inside the labour movement and give strength and force to the fight to defeat them.

Socialist Challenge

**SPECIAL
OFFER
SUBSCRIBE
NOW!**

**£2 for
3 months**

The paper everybody's reading



Please send me *Socialist Challenge* for the next three months. I enclose £2.

Name

Address

.....

Send to: Socialist Challenge, 328 Upper St; London N1. All money payable to Socialist Challenge.

If your trade union branch, Labour Party, LPYS, women's group, student union etc would like a speaker from Socialist Challenge on the subject of this pamphlet, or any other issue please write to Socialist Challenge, 328 Upper Street, London, N1 2XQ. Telephone 01-359-8180