

**British Labour Party's Patriotic Politics
on Immigration and Race, 1900-1968**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the British Labour Party's understanding of, and approaches to, domestic race issues from 1900 to the 1960s. Its focus is to compare the party's race politics for 1900-1939 to that for post-1945 New Commonwealth immigration, thereby finding continuities in the Labour Party's race politics in a longer-term perspective. It does so by exploring the party's position on: the Eastern European Jewish immigration and the 1905 Aliens Act; the 1919 Aliens Act; the employment of *coloured* seamen on British merchant ships; the anti-Semitism practiced in East London by the British Fascists. After this, it discusses what continuities and changes appear in the Labour's policies towards post-1945 non-white immigrants until the 1960s.

It will argue that the basis of Labour's race politics was patriotic concerns which developed into different directions in each case. On the one hand, the Labour Party's official position of opposing immigration laws was based on liberal and tolerant British tradition, with a change in emphasis occurring after the First World War to socialist internationalism. Likewise, anti-Semitism of British fascists in the 1930s was criticised as a foreign assault on Britain's order and democracy. On the other hand, Labour's patriotic language took a opposite direction when in government office, administering immigration control and addressing issues related with *coloured* seamen. Labour defended its positions as protecting the interests of Britain and British workers.

The features shown in the early twentieth century reappear in its politics on New Commonwealth immigration in the 1950s and 1960s. Its volte-face into acceptance of immigration control, suspicion of a multi-racial society, and attempt to exclude *race* from its politics, all reveal long-standing tensions within Labour's politics, which demonstrates that Britain's race politics need to be understood in a much longer trajectory than a narrow focus on post-1945 years.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University.

All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

This thesis examines the Labour Party's position on, and approach to, domestic racial issues from 1900 to the 1960s. It aims to compare Labour's position during its early years with that of the post-1945 era. Although the British Labour Party started out with concerns that were directly focused on political representation and industrial protection of the British working classes, it also embraced internationalism in solidarity with, and sympathy for, the working classes of other countries. As a result, from time to time the Labour Party had to face issues that seemed to involve possible conflicts between the interests of British workers whom the party claimed to represent domestically, and its ideological adherence to the internationalist ideal. Anti-racism, or opposition to anti-alienism, constituted a crucial part of the ideological basis of the most left-wing political groupings like the British Labour Party, and issues involving racial aspects exposed the tensions arising from the seeming incompatibility of the national and international positions of the party. This thesis aims to examine these tensions.

Who and what did the Labour Party attempt to protect in its fight against the proclaimed evil of racism, or anti-alienism, evident in domestic political and social issues? What was at stake in the party's political dealing with these racial issues? How did the party balance between the declared internationalism of its official ideological orientation, and the practical constraints upon its position as a national political entity representing the working classes, and later the whole nation when it was elected in 1924 and in 1929-31? And finally, what continuities and changes can be identified in the Labour Party's policies towards the New Commonwealth immigration after the Second World War? These are the main research questions to be answered in this thesis.

Four case studies are presented chronologically in order to examine the Labour Party's approach to domestic racial issues over time. The first case study focuses on the introduction of the 1905 Aliens Act, the first restriction to be imposed on immigration in the twentieth century. It was directed against Eastern European Jews. Positions adopted in relation to on the Act, by the British socialists associated with the newly-formed Labour Representation Committee, which would be the Labour Party in 1906, will be explored. The second case study looks at the Labour Party's position on the attempts to restrict immigration after the First World War. The third study tackles Labour's stance on non-white groups residing in Britain, specifically the coloured seamen employed on

British merchant ships. Fourth and finally, this thesis analyses in detail the party's dealing with the fascist anti-Semitic disturbances in East London in the 1930s, an area under the administration of the London Labour Party. These four case studies will illuminate several important themes that the Labour Party had been involved with since its formation in 1900. These themes include patriotism, internationalism, an exclusive sense of white-Britishness, and advocacy of democracy and public order. In addition to the four case studies, the last chapter will take an overview of the Labour Party's policies on the New Commonwealth immigration up to the 1960s in order to answer the last research question, what continuities and changes can be identified in the party's approaches?

The four case studies above were chosen because they show both persisting and changing features within Labour's domestic race politics in Britain. Immigration controls and positions on them involved discussion of race, which was particularly evident in the writings connected with post-1945 New Commonwealth immigration. But this was also the case in the early twentieth century, as will be examined in chapters 1 and 2. The immigration of East European Jews stimulated discourses with worrying undertones relating to perceived threats to, and the decay of, the English race. Such worries were reflected in the resultant 1905 Aliens Act passed under the Conservative government. The 1919 Aliens Act also resulted from excessive post-World War I nationalism and hostility towards foreigners. Both events set the institutional framework within which British politics dealt with racial concerns into the post-1945 years. Colonial seamen working on British merchant ships and their marginalization, discussed in chapter 3, created a domestic *colour* problem which had to be dealt with before the New Commonwealth immigration started. The presence of different *races* within the British Isles challenged Labour, presenting issues of social disorder, fear of racial mixing and protection of social resources for white Britons, which were to be repeated in future decades. The subject of chapter 4, which tackles domestic fascism in the 1930s, is also a good example of persistent yet changing elements within Labour's race politics. Labour's attempts at tackling racial discrimination in both the 1930s and the 1960s, centred on concerns relating to public order. However the 1960s also witnessed a prospect for change, in the vision of a multi-cultural society.

As noted earlier, the last chapter is devoted to comparing the pre-1945 years with post-1945 politics centring on immigration from the New Commonwealth, ending in 1968. Although the year 1968 has not been generally accepted as either a crucial or a decisive moment in the history of British race politics, (as 1962 was), it is nevertheless important

in that the year marked the completion of the policy on immigration and race made by the Labour government which had come to power in 1964. By accepting and strengthening the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which it had once opposed, and making the Race Relations Act in 1965, Wilson's Labour government tied immigration control to the integration of immigrants, establishing the basis of British immigration-race policy. This foundation once laid, and supported by the other parties in 1965, was solidified in 1968 when the second Commonwealth Immigrants Act and the second Race Relations Act were legislated. The policy set devised by the Labour government was solidified in terms of its character as well in 1968, that the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was criticized as racially biased immigration control, and the 1968 Race Relations Act was enacted in large part to control public order and prevent the race issue from becoming politically sensitive, despite the widened scope for dealing with racial discrimination. This thesis argues that British Labour Party's race politics did not begin, or was not newly devised, in these years. If the character of its race politics was solidified in 1968, and if its character was to exclude the 'race' from politics, as many existing researches argue, then this thesis aims to trace such features from the early twentieth century.

It also needs to be made clear which part of the political body, the Labour Party, is the focus of this thesis. It would be quite unrealistic to suggest that one thesis can present a comprehensive view regarding its approach towards certain issues involving *race*, given that the party has never been a single body operating with a single opinion. Commonly described as a broad church by historians, the Labour Party has been a combination of a number of different people and organizations which for much of the time rarely had common opinions over any issue. When it started as the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in February 1900 with an aim to represent working class interests in parliament, it was the result of the collaboration of trade unions and socialist societies like the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Fabian Society, and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). Since then, a number of trades councils, women's associations, small organizations, co-operative societies, professional groups, and constituency parties joined to form the Labour Party, some of them leaving at different points. Naturally, these individual people and groups brought with them their own opinions, expectations, and priorities, all trying to influence the party's general direction and policies, resulting disputes and conflicts which have been a constant feature of the party's history. Despite this diversity within the party, Labour proved to be unified enough to become the second

largest party after the First World War. The core of this unity centred on its ideological orientation as a socialist party, especially after 1918. The Labour doctrine, a form of socialism although not fully determined before 1918, combined a moral sense of diverse religious and radical influences of socialist organizations, with the working-class pragmatism of trade unions.¹

Thus, this thesis attempts to discover a feature in race politics which can be described as a Labourite approach underpinned by ideological priorities, while clearly recognizing the diversity and plurality in the composition and opinions within the coalition body that has been called the British Labour Party. This will be done by examining records produced by individuals and institutions under the name of British Labour. The focus of analysis will first be on the parliamentary debates which contain discussions of the Labour MPs representing the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). This will enable us to listen directly to the voices of Labour MPs, including prominent individuals, who played major roles in forming and leading the party. Concentrating on the PLP and the associated parliamentary records has the merit of providing abundant evidence, more than can be found in any other source, relating to the positions and thoughts on domestic race issues such as immigration restriction. In the early twentieth century, it cannot be said that the Labour Party gave its keenest interest and attention to the issue of immigration control when compared to domestic economic or worker-related issues. Discussion on immigration controls were usually raised by the Conservative Party, so despite the fact that Labour did not open debates on the subject, but rather responded when the subject was raised in the parliament, in doing so it often loudly expressed its officially recognized opposition to anti-alienism.

However this does not mean that the PLP was recognised as representing all, as will be demonstrated through the reading of other sources. One of these sources, the Labour Party's Annual Conference reports are particularly useful for revealing that Labour was not a single body in terms of its opinion. While the annual conference provided an occasion for conferring authority on certain positions as officially Labourite, it also frequently witnessed disagreements between different sections within the party, during the process of acknowledging such positions. The discrepancy present in the party's annual conferences is evident regarding Labour's anti-fascist strategy in the 1930s, as will be illustrated in chapter 4, when some rank-and-file members of the Labour Party

¹ Matthew Worley, *The Foundations of British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 1.

criticized the perceived passiveness of the National Executive Committee's official guidelines for an ordered approach to anti-fascism.

In addition, the opinions of trade unions that constituted the major part of the British labour movement must not be overlooked. Although it has not been possible to investigate the opinions of all the affiliated unions, their stances reported in the annual Trade Union Congress reports and opinions of certain unions have been examined. Some trade unions and unionists actively expressed their opinions on the cases examined, for example, in relation to Jewish immigration examined in chapter 1, and that of colonial seamen in chapter 3. Their positions often conflicted with the official ones held by Labour of embracing the solidarity of workers of the world, which, once again, tells plural voices of the body called the Labour Party in its recognized opposition to racism and anti-alienism. Other important sources include the *Daily Herald*, the Labour Party newspaper, as well as government papers from the period when the party seized the power, albeit for a short period; pamphlets from the party and its affiliated organizations; and letters of some MPs containing the views of individuals and groups in the political body.

In this thesis, therefore, the term 'Labour' refers to the MPs, affiliated organizations, trade unions, press articles, government personnel, all represented in the primary sources examined here, although the focus is on Labour MPs who conveyed their views in parliamentary discussions. While clearly recognizing that there was no single individual or organizational party opinion, this thesis attempts to capture the outstanding tendency amongst the plural voices in relation to domestic race issues such as immigration legislations and fascist disturbances.

Historiography

Before proceeding further, it is important to note that the period addressed by this thesis reflects a major gap in the historiography on British politics and race. A number of existing studies deal with the post-1945 New Commonwealth immigration, from which this thesis started. The development of race politics in Britain has been explained with particular focus on policies relating to the New Commonwealth, thus *coloured*, immigration that began after the Second World War. The records of both the Labour and the Conservative Parties have been critically evaluated for the policies they introduced in response to these coloured immigrants. Concentrating on the legislative measures of immigration restriction and integration of immigrants, these studies have taken the view that successive British governments adopted policies based on prejudice against their dark

skin colour, consequently *racializing* them within British society.²

In the case of the Labour Party, the disproportionate focus on post-1945 immigration resulted in a short-sighted picture of the party's race politics. Many studies focus on the years up to the 1960s in particular, because it was indeed a critical period, in that the basis of British immigration and race policies was devised by the 1964-70 Labour government.³ It combined immigration control in the form of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act which had been legislated by the previous Conservative government, with integrative measures when it introduced the Race Relations Act in 1965. This combination was further strengthened three years later, in 1968 when the Labour government passed the second Commonwealth Immigrants Act and the Race Relations Act.

As a party claiming to advocate social justice and having opposed the Conservatives' introduction of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, arguing that it was based on racial discrimination, the Labour Party's volte-face in accepting that Act, once in office between 1964 and 1970, resulted in considerable controversy and debate among scholars as well as contemporaries. If attention is paid to the Labour Party's policies towards the New Commonwealth immigrants after 1945, the party's record could understandably be read as a moral cowardice, and betrayal of the immigrants for the sake of electoral contest, as has been suggested by some academics.⁴

² For example, see Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Post-war Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Ian R. G. Spencer, *British Immigration Policy since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997); Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea, *White Man's Country: Racism in British Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, "Race" and "Race Relations" in Post-war Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

³ For example, Saggat described the 1964-70 Labour government's politics on immigration and race as a process building a 'limitation-integration equation'. Shomit Saggat, *Race and Politics in Britain* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); Hansen demonstrated in detail a process of making a 'package deal', combining immigration control and integration of immigrants into a policy set, under Labour Home Secretary, Frank Soskice. Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain: The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Bleich, with particular attention to making of Race Relations Acts in the 1960s onwards, explained that the policies developed during the 1960s were a result of political calculation in order to exclude the issue of race and immigration from the political centre. Erik Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policymaking since the 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴ For example, Robert Moore, *Racism and Black Resistance in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1975); Robert Moore and Tina Wallace, *Slamming the Door: The Administration of Immigration Control* (London: Martin Robertson, 1975); Ambalavaner Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1982); Muhammad Anwar, *Race and Politics: Ethnic Minorities and the British Political System* (London: Tavistock, 1986); Gideon Ben-Tovim et al., *The Local Politics on Race* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986).

But this is a superficial judgement based upon a short-sighted approach. Viewed from a longer-term perspective, the Labour Party did not make a sudden, or unexpected, change in policy. Rather it's response resembled the features it had adopted when dealing with other race issues before the New Commonwealth immigrants arrived in the UK. This thesis aims to place an understanding of the Labour Party's race politics in a longer-term context and to add continuity to the existing literature of race politics that is excessively focused on the post-Second World War New Commonwealth immigrants. This will be achieved by turning attention to the early twentieth century, the period before British politics encountered the non-white immigrants. By doing so, Labour's ideological concerns that underpinned the position and policies of the party will be examined, incorporating the history of Labour's race politics into the general history of the party.

There are a few studies which take a longer-term perspective like this thesis. As early as 1965, Paul Foot in his *Immigration and Race in British Politics* examined immigrants and immigration laws in the early twentieth century, including the Jewish immigration, the 1905 Aliens Act and the 1919 Aliens Act.⁵ He concluded that the Labour Party's stance on the New Commonwealth immigration simply fitted the pattern that had been established since the 1905 Aliens Act. The pattern was characterised by the inconsistency that the party showed towards the issue of immigration: when in Opposition Labour objected to immigration control legislation, but once in office it accepted and administrated that legislation.⁶ So, according to Foot, Wilson's Labour government of the 1960s did not betray the non-white immigrants. It only reiterated the pattern that had been established since the early 1900s. While viewing that pattern through the Labour Party's stance on immigration control, this thesis will also pay attention to the party's concerns and the grounds that underpinned them, into which Foot did not delve.

Caroline Knowles, in *Race, Discourse and Labourism*, also went back to the so-called "coloured" immigration years in order to address the disappointment among black citizens and leftist activists regarding why the Labour Party has not been an effective force for race equality in Britain. Like Foot, she also refuted the widespread judgement of the Labour government of 1964-70 as a betrayal of the New Commonwealth immigrants.⁷ In comparing Labour's race politics of the pre-1945 years with that of post-1945, and also in highlighting ideologies, concerns, and priorities behind the party's

⁵ Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷ Caroline Knowles, *Race, Discourse and Labourism* (London: Routledge, 1992).

stances on race issues, Knowles had a direct influence on the starting point of this thesis. The way of dealing with race issues, she wrote, developed in the 1930s, when the party faced Indian independence negotiations and the anti-Semitic attacks of the British Union of Fascist (BUF) in East End of London. In these cases, she concluded the party established both a negative response to blackness and tolerated racial inequality, which shaped the frame of approach of race politics in the 1950s and the 1960s, in relation to the New Commonwealth immigration.⁸ Throughout the period, what constrained Labour's capability of applying its conception of social justice, of racial equality in this case, were the political boundaries set by *Labourism* - the term Knowles used to refer to "politics constructed within and around the Labour Party."⁹ Among plural political concerns, claims, and objectives within Labour, those given official party authorisation included socialism and parliamentary democracy, and these largely affected and directed the way the party dealt with race issues.

This as Knowles notes, tells us as much about the Labour Party itself as it does about race politics in Britain. This points to another feature of the existing historiography, that the issue of race is largely excluded from the general account of the party's history, if not totally neglected. Important studies which outline Labour's historical path do not usually contain anything about the party's treatment of race.¹⁰ Likewise the ideologies and philosophies driving the party have not been studied in relation to the stance it took on race issues. The Labour Party and race has tended to be discussed within the specific context of the post-1945 New Commonwealth immigration, as mentioned above. Exploration into what concerns and ideological inclinations underpinned policies, like legislative forms of control and integration, has been rarely made.

This thesis aims, like Knowles, to find a place for the Labour Party's politics on race and immigration in the wider discourse of the party's history. However, while Knowles supports the idea that the Labour Party's own reference to socialism and parliamentary democracy framed its stance, here it will be argued that it was the patriotic language deeply rooted in Labour's discourse that drove its political approach to race. In

⁸ Ibid., 3, 24.

⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰ Books on the Labour Party's history generally omit the theme of race and immigration. If they do, it is mentioned very briefly and occasionally. For example, see Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Alastair J. Reid and Henry Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 12th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Keith Laybourn, *A Century of Labour* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000); Brian Brivati and Richard Heffernan, *The Labour Party: A Centenary History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

Knowles' analysis of Labour's race politics, the party's self-conscious concern as a social democratic party made it concentrate on protecting the political values and boundaries with which it identified. For example, in the face of BUF's anti-Semitic disturbances, what Labour tried to protect was order and democracy which it thought were being threatened by the disturbances. As a result Labour, argued Knowles, rarely gave the Jewish victims of the fascist attacks the protection they needed and this significantly restrained its potential to apply the concept of social justice or establish racial equality as a principle in relation to the racially inspired disturbances.¹¹

Knowles' reading of public order and parliamentary democracy, as the dominant concerns of the Labour Party, originating from its aims to be a legitimate social democratic party located within established politics, is not contestable.¹² However the patriotic language in which these concerns were voiced, which had been a constant feature in the Labour Party's engagement with race issues throughout the period covered under this thesis, emerged from the turn of the twentieth century, and not the 1930s as Knowles has argued. It will be shown that the party appealed to *British* values such as liberty, tolerance, order, and democracy, which it claimed to protect and represent. Both immigration restriction laws and fascism were criticised for damaging Britain's liberal tradition, and the presence of colonial non-white subjects criticised for jeopardising social order and threatening the purity of Britain's racial fabric. The Labour Party constantly tried to place its politics within patriotic discourse.

In this respect, a frame of analysis for this research has been provided by Paul Ward's discussion of patriotism and British identities. In *Red Flag and Union Jack*, he paid attention to Labour's language of patriotism in establishing its positions on the issues examined in this thesis.¹³ Ward argued that from the start the British left tried to prove the legitimacy of their creed by repeatedly claiming that they were the true patriots and that their socialism defended English/British values. But it should be noted, wrote Ward, that the left's patriotism was not identical to that of the political right. In Britain the

¹¹ Knowles, *Race, Discourse and Labourism*, 109-123.

¹² For an explanation of Labour politics in relation to its socialism and parliamentary democracy, see Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour*, 2nd ed. (London: Merlin Press, 1973); Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); On Labour's rejection of un-parliamentary politics, especially Communism, see Andrew Thorpe, ed., *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-war Britain* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1989).

¹³ Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism, and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society / Boydell Press, 1998).

Conservative Party have been typically associated with claims to patriotism and defence of national identity.

From the late eighteenth century, the language of patriotism was actively employed by radicals in their opposition to the ruling aristocracy which was criticized for representing only sectional interests. Radicals argued that they were the true patriots, appealing to their interpretation of history in which the rights and liberties of the common English people had been constantly threatened by ruling clique since the Norman Conquest. With the rise of industrialization from the mid-nineteenth century class became an alternative frame of identity for the radicals, but it did not replace patriotism entirely. Rather, class identity shaped in the workplaces could appeal to the liberty and rights of the Englishman, even though the languages of nation and class were not entirely compatible. It also went along with the historical development of the United Kingdom, as it upheld the unity of four nations and their peoples against the narrow interests and tyranny of the ruling class, thereby embracing a more inclusive form of patriotism and vision of the nation.¹⁴

It was by the latter half of the nineteenth century, particularly after the 1867 Reform Act, that patriotic arguments began to be moulded along the imperatives of the ruling parties, especially by Disraeli of the Conservatives. He found in the language of patriotism a useful means to mend inner social divisions and to promote popular conservatism. Disraeli and his Conservative successors equated patriotism with support for an expansionist imperial Britain, and hostility towards Irish and Jewish immigrants. This form of popular conservative politics culminated in the 'Jingoism' of the 1877-8 Eastern Crisis, the 1899-1902 Boer War, and the First World War, in which advocacy of peace was attacked as the enemy within the nation.¹⁵

The beginning of the period under examination in this thesis is therefore set against a background in which the emerging Labour movement and Labour Party contested the legitimate claim to true patriotism. Their firm grasp on the traditional radical patriotism, along with some Liberals, enabled them to challenge the Conservatives who held that they represented the working classes in imperialist and exclusivist sense. We will see this clash particularly clearly in chapter 1 which deals with Jewish immigration, and in chapter 2 in relation to post-1918 immigration control debates in parliament. Immigration controls were viewed by Labour politicians as xenophobic and exclusivist

¹⁴ Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004) 93-95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

measures, that were rupturing the long-held liberty and fair play of Britain, and as a result they were deemed un-British.

There was however a point on which the Labour and the other major parties could agree.¹⁶ As Ross McKibbin has demonstrated, all attached central importance to parliament as an essentially British institution, which was part of a deep-held faith in British fairness by the British left as well as the right.¹⁷ Finding Britishness in parliamentary politics and related values such as public order clearly surfaces in the inter-war confrontation of Labour with the Fascist movement, which is the theme of chapter 4.

Race, Immigration and Imperial Past

The historiography of race and British politics in the twentieth century tends to concentrate on two periods and themes. The early twentieth century has mainly been examined through the lens of the British Empire, while the later period is dominated by the New Commonwealth immigration. This tendency results from an interconnected concern that Britain's imperial past provides a background needed for understanding the race relations and policies of the latter half of the twentieth century. This concern suggests that white British supremacy over black colonial subjects, assumed during the imperial period, decisively affected the discriminative way the British host-society treated the immigrants from her former colonies. A number of studies on post-1945 race relations emphasise and start from such concern. For example, Harry Goulbourne, in *Race Relations in Britain Since 1945*, has written that understanding Britain's post-1945 race relations requires an understanding of the history of the British Empire.¹⁸ Likewise, Dilip Hiro, in *Black British, White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain* has also addressed contemporary race relations in the historical context of the British Empire (and slave trade), stressing the impact of that context on how white British people encountered Blacks and Asians.¹⁹ Also, there are studies on the presence and experiences of Blacks

¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷ Ross McKibbin, "Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?", *The English Historical Review*, Vol. XCIX, Issue CCCXCI (Apr 1984) 297-331.

¹⁸ Harry Goulbourne, *Race Relations in Britain since 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1998), ix-x, 26-28.

¹⁹ Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain*, 3rd ed. (London: Paladin, 1991); In addition to Goulbourne and Hiro, a number of studies on post-1945 race and immigration in Britain present the history of the Empire as their background. For example, see studies by Ian R. G. Spencer, Randall Hansen, and Kathleen Paul. Also see Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back* (London: Hutchinson, 1982); Darcus Howe, "Bring It All Back Home," *Race Today* 6, no 3 (1974); Ambalavaner Sivanandan, *Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1976).

and Asians in Britain, highlighting the long history of their connection with the British Empire which can be traced from the sixteenth century.²⁰

Stuart Hall, also saying that the history of racism in Britain could be traced back to the sixteenth century, stressed the central importance of the imperial context in domestic race relations in which black immigrants and their children were marginalized and excluded from the mainstream economic and social arena. Exploitative capitalist system within the British Empire placed black immigrants in the position of labour force that was cheap and exploitable by the economic needs of the metropolis. Their social and economic relations within the host society were experienced through their blackness which denied them a legitimate British identity. This was also the case for the black children of immigrants, who were born and educated in Britain. In short, the imperial relations between the metropolis and the peripheries in large part shaped the domestic race relations both before and after these non-white colonial citizens arrived in their 'mother country'.²¹

John Rex and Sally Tomlinson have argued that the Empire directly influenced British political parties, from the Conservatives to the Liberals and Labour, by challenging their ideological framework which contained the potential of protecting coloured British citizens against discrimination. In the case of the Labour Party (and the British left as a whole), the imperial experience contradicted the liberal and socialist ethos that the left adopted. This ethos which advocated freedom, equality of opportunity, and intervention for social reform and justice was increasingly put under strain in the face of imperial and colonial assumption of white supremacy. Most of the left accepted such assumptions. As a result, they compartmentalized their principles or conditionally applied them to the domestic sphere only, or abandoned them altogether. Only a minority kept their principles and became radical anti-imperialists. And when an actual encounter with millions of immigrants from former colonies happened after 1945, it became almost impossible for the most left to keep their liberal and socialist principles, resulting in the Labour Party's support for racially discriminative immigration laws.²²

²⁰ Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain* (Chicago: Johnson, 1972); Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Ron Ramdin, *Reimagining Britain: Five Hundred Years of Black and Asian History* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

²¹ Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978)

²² John Rex and Sally Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants in British City: A Class Analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 37; See also, Shirley Joshi and Bob Carter, "The Role of Labour in the Creation of a Racist Britain," *Race & Class* 25, no. 3 (1984): 53-70.

The argument that the imperial past had a decisive influence on the way the post-1945 immigrants were treated in Britain attaches greater importance to the element of skin colour, which is certainly pertinent to what will follow in chapters 3 and 5 of this thesis. In these, we will see that black British subjects were excluded solely because of their skin colour from Labour's idea of who genuinely belonged to Britain. However, as Robert Miles has warned, understanding the approach of British politics (including the Labour Party) to immigration and race requires considerations beyond Empire and an exclusive focus on the single element of *skin colour*.²³ Although the issue of dark skin colour was central in the marginalization of the New Commonwealth immigrants by British politics, there were other determining factors. Responses to a multi-racial Britain took place with reference to past experiences of legislation, institutions, and discourses regarding people who were deemed to be essentially different from Britons. As Tony Kushner phrased it, racial discourse and exclusion occurred in relations not only with colonials of different skin colour but also with European neighbours and *racially* different minorities such as the Irish and Jews within the nation.²⁴ These racial experiences involved not only dark-skinned colonial races, but also white Europeans. Even though there was a difference of extent, racial divisions were clearly recognized between whites as well.

The concept of *race* itself is not fixed, but has evolved since the sixteenth century when it meant something similar to variety or species. From the nineteenth century, race began to mean demarcation dividing human groups.²⁵ Of course, the term was not understood and used on a strict academic basis. Rather, its usage was highly confusing and lacked a solid definitional basis, so nearly every form of grouping peoples - cultural,

²³ Robert Miles, *Racism after "Race Relations"* (London: Routledge, 1993), 148.

²⁴ Tony Kushner, *We Europeans? Mass-observation, 'Race' and British Identity in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 34. Here, it might be necessary to mention the background of exclusion of Irish questions in this thesis discussing 'domestic' race politics. Ireland has never been integrated into 'the United Kingdom' to the extent that Scotland or Wales have been. In addition, the Irish were deemed to be the least white among the four main groups. Commonly called 'Paddy', the Irish immigrants in British Isles went through racialisation as other immigrants. Irish independence and Home-Rule movement drove their support for the Liberal Party in the nineteenth century, and then the Labour Party after 1918. All these make the Irish question a subject worth being examined with a frame of race politics. But it was decided to exclude it, for two reasons. Firstly, it is not the subject that directly provides continuous themes, like immigration laws. Secondly, the Irish question was approached by the Labour Party within the imperial context with other colonies. For the racial understanding of the Irish in Britain(England), see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 1995). For the Labour Party's approach to the Irish question, see Geoffrey Bell, *Hesitant Comrades: The Irish Revolution and the British Labour Movement* (London: Pluto Press, 2016); Bell, *Troublesome Business: the Labour Party and the Irish Question* (London: Pluto Press, 1982); Laurence Marley, ed., *The British Labour Party and Twentieth-Century Ireland: The Cause of Ireland, the Cause of Labour* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

²⁵ Michael Banton, *Racial Theories*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

religious, national, linguistic, ethnic, and geographical groups - was referred to *race*. According to Nancy Stepan, “the ‘Jews’, the ‘Celts’, the ‘Irish’, the ‘Negro’, the ‘Hottentots’, the ‘Border-Scots’, the ‘Chinese’, the ‘Anglo-Saxons’, the ‘Europeans, the ‘Mediterraneans’, the ‘Teutons’, the ‘Aryans’, and the ‘Spanish Americans’ were all ‘races.’”²⁶

Although direct mentioning of race and the belief in fundamental differences between races became frequent and firm from the mid- and late nineteenth century, a discourse of exclusion in identity-shaping emerged before then. Linda Colley has shown that the making of British identity involved the critical role of *others* played by European neighbours, which varied according to time and place. One other was France with its Catholicism and powerful monarchy in the long eighteenth century, which Colley suggests was a critical period in forging British identity.²⁷ The treatment of Germans, who took over the position of the other during the First World War, shows the changing nature of racial perception, or construction of racial character according to specific historical contexts. As Panikos Panayi has shown, the British dramatically changed their racial images of the Germans. Having once been favourably perceived as the closest to Britons in their cultural superiority which was symbolically expressed by the Royal marriage, they became the enemy of the nation. The war-time measures of confiscation, expulsion, and deportation, accompanied the attempt to denounce, or erase, any German racial trace in social and cultural spheres.²⁸ In addition to the French and the Germans, in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century many European immigrants such as Jews, Italians, Poles or Lithuanians went through certain degrees of discriminations based on assumptions that they were culturally and racially different people from Britons. They have only slowly become white after a long integration process and moved up the social ladder.²⁹ As Paul Gilroy has noted, the experiences of these European immigrants achieving whiteness show that race was a dynamic in which the meaning was constantly reconstructed and reformulated according to particular historical contexts.³⁰ Therefore,

²⁶ Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1860-1960* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), xvi-ii.

²⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

²⁸ Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (New York: Berg, 1991).

²⁹ Leo Lucassen, David Feldman, and Jochen Oltmer, ‘Immigrant Integration in Western Europe, Then and Now’, in *Paths of Integration: Migrants in Western Europe, 1880-2004*, eds. Leo Lucassen, David Feldman, and Jochen Oltmer (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 12.

³⁰ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 38.

the history of European immigration that took place before the post-1945 non-white immigration needs to be taken into consideration when examining Britain's race relations, and reveals its continuities and characteristics in longer-term perspective.³¹

The chosen topics of the four chapters of this thesis reflect these concerns. Whilst it fully admits that race relations were shaped in the imperial context, in which non-white British subjects from the colonies were deemed a constant threat by their presence in Britain due almost solely to their skin colour, it also pays attention to the early immigration legislation instituted against European immigrants, as a predecessor of the post-1945 restrictions. By recognising this, this thesis attempts to reveal continuities within Labour politics from the early twentieth century, relating to immigration control, the domestic presence of colonials, the idea of a multi-racial society and public order. The topic of Chapter 1 and 2 is earlier immigration control legislations - the 1905 Aliens Act, the 1919 Aliens Act and further related debates. Chapter 3 continues to deal with immigration control of the inter-war period, but does so in relation to people from the British colonies. Chapter 4 focuses on East End fascism and the 1936 Public Order Act as a forebear of the post-1945 politics of a multi-racial society and the Race Relations Acts.

So far, the need for wider consideration beyond an exclusive focus on the imperial context has been emphasized. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to briefly look at the Labour Party's view of the British Empire. It provides a historical context to the thought of Labour socialists and the labour movement on race, as well as related contemporary assumptions, and the attitudes of other Britons in the early twentieth century.³²

³¹ Kenneth Lunn also points out that the perception of the post-1945 New Commonwealth immigration as the starting point of British 'race relations,' or the identification of 'race' as a political and social issue, resulted in a tendency to ignore experiences of European immigrants before 1945. This tendency attaches greater importance to the imperial past as the background needed to understand the post-1945 race relations, whilst treating European immigration as minor episodes, or precursor, of the post-1945 immigration. See Kenneth Lunn, "Immigration and Reaction in Britain, 1880-1950: Rethinking the 'Legacy of Empire,'" in *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, eds. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 335-49. For the history of immigration in longer-term perspective, see Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1988); Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Panikos Panayi, *An Immigration History of Britain: Multicultural Racism since 1800* (London: Longman, 2010).

³² For the view of the Labour Party (and the British left) on the British Empire and its political approach to specific colonial and regional issues, see Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1968); Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1975); Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan*

British Empire and the Labour Party

Before the twentieth century, there was little mention or debate on the Empire among the British left and the labour movement. Apart from individuals who were personally interested in imperial and foreign policies, like James Ramsay Macdonald, James Keir Hardie, and Henry Hyndman, such issues were not regarded as of direct concern to British working-class interests. In general, the Trade Unions Congress (TUC), Fabian Society, Independent Labour Party (ILP), Socialist League, and Social Democratic Foundation(SDF), (organizations which would later combine to establish the LRC in 1900), expressed relative disinterest in imperial issues.³³ What brought a change to this general atmosphere among the British left was the Second Boer War (1899-1902). It fostered avid and aggressive expressions of patriotic feeling. The Jingoism of the public shocked the socialists, stimulating them to establish their positions on the War and British imperialism generally.³⁴

Whilst most of the left opposed the Boer War, it turned several socialists into open supporters of Britain's imperial campaign. Among these the most famous was Robert Blatchford, the editor of a socialist journal, the *Clarion*.³⁵ Blatchford raised his voice in defence of Empire, and supported the British army in the War. He openly confessed that he was a socialist, but an Englishman first.³⁶ He based his position on the belief in Britain's superiority in ruling the colonized, a view widely shared with contemporaries, who thought that Britain was "the best colonizing power the world has known, and the gentlest and wisest ruler over subject races."³⁷ The Fabian Society, which had shown little interest in imperial questions, went through inner divisions over whether the society had to establish and publish an official position on the War or not. After the decision not to do so, members including Ramsay MacDonald left the society. In 1900 the Fabian tract *Fabianism and the Empire*, based on a draft by George Bernard Shaw, was published. In

Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³³ Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 96-97; Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 217-18.

³⁴ Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 106-7; Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 218; Ward examined the patriotic frame of British left's responses to the Boer War, see Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 59-75;

³⁵ Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 172-80; Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 60-62; Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 217.

³⁶ *Clarion*, 21 Oct 1899, quoted in Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 60.

³⁷ *Clarion*, 13 Jul 1901, quoted in Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 62.

it the society supported British imperialism, based on a particular Fabian point of view - efficiency.³⁸ Fabians argued for the achievement of socialism through the efficient use of resources in the British Empire, and thus for a change in the existing management of the Empire.³⁹ At the same time, it wanted the British Empire to be ruled humanely and for the benefit of all its subject peoples.⁴⁰ The Fabians thought that the existence of the Empire was good for interest of the world, if properly reformed. The division of the world into several empires was deemed an inevitable reality, and the old-Liberal advocacy of right of nationality was denounced as neither realistic nor tenable.⁴¹ It would be better, said the Fabians, to face that reality and try to establish a federation of responsible imperialist powers, until “Federation of the World” was accomplished in an ideal form in the future.⁴²

On the other side, some socialists were shocked by the popular feelings, and opposed the Boer War. They sided with the Boers, criticizing popular support of the War. Paul Ward has pointed out that these socialists placed their position within a patriotic frame, arguing that opposition to the War was *genuine* patriotism.⁴³ The ILP criticized Britain’s military venture in South Africa for being “one of aggression ... especially humiliating to the democratic instincts of this country.”⁴⁴ The SDF also took a similar view, emphasising that “the British Empire [had] been built up on a foundation of justice and constitutional liberty, and we can only endanger the Empire by flying in the face of these principles.”⁴⁵ Taking themes that were regarded as particularly British, such as liberty, democratic institutions and fair play, they showed that opposing Britain’s imperial policy was not necessarily based on anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism. Importantly to this thesis, this characteristic of the British left, grounding their language in patriotism, will repeatedly arise in the following examination of the Labour Party’s approach to domestic race issues.

The other feature of the socialists’ opposition to the Boer War was the idealising of the Boers and their way of life. They suggested that they were the saviours of a lost

³⁸ On Fabian Society’s discussions on the Boer War and the British Empire, see Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 109-23; Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 180-98.

³⁹ Fabian Society, *Fabianism and the Empire: A Manifestation of the Fabian Society* (London: Fabian Society, 1900), 6-13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴³ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 64-71.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

democratic and agrarian lifestyle that the country should seek to restore in the future, and they represented a vision of the country's past- and of post-capitalism. Anti-capitalist opposers to the War, like Keir Hardie wrote that: "As socialists, our sympathies are bound to be with the Boers. Their republican form of government bespeaks freedom, and is thus hateful to tyrants, whilst their methods of production are much nearer our ideal than any form of exploitation for profit."⁴⁶ This form of opposition to the Boer War was typically interpreted as a class-based approach, but Ward wrote that there was also a national or patriotic element in it. The socialists were not necessarily opposed to Britain herself in the War, but to what was really behind her, the capitalists.⁴⁷ Here, an anti-Semitic element appears in their argument. Hyndman called the Boer War "the Jew's war on the Transvaal" regulated by the "Jew-jingo press."⁴⁸ John A. Hobson, in *The War in South Africa: its causes and effect* (1900), carried an anti-Semitic tone, with his suggestion of a possible conspiracy of Jewish financiers and capitalists behind the War, though this judgement was contested.⁴⁹

The socialists' opposition to the Boer War was not necessarily based on opposition to the British Empire itself. Their anti-war strategy, was based more on the belief that the war was conducted on behalf of conspiring capitalists, and on opposition to how the British Empire was being ruled. Therefore, the question was not whether the Empire should cease to exist or not, but what it should look like and how it should be administered. Whether opposing the Boer War or not, most British socialists believed that the Empire could be reformed or improved for the benefit of the subject peoples. Just as the Fabian Society argued for reformed Empire, so Ramsay MacDonald believed that it should be ruled according to certain standards of fairness, tolerance and institutional administration.⁵⁰ MacDonald opposed further imperial expansion, but at the same time he did not think it would be good to abandon the existing Empire. His view of historical development rejected sudden changes and espoused gradual change from the organic relationship of complex elements handed down from a society's past. According to this view the Empire was also an element that Britain could not suddenly abandon or divest

⁴⁶ *Labour Leader*, 6 January 1900, quoted in Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 66.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-68.

⁴⁸ Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 153-55; Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism*, ed. Henry Pelling (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 128.

⁴⁹ S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 38; Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 92; For an extensive analysis of Hobson's view of British imperialism, see Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 235-81.

⁵⁰ James Ramsay MacDonald, *Labour and the Empire* (London: George Allen, 1907), 49-68.

herself from.⁵¹ He said, “we have a history, and it is an imperial one ... [We cannot] re-write history, to undo evil.”⁵² He believed that giving up the Empire would lead to harsher militarism from other imperial powers, putting the colonized in an even worse position.⁵³ So, he hoped that the most democratic country in the world would have the most influence. He went on, “if one nation must lead, let England lead the light and freedom and justice of the newer days. And so, in my English prejudice, I cannot wish South Africa lost to England.”⁵⁴

Such reformist views supporting the maintenance of an improved British Empire were to become the basis of the Labour Party’s policies after 1918. It was after the First World War that the Labour Party stipulated its position on British Empire clearly. In its statement of post-War design, *Labour and the New Social Order*, Labour clearly expressed its hope to maintain the British Empire, supporting the addition of widened self-government: “The Labour Party stands for its maintenance and progressive development on the lines of local autonomy and “Home Rule All Round.”⁵⁵ It criticized abusive and inhumane imperial rule, as expressed in the repression of Ireland and the massacre at Amritsar, but insisted on the continuance of the Empire. It wanted to see a reformed British Empire working gradually towards the more autonomous self-determination of subject peoples. J. H. Thomas, who was the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the 1924 minority Labour government, stated that Labour’s first and paramount principles were no economic exploitation of, but education for, the natives. He made this point clearly, saying that “Labour’s aim will be to civilise, not to exploit.”⁵⁶ In short, as Stephen Howe put it, although Labour opposed exploitation in the colonies, it did not lead the party to delve into the root cause of such abuse or devise strategies to remove the evil.⁵⁷

This position, to some extent, resulted from Labour’s desire to make itself appear as a party *fit to govern* to the electorate, as well as to the Conservatives. Labour’s attitude to Empire was regarded by the party leaders as a testing point which would reveal whether it was actually able to represent national, not just class or sectional, interest as a government. Jack Jones, Labour MP for Silvertown from 1918 to 1940, expressed the force of that concern among Labour politicians: “One thing has impressed me more than

⁵¹ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 69; Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 200-1.

⁵² *Ethical World*, 12 Nov 1898, quoted in Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 189.

⁵³ MacDonald, *Labour and the Empire*, 35-36.

⁵⁴ *Labour Leader*, 29 Sep 1900, quoted in Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 71.

⁵⁵ Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order* (London: Labour Party, 1918), 19-20.

⁵⁶ James H. Thomas, *When Labour Rules* (London: Collins, 1920), 132-35.

⁵⁷ S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 46.

any other in the opposition of our opponents to a possible Labour Government, and that is their almost unanimous opinion that under Labour the Empire is bound to come to a sticky end.”⁵⁸ Clement Attlee also expressed the difficulties in making the transition to a national party from a federation movement: “As long as the Socialist movement was only a propagandist body, with no prospect of achieving power, it was possible to take up a purely negative and critical attitude ... Socialists took their full share in denouncing and exposing the exploitation of the black, brown, and yellow races.” However, as Labour evolved into a party with prospects and actual experience of governing, “it was realized that the relationship between advanced and backward peoples raised problems not easy of solution.”⁵⁹ Thus, Labour leaders felt the need to prove that Labour’s imperial policies served the interest of Britain even better than those of the Conservatives. Attlee said, “the imperialism of the Conservative Party, so far from preserving the British Empire and the Commonwealth, is calculated to lose the one and break up the other.”⁶⁰ John R. Clynes also emphasised that “we on the Labour side want as fervently as any class to see the British Empire well developed.”⁶¹

However, there was a tension and conflict within the party between the desire to prove its capacity for government and to implement a more progressive imperial policy. Such conflict surfaced between leadership and intellectuals in the party who wanted gradual yet thorough reform towards self-government and expanded native rights. The latter group included several experts on colonial issues such as Leonard Woolf, Sydney Olivier, Charles Roden Buxton and Sir John Maynard, who formed the Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions. Woolf recalled how deeply the Committee members had been dismayed by the leadership’s conservatism and inactivity, especially by Sidney Webb, the Colonial Secretary in the 1929-1931 Labour government, “whenever an opportunity arose to do something different” from what Conservative governments had done. The Committee “continually put before the Executive detailed practical proposals,” and again and again the Executive accepted the recommendations, publicly announcing them to be the party’s policy. However, none of them actually led to actual programmes, and “this kind of things, which often happened, made one wonder whether the immense

⁵⁸ Jack Jones, *My Lively Life* (London: John Long, 1928), 181, quoted in S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 46.

⁵⁹ Clement Attlee, *The Labour Party in Perspective* (London: Gollancz, 1937), 228-29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁶¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 19 Oct 1923, quoted in Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 185.

amount of work ... was of any use at all.”⁶² The more thorough and radical position of the far-left wing of the party, the Communists, a section of the ILP and campaigns of organisations such as the League Against Imperialism was even more marginalised and rarely received responses from the party’s policymakers.⁶³

The disappointment Woolf expressed was also felt by the colonial nationalists. The imperial policies sought by the two Labour minority governments were rather disappointing to those who wanted to see more progressive policy directed towards colonial self-government and practical steps for such change. For example, despite two important Indian initiatives - the Simon Commission report in 1930 and Lord Irwin’s promise in 1929 of eventual Dominion status of India - which appeared during the 1929-31 Labour government, they not only originated from Stanley Baldwin’s previous Conservative government, but also met with protests from Indian nationalists. The vague promise of gradual self-government in some future was far from what Indian nationalists wanted. Patronizing remarks from Labour politicians pointing out the need to educate India, to whom “the programme of constitutional democracy ... was not native” were to say the least disappointing to them. Thus, policies under Labour government seemed to the Indians barely different from those of the Conservatives. As one Indian communist said: “The Indian people did not require the advent of a Labour government to hear all those stock arguments of imperialism ... Such a speech could have been expected from a Curzon - but it fell instead from the lips of a Fabian socialist, a Labour lord.”⁶⁴ Moreover, Labour’s participation in the Simon Commission, suppression of the Civil Disobedience, imprisonment of Ghandi, and the Meerut trial were met with furious outrage in India.

Labour's need to present itself as a national party clearly shaped its imperial policy along the lines of British national interests. An example of this is revealed in the design of the 1929 Colonial Development Act, relating to the economic development of the African colonies. It was not the Labour government’s original scheme, but was handed down, like the Simon Commission, from the previous Conservative government. The Act provided only £750,000 to £1 million per annum as a development fund. It established no executing organisations or effective frame for the development. Moreover, it was initially motivated by the need to mitigate domestic unemployment in the UK which had increased

⁶² Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939* (London: Hogarth, 1967), 236-38.

⁶³ S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 48.

⁶⁴ Thomas, *When Labour Rules*, 138; *Sydney Olivier: Letters and Selected Writings*, ed. Margaret Olivier (London: 1948), 152-53, quote in Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 185-86.

due to the Great Depression. The focus was on the export of a British labour force, rather than on fostering development in the colonies.⁶⁵

The Labour Party cannot be divorced from the early twentieth century racial landscape that was part and parcel of the British Empire. As such Labour believed in the superiority of British rule, and in her civilising mission. Labour's judgement on the degree of civilisation and capacities of self-government of various regions within the Empire was made upon the racial mixture of each region, with white settlers' communities occupying the top and black Africans at the bottom. Such contemporary racial assumptions were backed by academic authority in the form of scientific racism, which was the other historical context that conditioned and influenced Labour's approach to race. Within in that context, the socialists of the British left were driven to support scientific racism in the form of eugenics.⁶⁶

Scientific Racism, Eugenics and the Labour Party

Contemporary intellectual ideas about race, and specifically scientific racism in which anthropology and biology played a central role, inevitably influenced the Labour Party. Although there were a lot of inner-divisions and disagreements on the issue of scientific racism, certain themes were accepted as basic premises from the Victorian period to the inter-war years. These included the belief in the existence of a racial hierarchy in which the Anglo-Saxon race of Britain was at the top and black Africans were at the bottom. Racial sub-divisions were made (for example, categorizing Europeans into sub-groups such as Teutonic, Alpine or Mediterranean), by classifying and measuring human body parts in detail.⁶⁷ The ideas and languages of racial science were not confined to the academic world, but entered politics as well, when concerns stimulated by the late nineteenth century worries about the racial degeneration of Britain.

Political programmes inspired by racial science were realised in the form of eugenics. The basic idea of good breeding in human populations started in 1883 with the scientist

⁶⁵ Charlotte Riley, "Monstrous Predatory Vampires and Beneficent Fairy-Godmothers: British Post-war Colonial Development in Africa," (PhD diss., University College London, 2013), 73.

⁶⁶ On British left politics' and left scientists' involvement in Eugenics, see Diane Paul, "Eugenics and the Left," *Journal of the History of the Ideas* 45, no. 4 (1984): 567-90; Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); David Stack, *The First Darwinian Left: Socialism and Darwinism 1859-1914* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2003); Pauline Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, its Sources and its Critics in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992); Gavin Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society, 1930-62* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁶⁷ Kushner, *We Europeans?*, 39.

Francis Galton, who was a cousin of Charles Darwin. Directly influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, he came up with the idea of applying domestic animal breeding illustrated in the *Origin of Species* to human improvement through selective breeding. Galton argued that marriages and reproduction between the young and healthy, and the mentally and physically strong, should be encouraged while those between the weak should be discouraged. This was applied not only to individuals but also to society as a whole. Galton's writings on eugenics immediately drew followers and in 1907 the Eugenics Education Society was founded under his leadership. It campaigned for good breeding as an urgent national issue.⁶⁸ From the 1890s societies with eugenic concerns appeared. For example, the National Association for the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded was formed in 1896 to urge segregation of the disabled. Eugenic concerns were also reflected in several royal commission investigations. In 1889 the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb recommended discouraging marriages between these people, and the 1908 Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded recommended sterilization of people with mental illness.⁶⁹

Though the main concern was the improvement of the nation's demographical quality, there were many agendas within British eugenics, and sometimes they contradicted each other when determining what should be prioritized to realise their aims. For example, on one side there were supporters of social welfare reform as a means of population improvement, among them Caleb Saleeby was typical. He argued for the establishment of free health centres. On the other side, there were people who insisted that government and society should not interfere by any kind of reform, as the weak would naturally become extinct. Arnold White, from the political right and a fervent campaigner who played an important role in introducing the 1905 Aliens Act, held such a view. He believed that "modern civilisation and philanthropy, on the whole, are hostile to conditions of sound national health," so that society must be "content to see the idle perish."⁷⁰

Such a wide spectrum of opinions meant that support for and participation in eugenics came from many political leanings, from not only political right wingers such as Arnold White but also the left. Prominent names from the left including Beatrice and Sidney

⁶⁸ Stepan, *Idea of Race in Science*, 111.

⁶⁹ Victoria Brignell, "The Eugenics Movement Britain Wants to Forget," *New Statesman*, 9 Dec 2010, <https://www.newstatesman.com/society/2010/12/british-eugenics-disabled>.

⁷⁰ Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society*, 9.

Webb, George Bernard Shaw, John Maynard Keynes, and Harold Laski- shared the concerns of the eugenicists. The Webbs were supporters of “eugenic planning just as fervently as town planning.”⁷¹ Bernard Shaw asserted that “the only fundamental and possible socialism is the socialisation of the selective breeding of man,” and that “nothing but a eugenic religion can save our civilisation.”⁷² There were attitudes and inclinations within British socialism that permitted for eugenicist concerns to be quite easily accepted. They were related to the meritocratic tradition of the left. The commitment to a rational, planned, and scientific society dominated by educated elites, and the devotion to the conquest of nature and the perfection of man incorporated affinities in attitude with eugenicist ideas of selective breeding by active governmental interference.⁷³ Fabian ideology endorsing efficiency in particular provided such a connection, so it was no surprise that a lot of its members were attracted to eugenics. In the inter-war years, the Soviet Union seemed to many to be realizing a society that effectively promoted a planned scientific outlook for a nation’s race betterment.⁷⁴

Moreover, social and governmental interference implicit in eugenic programmes was not likely to inspire a strong aversion among the politicians of the left, while left-leaning scientists, biologists and physicians looked to a socialist society as a pre-requisite of their vision of eugenics. Prominent among them were Julian Huxley, Lancelot Hogben, and J. B. S. Haldane, representing the moderate to the Marxist left, who firmly rejected *laissez-faire* individualism, and conferred an active role on the state. They thought that capitalism was dysgenic in itself, because it produced unequal living conditions which made it difficult for some sections of society to find the talents inherent in their genes. For others who were lucky, capitalism permitted unfairly generous opportunities which did not originate from natural talents but from favourable surroundings such as family. Therefore, by removing old obstacles of class, nepotism and poverty, and by building equal opportunities by which individuals could truly realise their inherent merits, it would be at last possible to distinguish the effects of heredity and of environment and then devise how to plan selective breeding.⁷⁵ Huxley admitted that, “we can’t do much practical eugenics, until we have more or less equalized the environmental opportunities of all

⁷¹ Adrian Wooldridge, *Measuring the Mind: Education and Psychology in England, c.1860-c.1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 210.

⁷² D. Paul, “Eugenics and the Left,” 568.

⁷³ Wooldridge, *Measuring the Mind*, 182-84, 210.

⁷⁴ D. Paul, “Eugenics and the Left,” 569.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 567-90.

classes and types - and this must be by levelling up.”⁷⁶

Throughout the 1930s, socialist scientists increasingly criticised mainline eugenics supported by the political right for being racist, anti-alien and anti-working class, and serving the interests of Hitlerism, fascism and reactionary forces in general. They argued that mainline eugenics was built upon scientific flaws revealed by new discoveries relating to the hereditary process. These discoveries refuted the old assumption that sterilization would significantly reduce the birth of defective people. Moreover, they highlighted the influence of environmental elements which were interwoven with heredity and other conditions which influenced certain characteristics and conduct of individuals, thus making it difficult to fix on one definite element. These ideas, adopted by left-leaning scientists, were seized upon by the Eugenic Society in 1931, under its new secretary, Carlos P. Blacker. Blacker who agreed with the arguments against traditional eugenics, wanted to distance the Eugenics Society from the political right, especially from the pro-Nazi right. He contacted Huxley, Hogben, and Haldane in order to keep the organization up-to-date with the facts of heredity thus bolstering its professional authority.⁷⁷ Though the relationship between the society and the left scientists was not always amicable, they, with their American counterparts, formed a loose coalition of reform eugenicists.⁷⁸

The liberal left scientists expressed their desire to fight against the old eugenic belief in population control, the extreme form of which was Nazi’s racial programme, by publishing a book on race. *We Europeans: A Survey of Racial Problems*, co-authored by Huxley’s lead, boldly declared the futility of using the term race in viewing, and attempting to divide, the population of contemporary Europe. The authors stated that all modern populations were “melting pot of race,” as a result of ethnic mixture created over a long period of time. Therefore, the book went on, “it is almost as illegitimate to speak of a ‘Jewish race’ as of an ‘Aryan race,’” and “the idea of a British, a French, a German or an Italian ‘race’ is a political fiction, and a dangerous one.” Furthermore, the authors also gave environmental factors as much importance as genetic elements. They denied that there was a method for judging differences in innate intelligence or qualities between different ethnic groups. In this matter, they asserted, “the differences in social

⁷⁶ Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 174.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 164-75.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

environment override the differences in genetic equipment.”⁷⁹

However, the concept of race was not entirely given up, despite the seemingly radical ideas of the scientists of the left. Even though the racial difference between Europeans was denied, this did not extend to the extent of advocating racial equality between white, black, and yellow races. They admitted the “extreme difficulty” in coming to any firm conclusion on biological results of “very wide crosses” (which means *miscegenation* between white and non-white). The authors did not deny that some ethnic groups might possess a lower level of innate intelligence, and that “combinations of unfamiliar genes” might lead to a biological disharmony.⁸⁰ Moreover, the belief that biological knowledge could serve the genetic betterment of peoples was not given up, even though such knowledge was deemed not sufficiently advanced to help. It was thought that in the future it might be possible to distinguish hereditary from environmental elements in the determination of certain racial characteristics.⁸¹

This idea of racial difference upheld by scientists of the left is reflected in their response to Jewish refugees and black soldiers during the Second World War. From the mid-1930s, they tried to lead the refugee policy in a more progressive direction, providing German refugee scientists with accommodation and academic posts in British and American institutions. Once the war started British scientists advised the government to free the interned Jews in order to use their ability for the benefit of Britain. Whereas the government and the public still held racial assumptions about Jewishness, the scientists did not share them. They supported more humane refugee policies that were more beneficial to Britain’s war-effort.⁸²

However, their attitude to black soldiers revealed that they had not abandoned the racial idea of the fundamental difference between white and black, or of black inferiority. In this sense, progressive scientists supported the separation of the two races. Despite the urgent war-time need for colonial manpower which brought black colonial soldiers along with black American GIs into the British Isles, the British government tried to segregate the black soldiers from the white in separate residential areas. They were especially concerned to keep black men from white women, in fear of alleged black sexuality that presented a danger to British white blood stock. Belief in the mental and intellectual

⁷⁹ Julian S. Huxley, Alfred C. Haddon, and Alexander M. Carr-Saunders, *We Europeans: A Survey of “Racial” Problems* (London: Cape), 271-74.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 281-83.

⁸¹ Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society*, 38-39.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 79-86.

inferiority of black soldiers, meant that they were excluded from important posts in the army. Although the progressive scientists tried to influence the British government's colonial policies by recommending more humane directions, this arose from strategic concerns for Britain's victory in the War. Huxley advised that adopting anti-racist and progressive policies in the colonies would enable Britain to gain support from them.⁸³

The lead that Britain took against Nazi racial crime during the War changed the climate in which race and ensuing assumptions about it were debated. Racial scientists had to try to prevent their agendas from appearing to advocate the racial assumptions of the Nazi. There were as a result some Conservative scientists who were increasingly excluded from the mainstream academe due to their open advocacy of racial differences and hierarchy. Despite these inner conflicts and disagreements an official declaration of racial equality was made in 1950 by UNESCO, although a belief in the differences between races was still active among the public.⁸⁴ For the period examined in this thesis belief in the existence of inherent characteristics and unequal ability among races was deemed solid scientific fact by that same public. This, we must remember, was the historical context in which the Labour Party dealt with domestic issues centring on race.

Thesis Structure

In chapter 1 we will see that socialists and trade unionists positioned their approach to anti-Semitism within the liberal British tradition. From the late nineteenth century, when the socialist organizations and trade unions, which were to form the LRC, were active, the flow of Jewish immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe ignited debates in British politics about social reform, local working class politics and the decline of the British race. The Jewish immigration debates resulted in the 1905 Aliens Act introduced by the Conservative government in response to concerns about the effect that immigration would have on the racial quality of the British working classes. These worries were accompanied by an increased anxiety centred on Britain's fragile dominance over the imperial nations of Europe. The socialists and trade unions saw that hostility to the Jewish immigrants involved racial hatred. However, they built their position on the Aliens Act not on opposition to anti-Semitism but on appeals for British liberty that rested on free entry into the country for oppressed people from abroad.

Chapter 2 continues the investigation into Labour's discourse surrounding Britain's

⁸³ Ibid., 86-96.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 120-31.

post-1918 restrictive immigration policies into the mid-1920s. The First World War increased suspicion of aliens, resulting in the 1919 Aliens Act. It was far stricter than the 1905 Aliens Act. But the changes brought by the War worked towards reinforcing the Labour Party's internationalist view on the subject. Through the experience of the War, Labour emerged as, and proclaimed to be, a socialist party, whose increased socialist consciousness was responsible for shifting its position on immigration policy. From following a pre-1918 British liberal tradition it moved to embracing socialist principles that criticised possible conflicts between nations and peoples in the world. This change based on socialist internationalism did not, however, involve the complete abandonment of liberal influences within the party. Rather, it will be shown that Labour's post-war internationalism was built upon the party's patriotism.

Chapter 3 examines the Labour Party's definitions of Britishness through its attitudes towards dark-skinned colonial subjects in Britain.⁸⁵ This chapter investigates how the immigration controls examined in the previous chapters were actually administered by the minority Labour government in the inter-war period. On taking office as a national government, it overturned previous arguments (discussed in chapters 1 and 2) that immigration restriction was based on anti-alienism that breached Britain's proud liberal tradition and support for international peace. Instead, it adopted a nationalistic argument that non-British migrants were stealing jobs, housing, and other social resources from the white British working classes. This demonstrates how it adopted a quite opposite definition of patriotism from that examined in chapters 1 and 2.

In chapter 4 the focus turns to the anti-Semitic disturbances created by the BUF in London's East End in the 1930s, which provided the London Labour Party with another race issue to deal with. It will be shown again that for the London Labour Party patriotism was at the heart of the race issue, British Fascist's anti-Semitic disturbances. It will be argued, that the London Labour administration deemed the fascists' hatred of the Jews as essentially a threat to British tolerance and democracy standards with which the Labour Party closely identified. The language of patriotism which framed Labour's stance on anti-alien immigration legislation from the 1900s was passed down the following decades. The London Labour Party played an active role in legislating the 1936 Public

⁸⁵ The use of certain terms in this thesis need to be explained. Particularly in chapters 2, 3 and 5, words such as 'coloured' and 'alien' reflect the racial landscape of the time under examination, revealing premises, hierarchies, and prejudices connected with 'race', and the contemporary boundary of Britishness. Therefore, it should be noted that these words are used only in the context of conveying the contemporary references and discourses.

Order Act which set the precedent for the anti-racist measures of the 1960s Labour government which centred on public order.

After working through the four case studies that look at Labour's approach to race issues in the early twentieth century, chapter 5 aims to reveal what the party in the post-1945 years to the 1960s inherited from these early approaches. For comparative purposes this chapter refers to the wealth of research on post-1945 British immigration and race politics. The Labour Party of the post-Second World War will be shown to have kept a continuity in their approach in relation to immigration from the New Commonwealth. This is shown in its understanding of who genuinely belonged to Britain, its ideas of a multi-racial society, and its positional changes upon immigration control legislation. It will be made clear that viewing Labour's policies on immigration and race in the 1960s as either new developments or as a betrayal of the immigrants who were British citizens, is a short-sighted interpretation.

The conclusion will draw together the themes covered in the thesis with a brief discussion of several big questions: Why did the Labour Party, with its avowed commitment to internationalism and social justice, support discriminative immigration restrictions and ineffective anti-discrimination acts? What made the party reluctant to apply its internationalist ideals to the race issues? Was the concept of patriotism that directed Labour's position on race issues the reason for the party's passiveness? Bearing these questions in mind, let us start the investigation with the domestic race and immigration debate stimulated by Jewish immigrants in the late nineteenth century.

1. The 1905 Aliens Act, Eastern European Jewish Immigration and British Socialists' Patriotic Opposition

In this chapter, Labour's approach to the issue of race is explored by examining the immigration debates that took place from the late nineteenth century to the enactment of the Aliens Act in 1905.⁸⁶ From the 1880s to the outbreak of the First World War, racial discourse in British domestic politics revolved around Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia and their impact on Britain, especially on the British working classes in the East End of London. Being in large number and not necessarily sharing the cultural and social practices of the established Anglo-Jewry, the Eastern European Jewish immigrants aroused considerable concern and hostility in British society. The hostility originated not only from the practical discontents they aroused in connection with jobs and the housing market, but also from existing anti-Semitic prejudices in Britain, which often included fears about the degeneration of the British race.

The 1905 Aliens Act, which ended the long period of unrestricted immigration of the Victorian era, was introduced in order to bar the entry of poor Eastern European Jewish immigrants and was opposed by the British political left. Regardless of individual opinions about the Jewish immigrants or anti-Semitism, British socialists from various organizations officially objected to putting restrictions on Britain's border which had been hitherto open to any nationality. One could say that it is not surprising that the left-wing took such a stance. Socialist ideologies put a great emphasis on international solidarity and the brotherhood of workers, and inherently oppose anything with a taint of racism. Anti-alienism directed against the Jewish immigrants who were poor workers and refugees was contrary to the core of socialism.⁸⁷

However, the reality was more complex, at least for British socialists, whose peculiarly nationalistic character often baffled their continental counterparts. For example, August Bebel who was a chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Germany complained of the difficulty in getting involved with the English brethren, as "not only do they speak a different language, they also think differently. Insular isolation has made them special

⁸⁶ For studies of the Aliens Act 1905 and political debates surrounding it, see Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972); John Garrard, *The English and Immigration, 1880-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social relations and political culture, 1840-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁸⁷ Garrard, *English and Immigration*, 184-85.

human beings.”⁸⁸ Egon Wertheimer who was a writer, diplomat and professor from Austria made a similar remark after he had first contacted the British Labour Party. The British left, he wrote, were much less deterred in expressing their love of country and less influenced by Marxism or any other theories which made continental socialists more dogmatically adhere to international socialism and helped build a relatively well-organised movement.⁸⁹

Most of scholars have also recognised the patriotic character of British socialism. Comparative historians like Donald Sasson and Walter Kendall have pointed out that British socialists, and later the Labour Party, always remained inward-looking and isolationists.⁹⁰ This is mainly because British socialism, unlike other working class parties on the continent, had developed in large part under the influence of British antecedents.⁹¹ Leading socialists such as James Keir Hardie and James Ramsay MacDonald tried to shape their socialism within a national form.⁹² The name of the Independent Labour Party itself was in fact an expression of patriotic motives.⁹³

As for the socialist opposition to the 1905 Aliens Act, earlier researchers, not taking the distinctive character of British socialism into account, used to see it as a natural result of socialist ideological inclination. As early as 1952, Edmund Silberner examined the reading of the Jewish problem by nineteenth century British socialists, particularly the Social Democratic Federation (the SDF). He described how Social Democrats proudly took up “the banner of internationalism” in the face of immigration control against Eastern European Jewish immigrants.⁹⁴ In a longer study, John Garrard also argued that the restriction of Jewish immigration was naturally unacceptable to most British socialists. Socialist ideology itself, argued Garrard, left British socialists few choices but to denounce the Aliens Bill as unbrotherly, inhumane, and unsocialistic. This was especially so because the bill was clearly targeted at poor immigrants, which was a direct

⁸⁸ Bebel to Molkenbuhr, 28 Sep 1908, NL22/132, 23, Bebel papers, quoted in Stefan Berger, “Labour in Comparative Perspective,” in *Labour’s First Century*, eds. Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 309.

⁸⁹ Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party* (London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1929), xiii-xv.

⁹⁰ Donald Sasson, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 15; Walter Kendall, *The Labour Movement in Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 180.

⁹¹ Berger, “Labour in Comparative Perspective,” 309.

⁹² Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), 203.

⁹³ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 293.

⁹⁴ Edmund Silberner, “British Socialism and the Jews,” *Historia Judaica* 13 (1951): 40.

challenge to socialist principles. Moreover, advocating immigration restriction brought them under the suspicion of being racist. As Colin Holmes has pointed out, this was probably why anti-immigrant feelings within the left and in the labour movement did not evolve into more extreme forms.⁹⁵ In short, anyone who claimed to be a socialist had no other choice than to oppose the Aliens Bill.

However, these explanations are only partially true. Although ideologies provided an overall guideline which one was expected to follow as a genuine socialist, they never dictated the way British socialists engaged in practical issues around Jewish immigration. It is worth noting that when British socialists instinctively rejected the Aliens Bill, they did not necessarily try to improve the treatment of immigrants or tackle anti-Semitic hostility in public. As Garrad has argued, once the British left and trade unionists adopted the socialist ideological imperative, they realised their political dilemma. They were caught between advocating immigration as a principle and the delivering the anti-alien demands of their representees.⁹⁶ The socialist ideologies were impractical, if not nominal, instructions.

To fully appreciate the position of British socialists on the 1905 Aliens Act, it needs to be acknowledged that their self-identity was drawn from a longer and broader British, or English, historical tradition. This shaped their approach to the issue of immigration control and the rationale behind it to a considerable degree. It is notable that in the political discourses on Jewish immigration from the late nineteenth century to the 1905 Aliens Act the British left situated themselves under the liberal influence, rather than the socialist one. As David Feldman briefly pointed out, early British Labour, like the Liberals, viewed the Aliens Bill as a departure from the British tradition of being a haven and an asylum for the oppressed.⁹⁷ The fact that most of the immigrants were poor, and a few socialists were amongst them, surely strengthened socialists' opposition to barring asylum, but it was not the main cause for adopting this position. What Labour politicians and trade unionists were keen to protect was not so much the international solidarity of workers, as the British liberty embodied in openness toward the oppressed. In other words, values regarded as peculiarly British had more appeal for contemporary socialists, than socialist ideals, especially in relation to anti-alienist or racist claims.

On this point, the argument of this chapter basically agrees with that of Paul Ward,

⁹⁵ Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939* (London: Arnold, 1979), 22-24.

⁹⁶ Garrard, *English and Immigration*, 157-202.

⁹⁷ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, 354.

who gives more weight to patriotic concerns than to the influence of socialist ideas in assessing the British left's opposition to restricting Jewish immigration. As Ward rightly noted, the British left from the late nineteenth century continually tried to present their socialism as genuinely British. This originated in part from the need they felt to defend it against the political criticism that socialism was foreign by birth and thus not suitable for Britons. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they were more concerned to present themselves as genuine patriots, than as followers of international socialism. The position of British socialists on the Aliens Bill and the rationale behind it, argued Ward, reveal this tendency. That is, they opposed to the Aliens Act not because it threatened socialist internationalism but because it threatened to end the proud British tradition of liberty and tolerance, of which they claimed to be the true defenders.⁹⁸

In the following, we will first explore the general perception of Jews in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century. Although most socialists did not necessarily share the unreserved racist views of the right wing, they were still influenced by contemporary prejudices. They were especially susceptible to economic biases against wealthy Jews, due to their own ideological orientation. The second part will examine the dilemma within socialist groups on how to understand the impact of Jewish immigration. While some shared contemporary discontent that the immigrants were worsening working and living conditions of British workers, others argued that the poor immigrants were a part of a working class exploited by capitalism. When it came to the 1905 Aliens Act, however, British socialists were united in opposing the attempt to introduce immigration control. The last part of this chapter will show that it was not the socialist doctrine of working men's unity that united them, but the idea of British liberty and openness, which they considered the Act to be incompatible with.

1-1. The Image of the Jew in British Society

The Aliens Act of 1905 was the result of intense debate precipitated by the influx of Jews who fled from the persecution in Tsarist Russia and Eastern Europe. From the first pogrom in 1881 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, between 120,000 to 150,000 Jews newly joined the existing Anglo-Jewish community, estimated to be about

⁹⁸ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 54-58.

60,000 people in the 1880s. The demographical expansion was revolutionary.⁹⁹ As the majority of the immigrants settled in already congested urban centres in London, Leeds, and Manchester, anti-alien or anti-Semitic feelings among residents, which had been present well before the 1905 Alien Act came into being, started growing and gradually evolved into a call for controlled immigration.

One should note that the contemporary discussion on immigration often referred to the matter as alien issue rather than a Jewish one. Anti-alienism and anti-Semitism were not always identical, and some anti-immigration propagandists did not particularly problematise that immigrants were Jews. As the majority of the immigrants were Jews, however, it is still true that the two were synonymous in many cases. Accusations often jumped to the conclusion that any problem connected with immigrants related to their Jewishness.

There is no doubt, therefore, that prejudices about existing Jewish communities in Britain provided the context for the arguments for immigration control.¹⁰⁰ From medieval times, Jews in Britain had been perceived as an internal *other*, a people belonging to a separate social sphere within British society.¹⁰¹ Their adherence to Jewish religion, languages, eating habits and customs were often read as a sign that they did not want to assimilate themselves into British society, thus trying to form “a nation within a nation.”¹⁰² This suspicion of unwillingness to assimilate was reinforced by the tendency of Jewish people to have their own institutions. There were Jewish charitable and friendly societies, and the Board of Deputies of Anglo-Jewry.¹⁰³ Even within the labour movement, they had separate Jewish organisations like Jewish trade unions and the Poale Zion, the Jewish Labour Party. Poale Zion, which means workers of Zion, was the movement that combined Marxist class struggle with Jewish nationalism. Originating in the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century, it spread with the Jewish diaspora, first to various parts of Europe and Palestine, and then to Britain and North America.

⁹⁹ Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 127; Geoffrey Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 50-51.

¹⁰⁰ There is a substantial body of research about the images of the Jews in British society. For example, see Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of the Jew in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*; Gainer, *Alien Invasion*; Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*; David Cesarani, *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Endelman, *Jews of Britain*.

¹⁰¹ Kushner, *We Europeans?*, 35-37.

¹⁰² Knowles, *Race, Discourse and Labourism*, 67-69; Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 10-33.

¹⁰³ Knowles, *Race, Discourse, and Labourism*, 69.

After two branches were established in London and Leeds in 1903/04 and 1905 respectively, British Poale Zion was formally constituted at a meeting in Liverpool in December 1906, and affiliated to the Labour Party in 1920.¹⁰⁴

A more noteworthy bias against Jewish people, however, was the belief that they had an excessive desire for wealth. The powerful image of medieval Jewish merchants and moneylenders evolved into the profit-seeking capitalists and international financiers of the modern period.¹⁰⁵ Such representation of wealthy Jews was widespread especially during the Boer War. It is noteworthy that this was a trope used by political progressives as well. In 1900, John A. Hobson, an economist and critic of imperialism, summoned the image of Jewish bankers in *The War in South Africa: its causes and effects*. He criticized public support for the war, and argued that it would only serve the interests of international Jewish financiers who were behind the War.¹⁰⁶ By the same token, John Burns, a socialist and leading trade unionist in the New Unionism, although he did not join the Labour Party but remained in the Liberal Party, spoke in the Commons in 1900 and pointed his finger at “the financial Jew operating, directing, inspiring the agencies that have led to this war.”¹⁰⁷ The liberal politician John Morley also accused “a ring of financiers ... mostly Jewish” as being “really responsible for the war.”¹⁰⁸

Hostility towards wealthy Jews amongst progressives was nothing new, since it can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. In 1806, reformer William Cobbett claimed that the state treated rich Jews too mildly while they were voraciously accumulating wealth behind all sorts of businesses.¹⁰⁹ Chartist papers, while lamenting the oppression of Jews outside Britain, warned that Jewish financial power was taking over England and making her the slave of the Jews.¹¹⁰ Similar animosity was also expressed by Henry M. Hyndman, the leader of the SDF. Referring the notion of capitalist conspiracy of the Jew, he said that rich Jews were dangerous because they dominated the capitals, the politics and the press all over Europe.¹¹¹ The tone of *Justice*, the paper of the SDF, was far stronger. One of its contributors alerted readers that the Jew “represents capitalism in its

¹⁰⁴ Alderman, *Jewish Community in British Politics*, 65, 90.

¹⁰⁵ Yaron Brook, “The Morality of Moneylending: A Short History,” *Objective Standard* 2, no. 3 (2007).

¹⁰⁶ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, 265; Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 67-68.

¹⁰⁷ 128 H.C Deb. 4s. 6 Feb 1900, cols. 795-96.

¹⁰⁸ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, 266.

¹⁰⁹ Garrard, *English and Immigration*, 189-90.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*; Silberman, “British Socialism and the Jews,” 32-33.

¹¹¹ Henry M. Hyndman, “The Dawn of a Revolutionary Epoch,” *Nineteenth Century* 9 (1881): 10-11.

worst form,” and “the personification of international capitalism.”¹¹² *Justice* argued that its attack was based not on anti-Semitism but on the adverse effect of Jewish capitalists: “We have no feeling against Jews as Jews, but as nefarious capitalists and poisoners of the wells of public information we denounce them. It would be easy enough to get up a capitalist Jew-bait here in London, if we wished to do so and the proletarian Jew would gladly help us.”¹¹³ As Silberner has pointed out, however, it is very hard to overlook the racist tone of the paper, since it contained “not infrequent generalizations about the exploitative character of the Jew which would befit any anti-Semitic paper.”¹¹⁴ Occasionally, the paper blamed Jews for not intermarrying with Gentiles and observing dietary laws, meaning that they could “never be included within any Socialist people.”¹¹⁵

On these prejudices, the Jewish immigrants who arrived after 1880 were stigmatised as hitherto unknown dangers to Britain, especially because of their Eastern European origin. Firstly, they were a threat to the physical health of the nation. From the late nineteenth century, there was a strand of thought concerning the health of Britain, which looked suspiciously on alien immigrants in general, not just Jews. William Eden Evans-Gordon, Conservative MP for Stepney from 1900 to 1907, one of the main campaigners for the anti-immigration legislation and who sat on the 1903 Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, explained in a speech to the Commons that diseases such as smallpox, scarlet fever, trachoma, and favus were spread by alien immigrants.¹¹⁶ There were indeed medical authorities who testified that disease was not a matter of race but of overcrowded environment.¹¹⁷ But opinions varied among doctors, scientists, and journalists. Some argued that the Jewish race was more prone to illness, carrying diseases that would weaken the physical health of British people. Dr. Francis Tyrell told the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration in 1902 that trachoma was “very largely a disease of race” so “the Jewish people are peculiarly prone to trachoma.”¹¹⁸

Jewish people were also accused of importing suspicious ideas and activities.¹¹⁹ Although there were only a small number of socialists and anarchists amongst the Jewish immigrants, their presence was equated with revolutionary threats by the pro-

¹¹² *Justice*, 6 Jun 1885, 1; *Ibid.*, 28 Jan 1893, 3.

¹¹³ *Justice*, 21 Jan 1893, 1.

¹¹⁴ Silberner, “British Socialism and the Jews,” 41-42.

¹¹⁵ *Justice*, 4 Nov 1899, 3-4.

¹¹⁶ 145 H.C. Deb. 4s. 2 May 1905, col. 711.

¹¹⁷ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 36-39.

¹¹⁸ Royal Commission on Alien Immigration. *Minutes of Evidence*. 1903 Cd. 1742, II, 128.

¹¹⁹ Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 101; Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society*, 56.

restrictionists. Arnold White, the leader of the anti-immigrants lobby, claimed that, “the vast majority of these foreign Jews are anarchists and nihilists of the very worst type.”¹²⁰ In 1894, Lord Salisbury tabled a private member’s bill in order to exclude aliens who threatened the “peace and tranquillity of the realm,” and supported their deportation if it was likely to prevent crime.¹²¹ The link between Jewish immigrants and crime was reiterated long thereafter. Ernst Wild, Tory MP and an anti-Semite told the House during the discussion for another Aliens Act in 1919:

You cannot be in the criminal courts without realizing what an enormous amount of the work of our courts is caused by the aliens and their crimes.”¹²²

The attack even came from the left. Charles Stanton, who had been a member of the Independent Labour Party and was National Democratic and Labour MP for Aberdare, argued that immigrants had “always been traitors ... to the British cause ... Bolshevism was, of course ... introduced in England almost entirely by aliens.”¹²³

Most of all, however, Jewish immigrants from the 1880s were seen as the main cause of economic hardship to the ordinary British people experiencing. As has already been mentioned, a majority of poor immigrants from the 1880s flocked to urban areas like the East End of London, Leeds, and Manchester. Although these were places traditionally occupied by newcomers and outcasts, the sudden increase in the local population added further tension to competition for housing and employment which was already becoming tough in a time of harsh trade depression.¹²⁴ Jewish immigrants were also blamed for being major contributors to the notorious *sweating system*. Usually employed by Jewish employers, the Jews tended to undersell their labour and comply with poor working conditions like long working hours and unsanitary and overcrowded environments. Unsurprisingly, British workers, who would not accept such terms, accused that Jews, both employers and workers, of obstructing the betterment of the ordinary working classes. Influenced by Social Darwinism of the time, they feared that the Jews’ perceived racial inferiority which enabled them to survive poor conditions and a low standard of

¹²⁰ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 66.

¹²¹ 26 H.L. Deb. 4s. 14 July 1894, col. 1054.

¹²² 114 H.C. Deb. 5s. 15 Apr 1919, col. 2777.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, cols. 2799-801.

¹²⁴ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 13-14.

life, would give them a favourable advantage in the competition for social resources, over the British.¹²⁵

Until the early twentieth century, Jewish immigrants in the UK were subject to various prejudices. They were essentially others who were different from British people. The fact that even British-born Jews were frequently referred to as immigrants by itself shows the way the host society perceived them.¹²⁶ The important point is that the Jews were deemed by the public, politicians and academics to be inferior to the British people, and their inferiority was attributed to the nature of the Jewish race. They were accused of trying to build their own society within the UK, of being excessively greedy for money, and responsible for spreading physical and intellectual disease. Lastly, Jewish immigrants were seen as encroachers who unjustly snatched the livelihood of British people. This economic accusation is the most important element in relation to the socialists' position on the 1905 Aliens Act, which will be examined in the following sections.

1-2. The British Socialists' Dilemma on Jewish Immigrants

The mass immigration from the 1880s presented socialist groups in Britain with an unavoidable political dilemma. On the one hand, the arrival of Jewish immigrants deeply affected the urban districts inhabited by ordinary workers. These were the precise groups that were the focus of socialist activities. Complaints about Jewish immigrants among British workers, therefore, could not be simply ignored or dismissed as racist or xenophobic biases. On the other hand, however, many socialists found it hard to blame the Jews for social problems in those areas. Most of the Jewish immigrants themselves were poor working class who under socialist ideology should be supported and united.

Whether socialists liked it or not, popular politics centring on these affected areas kept channelling pressure for immigration control towards policy makers in government and parliament. At first, societies demanding the prevention of immigration appeared. For example, in 1886 the Society for the Suppression of the Immigration of Destitute Aliens was established and the Association for Preventing the Immigration of Destitute Aliens in 1891. Then in 1902, Major William Evans-Gordon established the British Brothers' League, whose propaganda had more effect on the public and the politicians.

There were also public investigations and legislative efforts. Prior to the Royal

¹²⁵ Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 113-15; Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, 271-72.

¹²⁶ Knowles, *Race, Discourse, and Labourism*, 70.

Commission on Alien Immigration in 1901-3, two parliamentary inquiries were held: the House of Lord Select Committee on the Sweating System and the House of Commons Select Committee on Immigration during 1888-90. When both committees recommended that no control was needed, individual members tried to put forward restrictive legislation, first by the Marquis of Salisbury in 1894 and then in 1898 by the Earl of Hardwicke, though both failed in their endeavours. In 1904, the Conservative government also tabled the Aliens Bill, which was also defeated because of inappropriate and impractical clauses.¹²⁷ Throughout these attempts, those who were against free entry of aliens presented specific issues such as excessive competition for jobs and housing, and consequent wage reduction or sweating, as the main reasons for control.

While the political right-wing attempted to introduce restrictive measures on Jewish immigration, the opinions of the political left and labour movements were rather complex, and far from united. From the 1880s, when the immigration of Russian and Eastern European Jews began, a number of socialist organizations and labour movements felt the need to explain their positions on the matter of Jewish immigration and the Jewish presence in Britain. Anti-Semitic discourses amongst socialists were far less common than amongst Conservatives and ordinary British workers. As shown above, however, such feelings existed amongst the left as well, for they were not free from the contemporary belief that race determined the physical and mental character of a people. This point will be shown in the responses of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) and various labour and socialist groups to the immigration of Eastern European Jews and the resultant 1905 Aliens Act.

The Jewish character in relation to capitalism was of the foremost interest for some leftists. For example, Beatrice Webb, a social reformer and one of the founding members of the Fabian Society, stressed the capitalist aspect of the Jews while participating in the social investigations of Charles Booth on working class lives in East London in the late nineteenth century. She emphasised the dominance of economic motives over any other in driving Jewish behaviour. She categorically defined the Jewish immigrants as “a race of producers with an indefinitely low standard of life.” To her, the most apparent feature of Jewishness was “the love of profit.”¹²⁸ Although she noted that the majority of Jewish immigrants were “mentally and physically progressive” and “possessed of many first

¹²⁷ Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 60-73, 81-83, 168-69; Vaughn Bevan, *The Development of British Immigration Law* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 67-68.

¹²⁸ Beatrice Potter, “East London Labour,” *Nineteenth Century* 24 (1888): 176-77.

class virtues,” they were however “deficient in that highest and latest development of human sentiment – social morality.” In her social concern as a reformer, the Jews’ perceived lack of care for others was central. The Jew was essentially “the economic man, seeking employment or profit with an absolute mobility of body and mind, without pride, without preference, without interests outside the struggle for existence and welfare of the individual and family.”¹²⁹

In his 1891 book *Problems of Poverty*, J. A. Hobson, who was then a Liberal but later moved to the Labour Party, wrote extensively about Jewish immigrants. Like Beatrice Webb, he categorised the Jews as above all an economic force capable of “turning out the largest quantity of wealth at the lowest cost of production.” However, for Hobson, this virtue from the point of old Political Economy was not to be encouraged, as he rejected laissez-faire capitalism. From his moral point of view, the Jews’ excessive diligence merely made them “such a terrible competitor,” undercutting English people who led an honourable life with consideration for their neighbours.¹³⁰ Hobson also saw the Jews as devoid of social morality. Therefore, for both Webb and Hobson, their concerns about capitalist profit and its impact upon workers had a big influence on their views about the Jews.

Biased views on Jewish people among the left occasionally resulted in practical support for immigration control. For instance, the Trade Union Congress paid great attention to Jewish immigration between 1892 to 1895, passing a series of resolutions asking for government restriction of alien immigration. In 1892, the first of these TUC resolutions appeared urging that “the door must be shut against the enormous immigration of destitute aliens.” In this resolution, immigrants were marked out as the main problem in causing poverty, exploitative labour and a cholera plague among British workers.¹³¹

The TUC’s support for control was sometimes expressed as an appeal for attention to unemployment, without explicitly mentioning immigration. In 1893, Keir Hardie argued that, with the unemployment rate at over 10 per cent of the working population (over 1,000,000), the parliamentary committee should use every means to reduce unemployment.¹³² His resolution, which was adopted without a division, also demanded the introduction of a parliamentary bill “to make it illegal and punishable by

¹²⁹ Beatrice Potter, “The Jewish Community,” in *Labour and Life of the People in London*, ed. Charles Booth (London: Macmillan 1889), 590.

¹³⁰ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 20-21.

¹³¹ TUCAR (1892), 29.

¹³² TUCAR (1893), 73.

imprisonment to contract with and import workmen from outside the United Kingdom to work in the United Kingdom during labour disputes, trade depressions, or while there is an unemployed class existing.”¹³³

In 1894, William Inskip of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives tabled a resolution calling upon the government to take the necessary steps “to prohibit the landing of all pauper aliens who have no visible means of subsistence.”¹³⁴ The boot and shoe union, along with the tailoring and cabinet-making union, were the most hostile unions to immigration. Their opposition stemmed from good reasons. Their membership included the majority of immigrant employees, because the character of the trades required a minute-level-division of work which enabled unskilled newcomers to be put to work immediately. These trades ran workshops where machine-processed materials were assembled by hand, and this often resulted in the adoption of the sweating system. The presence of immigrants contributed to a certain extent to the continuation of this type of trade, because they supplied cheap and exploitable labour but seldom had economic and social means to challenge to these miserable conditions.

The 1894 resolution and its adoption clearly shows that TUC’s support of immigration control was shaped by racial bias. Because most of the immigrant workers were Jews, the cause of the sweating system was often attributed to them and their racial character. That is, the exploited Jewish labourers were so greedy themselves that they aimed to become a sweating master in the future, thus perpetuating the system.¹³⁵ Once again unemployment, sweating, and the degradation of the standard of life of British working people was blamed on the immigrants.¹³⁶ A year later, racial prejudice was more openly expressed when William Inskip presented the same resolution, in which the aliens were referred to as a “blighting blister,” and the East End of London was described as the “dumping ground for the common refuse of the world.”¹³⁷

The labour movement’s hostility to immigrants also came from one of the most prominent trade union leaders, Ben Tillett. He led the London Dock Strike in 1889 and the New Unionism thereafter, and was the leader of the Dockers’ Union and one of the founders of the ILP and the Labour Party. Despite the fact that the number of alien workers in his trade was negligible, he argued that conditions in docks areas were getting

¹³³ Ibid., 82.

¹³⁴ TUCAR (1894), 59-60.

¹³⁵ Garrard, *English and Immigration*, 157-160.

¹³⁶ TUCAR (1894), 59-60.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 45-46.

worse because of people looking for work who had been displaced by alien competitors in their own trades.¹³⁸ Therefore, in 1889 Tillet reproached the government for allowing “all the dregs and scum of the continent to make fetid, putrid and congested our already overcrowded slums ... while ... men who would have been very good citizens, good patriots, bearing and discharging social responsibility with credit to themselves and honour and glory to their country ... are starved and driven to desperation.”¹³⁹

However, some socialists saw the relation between the Jews and problems of capitalism in a totally opposite way. They regarded the Jews, like other British working classes, as victims of the capitalist system. For instance, TUC resolutions calling for immigration control were not unanimously supported, although the anti-immigration feeling was strong in certain trades, such as boot and shoemakings, cabinetmaking, or costermongering. The chairman of the 1894 Congress called the proposals dangerous and reactionary, emphasizing that the solid union of all workers would be the only solution to these social problems, as the immigrants were as much the victims of Continental capitalism, as the British working people were the victims of capitalism in United Kingdom.¹⁴⁰

Other organisations shared this view as well. The Socialist League, which had been formed by William Morris in 1884, regarded it pointless to attack the immigrants, but focused on the capitalist system itself. In fact, the Socialist League maintained a close relationship with the East End Jewish immigrants and Jewish socialists. Its leader William Morris frequently attended Jewish socialist meetings, for example, the Berner Street Group, and delivered speeches. When he died in 1896, Jewish tailoring workers mourned his death by sending a letter of condolence to his family.¹⁴¹ Andreas Scheu, one of the leading members of the Socialist League, criticised the argument that stopping alien immigration would cure the low wages and difficulties of British working people. In 1888, he wrote:

¹³⁸ Garrard, *English and Immigration*, 163-64.

¹³⁹ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 54-55.

¹⁴⁰ TUCAR (1894), 32; The argument that blaming immigrants as the cause of economic and social problems was just a way of diverting British workers' attention, is one of continuing themes of the post-1945 years. The only difference is that early socialists thought that the issue of immigration was used to conceal the failure of capitalism, while later the Labour Party in the late 1950s criticized the imminent Commonwealth immigration restriction as a stopgap measure of the Conservative government's failure to provide sufficient social resources. See chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁴¹ Bill Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals, 1875-1914* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1975), 192-97.

We may safely assume that poverty in the British Isles will soon be a thing of the past! ... How easy and well-to-do the East End workman and workwomen would then become, all of a sudden. ... To Ireland, the poor foreign Jews have, as yet, not penetrated ... and hence the standard of the Irish peasants and wage workers is almost an ideal one.¹⁴²

In a similar vein, the SDF also argued that problems related to Jewish immigration essentially arose from inherent deficiencies of the capitalist system which it considered rich Jews as representing. From this point of view, blaming poor Jewish immigrants for all the problems was a mere distraction because it prevented ordinary workers from facing the real causes of their problems. In 1894 when the Trade Union Congress passed a resolution urging immigration restriction, the SDF criticized the resolution as unsocialistic – for once immigration control was introduced it would be easier to exclude political refugees with socialist aims.¹⁴³ Likewise, Ernest Bax wrote that attributing any adverse effect on British labour to the immigrant workers would be absurd, given that the number of emigrants was far greater than that of immigrants. Instead, he blamed female labour with its lower wages for displacing male labour, irrespective of whether that labour was English or alien. He concluded that the alien issue was one of the many red herrings blocking socialist progress.¹⁴⁴

The Independent Labour Party (ILP) also took a similar position. Although there were minor voices such as that of J. Havelock Wilson, who argued for legislative control, overriding opinion within the ILP was against immigration control. It said that the attempt to make workers interested in the immigration issue was a strategy to obscure the real cause of their problems.¹⁴⁵ In 1903 at its annual conference, an anti-alien resolution was moved for the two reasons of the housing problem and the overcrowded labour market, but was rejected immediately on the grounds that it was an insult to socialist principles that embraced the brotherhood of mankind.¹⁴⁶

The Fabian Society also rejected the common charge that the Jewish immigrants were the cause of the sweating system, and said that the removal of the Jews would only be a partial and temporary relief for the sweated trades. This was because whereas Jewish

¹⁴² *Commonweal*, 19 May 1888, 123.

¹⁴³ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 22.

¹⁴⁴ *Justice*, 14 Dec 1895, 4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ ILPACR (1903), 30.

immigrants were mainly found in East London, Leeds and Manchester, and in certain trades such as tailoring, slipper-making, and boot and shoe finishing, sweating flourished in nearly every large city in England and in trades without a concentration of Jews.¹⁴⁷ The Fabians made an official resolution about the issue when, at its 1905 annual meeting the attendees agreed on the executive committee's decisions opposing legislation to restrict alien immigration.¹⁴⁸

So, as we have seen, socialists had no unified attitude towards Jewish immigrants. Some of them, especially those who were in trades easily affected by the surplus of cheap labour, argued for immigration control on the grounds that the Jews were the source of problems. Meanwhile, others argued that such an approach was misleading and anti-Semitic. Socialists, they reasoned, should be able to see that the capitalism was the fundamental cause, not the Jewish immigrants. The ambiguous stance of the British left, however, was to be challenged further in the coming years.

1-3. Socialists' Opposition to the 1905 Alien Act

After 1895, the anti-immigration atmosphere in the TUC withered away, and the subject was not taken up again. This change was also recognised at the local level. For example, the London Trade Council had passed anti-immigration resolutions in 1891 and 1892, but it dropped them in 1895 and 1896. Likewise, Leeds Trade Council had passed an anti-immigration resolution in 1895, but it did not raise the matter again thereafter. Gainer and Garrard have suggested that the TUC stopped supporting immigration restriction because of the trade unions' belief in the international brotherhood.¹⁴⁹ Trade recovery after 1895 did partly ameliorate the anti-immigration feelings among unions, but socialist faith in international brotherhood had a decisive impact on the shift towards anti-restriction. The fact that the poor immigrant workers were "compulsory objects of trade union sympathy" made it extremely uncomfortable for British trade unionists to speak against their presence. Moreover, since most of immigrants were Jews, discussion of them was likely to be condemned as anti-Semitism or racism, which the labour movement was anxious to avoid.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Fabian Society, *Sweating: its Cause and Remedy* (London: Fabian Society, 1894), 5.

¹⁴⁸ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 23.

¹⁴⁹ Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 96-97; Garrard, *English and Immigration*, 175-77.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

If the doctrine of the worker's brotherhood kept the TUC from officially approving more anti-immigration resolutions from 1895, it certainly did not resolve all the discontent and anti-immigrant feelings among trade unions. In fact, some trade sectors that regarded themselves as being under the threat of cheap immigrant labour continued to ask for the legislative restriction. Representatives from the National Boot and Shoe Operatives, the Cabinet Makers' Association, the Amalgamated Society of Tailors and the Costermongers' Unions told the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration in 1903 that British working people were being displaced by immigrants.¹⁵¹ Robert Smillie from the Scottish Miners' Federation confessed that he did not want foreigners to be employed until all British miners were working even though he admitted, "we have not at the present time had any single accident caused to a British workman by a foreigner."¹⁵²

Hostile feelings toward immigrants among ordinary residents did not go away, either. In 1892 when the issue of immigration restriction was first introduced at the general election, H. H. Marks of the Conservative Party won the seat of Bethnal Green north-east where a number of boot and shoe makers lived and competed with immigrant labour.¹⁵³ In January 1902 and November 1903, public meetings at the People's Palace, organized by the British Brothers' League, the Londoners League, and the Immigration Reform Association attracted over 4,000 attendance each time.¹⁵⁴ In 1906, Conservative candidates William Evans Gordon and Claude Hay won in Stepney and Hoxton. Given the general victory of the Liberal Party both in 1892 and in 1906, it is noteworthy that all these cases took advantage by canvassing with the immigration issue.¹⁵⁵ In other words, there was no sign that the TUC's silence was resulted from the genuine easement of the anti-immigrants' anti-Semitic feelings. As Gainer acknowledged, it rather meant that the hostility in several trades or some regions, simply did not get any nation-wide support or encouragement.¹⁵⁶

In the meantime, the Conservative Party seized the opportunity by tabling the Aliens Bill in 1905. The bill was built on the extension of previous attempts of the party to introduce restrictive measures. Conservatives expected that the bill would help it form a new relationship with the newly enfranchised working class voters. After two

¹⁵¹ 1903 Cd. 1742, II, 470-73, 511-16.

¹⁵² Ibid., 843-44.

¹⁵³ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, 278.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 281-82

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Gainer, *Alien Invasion*, 96-97.

unsuccessful parliamentary enquiries at the end of nineteenth century, Conservatives won good arguments for immigration control in the 1903 Royal Commission. As shown above, it was especially reassuring for the party to see that some trade organisations were on their side for control, though it failed to pass the 1904 Bill. The Conservative government also saw the usefulness of immigration restriction in overcoming internal divisions over tariff reform and external unpopularity.¹⁵⁷ Fears about the degeneration of national health and the precarious dominance in imperial affairs, which had increased throughout the Boer War, provided a national context for specific local grievances.¹⁵⁸ The Conservative government framed the Aliens Bill in a patriotic language which put the interest of British working classes in opposition to that of immigrants, thereby placing itself and the Conservative politics in the position of working classes' mouthpiece. To this, the LRC MPs in parliament and socialist organizations refuted with their version of patriotism which appealed to British liberty and inclusive gestures for immigrants.

As seen above, the most frequent complaint regarding immigration was that the alien – Jewish – labour was stealing jobs and houses from British workers. However, grounds for control were by no means limited to the specific issues of employment and housing. Fear of the degeneration of British racial stock by the influx of *undesirable* aliens underpinned the problems centring on Eastern European Jewish immigration and political debates on the Aliens Bill. This concern was clearly expressed by the Prime Minister Arthur Balfour. During the second reading of the Aliens Bill in 1905 he reminded the House of Commons of “the question of race,” which he said should not be forgotten:

If there were a substitution of Poles for Britons, for example, though the Briton of the future might have the same laws, the same institutions and constitution, and the same historical traditions learned in the elementary schools, though all these things might be in the possession of the new nationality, that new nationality would not be the same, and would not be the nationality we should desire to be our heirs through the ages yet to come.¹⁵⁹

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the enactment of the 1905 Act was far

¹⁵⁷ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, 289.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 280; Debra Hayes, “From Aliens to Asylum Seekers: *A History of Immigration Controls and Welfare in Britain*,” in *From Immigration Controls to Welfare Controls*, ed. Steve Cohen, Beth Humphries, and Ed Mynott (London: Routledge, 2002), 36-37.

¹⁵⁹ 145 H.C. Deb. 4s. 2 May 1905, cols. 796.

from smooth or fast. Among politicians, the notion of the lost tradition of Britain as a free land for the persecuted and political refugees was still powerful, especially among Liberals. This was particularly the case when the persecuted were from Tsarist Russia whose despotism was abhorred as the opposite of the freedom that was enjoyed by Britons. Even the Conservative administration was reluctant to challenge this deeply-rooted tradition by passing “legislation of such a novel and startling character” restricting free movement of people, despite pressures from their backbenchers.¹⁶⁰

Shutting the door against the oppressed was interpreted by Labour as a serious rupture in the traditional English liberty which was at the root of the radical patriotism. It was precisely this notion of national tradition that formed the basis of the Labour Party and socialist groups opposition to the 1905 Act. All four LRC MPs voted against the Aliens Bill.¹⁶¹ In the second reading of the bill, Keir Hardie pointed out that the people most likely to be affected by the bill were the very ones most in need of protection from persecution in their homelands: “It is certain that the bulk of those people will be poor people who will be kept out under this Bill, and are we to say to those poor creatures that England of all lands under the sun is no resting place for them from the conditions now prevailing in their own country?”¹⁶² He argued that supporting the bill would shut the door on the “one way of escape which these poor victims of injustice have left open to them.”¹⁶³ The next year, James Ramsay MacDonald spoke in the House of Commons about “the most objectionable character” of the Aliens Act, which was the “serious breaches of the honourable historical tradition of this country ... that all persecuted people might find refuge here.”¹⁶⁴

The issue of the right of refugees to asylum was shared by other socialist organisations. In 1904 when the Aliens Bill was introduced, the ILP wrote about this right: “A tradition that has remained unbroken for hundreds of years; that has given us material prosperity and moral strength.”¹⁶⁵ The ILP denounced the bill as more stimulating racial antipathy towards foreigners which was already widespread.¹⁶⁶ It concluded that “every lover of

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., col. 773.

¹⁶¹ These were Keir Hardie, D. J. Shackleton, Will Crooks, and Arthur Henderson.

¹⁶² 145 H.C. Deb. 4s. 2 May 1905, col. 782.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ 153 H.C. Deb. 4s. 5 Mar 1906, col. 148.

¹⁶⁵ Harry Snell, *The Foreigner in England: an examination of the problem of alien immigration*, Tracts for the Times, no. 4 (London: Independent Labour Party, 1904), 3.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.

liberty within this country” ought to resist such discriminatory restrictive legislation.¹⁶⁷ Even to Hyndman of the SDF, whose anti-Semitic articles in *Justice* aroused considerable opposition from Jewish and socialist readers from time to time¹⁶⁸, the right of asylum was “worth defending at any cost.”¹⁶⁹ In the SDF’s 1884 annual conference, it was proudly declared that “alone among English organisations, [the Democratic Federation in 1882] came forward to champion one of the most glorious privileges of our country.”¹⁷⁰

In the Commons, Keir Hardie expressed another worry about the additional danger in which Socialists would be placed should the bill become a law. Pointing out a clause dealing with the exclusion of people accused of having committed a crime, Hardie said it was “an easy thing in Russia or Germany to prove a Socialist to be a criminal.”¹⁷¹ In addition to the possible criminalisation of socialists, another important aspect of Hardie’s opposition to the Aliens Bill was to refute the Conservatives’ claim to be a protector of the British working class¹⁷², and uphold the Labour Party and the Trade Union as the genuine mouthpiece of working men.

The parliamentary Labour members also repudiated the Conservatives by refuting their claim that the bill was proposed for the sake of English workers in the face of competition from Jewish immigrants. Instead, they set forth a claim that the working classes would not welcome the Aliens Bill, which was quite different from the fact. By doing so Keir Hardie and MacDonald not only contested the position of the Conservatives as representatives of the working classes, but also asserted that it was their version of patriotism that defended British liberty against the establishment of border barriers.

Despite disagreements within socialist groups and the labour movement in relation to the specific issue of immigration control targetted on Jews, the British left united in general against it. It did not mean that British left started sharing common perspectives on Jewish immigrants. There were however consistent complaints, not infrequently in anti-Semitic tones, from some trades about immigrants. However, they could never

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁸ Silberner, “British Socialism and the Jews,” 40-49.

¹⁶⁹ Garrard, *English and Immigration*, 186-87.

¹⁷⁰ *Justice*, 9 Aug 1884; Ibid., 31 January 1885.

¹⁷¹ 145 H.C. Deb. 4s. 2 May 1905, 782.

¹⁷² After the franchise reforms of 1867 and 1884, the working classes men entered the political contest as active subjects, not mere policy objects, they highlighted issues of social policy intruding on party politics. The immigration question acquired its momentum when the Conservative Party tried to develop its popular politics, and from the 1892 general election immigration had played a part canvassing the East End by Conservative candidates. In this political terrain, Jewish immigrants were characterised as destroyer of the material and moral well-being of the native British working classes. See Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, 263-81.

become the main official voice. The unified opposition to the 1905 Aliens Acts found was grounded on from the British value of liberty and openness toward the oppressed, not on the socialist ideology of international solidarity and brotherhood among workers.

From the late nineteenth century to the 1900s, the massive increase in the number of Jewish immigrants created considerable pressure for immigration restriction in British society, especially in a few areas like the East End in London. Hostility to the Jewish immigrants was not only based on social stress caused by the lack of housing and employment, which was a chronic feature of the slums, but was also often mixed with prejudices about the physical, mental and social differences of the Jews, influenced by nineteenth-century racial theory. British socialists of various organizations were not separated from but subject to this perception. From their ideological stand-point, the left particularly focused on the economic dimension in relation to the Jews – some viewed them as exploiting capitalists or international financiers, and others regarded them as people who were willing to accept miserable working conditions and lower pay while aspiring to become the masters who exploited them.

British left's response to the Jewish immigration and Conservatives' attempt to prevent it was made in the context of radical patriotic tradition in which liberty was a key element. Most socialists with a few exceptions, opposed the restrictive measures of the Aliens Bill, and stood for free entry. Despite the not all positive views on the Jews, imposing a barrier to Britain's open door meant a considerable departure from British values for the left. Upholding the position of Britain as an asylum for the oppressed appealed as strongly to the socialists as it did to the Liberals. Socialist opposition to the Aliens Act was primarily driven by patriotic concerns based on appeals to the proud British tradition of the right of asylum and deep-rooted ideas of British liberty. From the socialistic standpoint, the belief in Britain as a haven for the worlds' oppressed people outweighed criticisms of immigration restriction as a form of trickery to conceal social deficiencies and inequality.

The concerns and debates embraced by the British left – the right of asylum, criminalization of socialists, safeguarding its own position as a real representative of workers – were highlighted in the attitudes adopted towards Jewish immigration and the Aliens Act, though there was no direct reference to race or racism. They appear repeatedly in political issues involving race throughout the period covered by this thesis, with changing degrees of dominance among each. After the First World War, the Labour Party,

when it became the largest opposition party, which had been the Liberal Party, expressed its confidence through the more frequent declaration of its socialist ideals of workers' solidarity. In debates on further immigration control proposed in an ever-growing nationalistic and exclusive atmosphere after the end of the war, the Labour Party once again advocated Britain's open-door, but this time its approach was based more on socialist internationalism than on the concern about British liberty.

2. Labour's Discourse on Immigration Policy: The Post-World War I Context of Internationalism, 1918-1925

At the turn of the century the immigration of Eastern European Jews triggered the debate about the alien threat to jobs, housing, and the racial decay of the British working classes. The emerging Labour socialists and trade unionists contributed to this debate. They argued that the immigration barrier, the 1905 Aliens Act, resulting from anti-Semitic campaigns and racial hatred, impaired the long-held tradition of British liberty and tolerance which provided asylum for the oppressed. (However, it would be wrong not to note that there were some among them who held anti-Semitic views.) This key argument in Labour's opposition to restriction was to change during the First World War.

This chapter moves on to examine the post-war period, and concentrates on the years between 1918 and the mid-1920s. At this time, the political discourse on *aliens* was once again highlighted in the context of post-war nationalism, with increased restrictions on immigration introduced via the 1919 Aliens Act. The position of the Labour Party on immigration control also changed due to the influence of the war, from a pre-war patriotic concern for British liberty to that based on a desire for international peace, although the patriotic language of the pre-war period remained. From 1918, Labour's approach to the issue was put in a new frame formed after the experience of the devastation of the Great War. It was directed by the internationalist thinking mainly driven by Labour members who attached great importance to harmonious and peaceful international relations. Thus, immigration control was now viewed with keen suspicion for the effect it could have on relations with other countries. While immigration restriction had been condemned for its ending the tradition of British liberty during the pre-war years, it was now criticized for its cliquish character which was thought likely to cause conflicts with other nations. This change in attitude toward anti-alien immigration restriction went side by side with the development of the Labour Party into a more confident political party. It was part of a broader evolution that covered many elements including membership, seats, organization, ideological orientation and policies, and was all part of its self-proclamation as a social democratic party advocating internationalist ideals of co-operation, peace and equality.

The Labour Party's internationalist approach to immigration control, the theme of this chapter, demonstrates a clear example of the close relationship between the areas of domestic and international policy, one of the core beliefs of Labour's internationalist

thinking noted by scholars of the party's foreign policy. For example, Rhiannon Vickers in *The Labour Party and the World* (2004) suggests that one of the principal features of Labour's internationalism, which became the basis of the party's approach towards international affairs, was the party's conviction that domestic and international policies could not be separate areas, and were mutually influencing. Other features included a belief in an international community of nation states tied by common interests and responsibilities, which included a concern for collective security in place of a state maintained by balance of power; anti-militarism; democracy; and belief in the international solidarity of workers.¹⁷³ This chapter will show that Labour's internationalism was not only confined to foreign policy areas, but also had an impact on its response towards domestic immigration and race policy debates, supporting the party's claim that foreign and domestic affairs were linked.

This chapter will also add to the existing historiography of domestic immigration policy and the Labour Party. For example, Paul Foot has briefly treated the party's position on the immigration restrictions of the 1919 Aliens Act and further debates into the mid-1920s. He interprets them as part of a longer-term pattern in which Labour's opposition to immigration control was declared only when the party was not in government.¹⁷⁴ In most other works on the history of British immigration and race politics, the period from the end of the Great War to the 1920s has been viewed as a time of highly nationalistic and chauvinistic fervour which was expressed in the introduction of the 1919 Aliens Act. Labour's position in this literature is either very briefly mentioned or is not the main focus of the whole story, especially because it was in opposition.¹⁷⁵

The point made by Foot, that the Labour Party showed its objection to immigration control only when in Opposition, is plainly right. This was a continuing feature of Labour's immigration and race politics that lasted into the post-1945 years. However besides placing Labour's stance within a long-term pattern, he does not provide grounds for, and motives behind, that position, not to mention changes over time and relationship in the general development of the party. This chapter will argue that Labour's position on the immigration restriction debates in 1919, 1923 and 1925 interestingly reflects the development of internationalist thinking in the context created by the experience of the

¹⁷³ Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, vol. 1, *The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy, 1900-51* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). 5-8.

¹⁷⁴ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 111-113, 186.

¹⁷⁵ For example, see Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, 140-160; Panayi, *Immigration History of Britain*, 200-258.

Great War. Hitherto, the rise of the internationalism within Labour discourse has been said by scholars to belong to the party's foreign policies. Indeed, this was a recognizable change from the party's pre-war response in which the domestic frame of the right of asylum dominated the grounds against the Aliens Act of 1905. By revealing this change, the history of Labour's immigration and race politics can be more closely integrated into the general development and history of the party.

At the same time, however, it needs to be made clear that the new post-war internationalism based on the party's increasing self-declaration to be a socialist party, was built on, rather than replaced, the language of patriotism. The Labour Party thought that internationalist ideals developed from a love of one's own country and a recognition that Britain had been open to newcomers throughout its history. In addition, internationalism was advocated on the condition that it did not contradict the needs and interests of the country. Thus, Labour admitted that it never argued for unrestricted immigration regardless of the domestic situation, but that control should be based on international considerations as much as possible. This was closely related to the fact that from 1918 Labour began to make an appeal to the wider electorate, trying to shake off the impression that it was a specifically working class party, in an attempt to stand as a national party *fit to govern*. As Paul Ward notes, the Labour Party's proclamation of British socialism from 1918 was made within this patriotic discourse, emphasising that it accepted the established way of politics, and represented national interests, not class interests.¹⁷⁶

The Labour Party's approach to immigration control from 1919 to 1925 will be examined next, and illustrated within the context of the post-First World War period. Particular attention will be paid to the party's records from its annual conference gatherings, debates in parliament, and press articles. The first section is concerned with the post-war growth of the party and the development of its internationalist thinking, providing background to the second and main part of this chapter, which will show how Labour's discourse on restriction on immigration was framed by internationalism. In the second section the contents and character of this internationalism will be discussed.

2-1. The Post-War Growth of the Labour Party and Its Internationalism

¹⁷⁶ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 167-95.

In the history of the Labour Party, the period after the First World War down to the mid-1920s saw its considerable growth. It grew from more of a protest movement consisting of a loose federation of various socialist and trade union groups, with a common aim of representing working class interests in parliament, to a more organized political party with greater parliamentary representation and membership, extended financial capacity, and organisational improvement that could support policy development. This progress of the Labour Party, which soon leaped towards being the second largest party in Britain, is an important factor in considering its position on the post-war immigration restrictions. Not only did it give the party confidence in putting forward its internationalist thinking based on socialism, but it also led the party to present its position in a more concrete and practical way. It was all part of the process of making itself a national party that went beyond its pre-war working class-only representation.

The growth of the Labour Party can be seen most graphically in its electoral records. Whereas in the December 1910 general election Labour received only 7 per cent of the votes gaining 42 parliamentary seats, in December 1918 the party gained 57 seats equivalent to 20.8 per cent of the votes. Though the election result of that year was disappointing to many Labour members, including the National Executive Committee (NEC), by the 1922 election the party had become the Official Opposition front bench, with 142 MPs entering the Commons, outstripping the Liberal Party. The following year with 191 MPs elected, Labour was able to form a minority government.¹⁷⁷

The progress towards being the second biggest party in Britain was in large part the result of the changes that the Great War had brought to the British political landscape, and from which the Labour Party had gained considerable benefits. For example, more than 14 million people, many of whom were working class, gained the franchise through the reform of the 1918 Representation of People Act.¹⁷⁸ It is increasingly unlikely that these newly-franchised electors were automatically inclined to vote for Labour.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, it has been shown that this electoral reform made an impact according to various local and regional contexts. In addition, the end of plural voting and the redrawing of constituencies did seem to benefit the Labour Party.¹⁸⁰ Women were also given

¹⁷⁷ Mathew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 21.

¹⁷⁸ Thorpe, *British Labour Party*, 27-47.

¹⁷⁹ H. C. G. Matthews, R. I. McKibbin and J. Kay, "The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party," *English Historical Review* 91, no. 361 (1976):723-52.

¹⁸⁰ Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 18.

suffrage under the 1918 Reform Act, and they had been targeted by Labour as one of the important sections of the electorate. Women received four seats on the NEC. They were recruited thanks to election campaigns specifically designed to appeal to female voters, and as a result agendas that were thought to address female concerns began to be dealt with,¹⁸¹ even though Labour's official support for sexual equality was based on the traditional notion of different roles for men and women.¹⁸²

Furthermore, working men's class-consciousness had become increasingly sharpened in response to the exploitative war-time experiences ranging from tightened workplace discipline, bans on industrial actions, to the dilution of labour and fixed wage rates.¹⁸³ By 1918, the membership of the trade unions had doubled compared with that of 1911, to about 6,500,000.¹⁸⁴ In addition, the increase in the membership of both affiliated socialist societies and individuals directly benefitted the financial situation of the Labour Party. Various committees were set up to give advice on, and help outline, policies. The National Joint Council was created, enabling representatives from the NEC, PLP, and TUC general council to co-operate regarding activities of the labour movement.¹⁸⁵

As well as these organisational and structural developments, by 1918, Labour also emerged as an independent political party which was more able to handle complicated problems beyond the direct remit of working class concerns. Labour had already gained actual governmental and administrative experience through its participation in the coalition government. Arthur Henderson had served as President of the Board of Education, as Paymaster-General, and as Minister without Portfolio. In the latter post he was followed by another Labour MP, George Barnes. The new ministries of Labour and Pensions also went to Labourites, John Hodge and George Henry Roberts.¹⁸⁶ Also, in terms of political programme, or ideological orientation, while Labour had been "born more from a pragmatism and desire for worker representation than from any specific

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 40-2.

¹⁸² For Example, see *Labour and the Nation* which stated, "Its policy is based on the belief that women have common interests with their husbands, sons and brothers, and that its principles and ideals appeal to citizens irrespective of sex. But it realizes also that women are specially concerned with the development of the social services - with care for the mother and infant, for the child and the sick, for the bereaved, the aged and the workless; with the general conditions of home life, and with the preservation of peace." Labour Party, *Labour and the Nation*, rev. ed. (London: Labour Party, 1928), 29.

¹⁸³ Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 8.; For the impact of the First World War on trade unions, see Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, vol. 2, 1911-1933 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 118-212.

¹⁸⁴ Clegg, *British Trade Unions since 1889*, 2:568.

¹⁸⁵ Thorpe, *British Labour Party*, 33.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

theory, socialist or otherwise,” it now embraced a clearer political orientation as a socialist party. *Labour and the New Social Order* was adopted at the 1918 party conference as the party’s post-war reconstruction programme. It expressed commitment to various economic and social projects which can be described as socialist policies: the enforcement of the national minimum wage, the democratic control of industry; the revolution in national finance and surplus wealth for the common good.¹⁸⁷ In other words, it proposed a future vision of social reforms based on nationalisation and redistribution by putting in its constitution the famous Clause Four that committed the party to “the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange.”¹⁸⁸

Above all, the most important change brought by the First World War, and relating to the theme of this chapter, is that it broadened Labour’s policy area to include international affairs that were beyond domestic issues directly concerned with the working classes. Prior to 1914, the British Labour Party almost exclusively focused on domestic labour issues, for instance, unemployment, insurance and trade disputes. Though the party confessed internationalism and exalted international workers’ solidarity, concerns for matters out of direct reach of trade unions in a genuine sense, were the preserve of a few party leaders such as Ramsay MacDonald, Keir Hardie and Arthur Henderson.¹⁸⁹ However the war caused significant changes in the attitude of many in the Labour Party in relation to international affairs, by forcing them to realise acutely that events taking place in the wider world had a grave influence on their everyday lives. This was felt at every level within the Labour Party including the trade unions which had been somewhat parochial in their concerns. Many like Arthur Henderson, who lost his son on the Somme in 1916, had first-hand experience of the war, including encounters with death, injury, conscription, and factory legislation. Securing peace became the essential pre-requisite to protect the interests of the working classes.¹⁹⁰

The war therefore set the context in which the consistent interests of the leadership in foreign and colonial affairs promoted the idea of a post-war party that looked to wider horizons. Such a change of mood is clearly identifiable in the party’s general election manifesto produced immediately after the war. In its 1918 manifesto the Labour Party

¹⁸⁷ Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order*, 5.

¹⁸⁸ Labour Party, “The Constitution of the Labour Party,” in *LPACR* (1918), 140-43, especially, see section 3-(d).

¹⁸⁹ Thorpe, *British Labour Party*, 37.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Northern and Jonathan Davis, *The British Labour Party and the Wider World: Domestic Politics, Internationalism and Foreign Policy* (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), 6.

covered several international issues and gave them priorities in the list of plans. It criticized secret diplomacy, demanded a peace settlement which would be based on international co-operation and withdrawal of the Allied forces from Russia. The party also advocated freedom for Ireland and India as part of the universal right of self-determination within the British Commonwealth of Free Nations. This is a remarkable change when compared to pre-War years. The 1910 general election manifestoes for example were shorter and dealt only with domestic issues. There were ample references to sickness insurance, land reform, adult suffrage, Poor Law reform and factory inspection, but none to international or foreign affairs.¹⁹¹

This broader political outlook of the post-war Labour Party was also influenced by new recruits from the ranks of the former Liberals. Immediately after the War had broken out, Ramsay MacDonald resigned from the party leadership in protest against Labour's support for the war. However, he remained in the party, and gathered ILPers and radical Liberals together who criticized the traditional conduct of foreign policy through exclusive cabinet circles for causing the war and insisted on parliamentary scrutiny of any treaties between nations. With radical Liberals like E. D. Morel, C. P. Trevelyan and Arthur Ponsonby brought over to Labour, MacDonald formed and chaired the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) whose ideas about international co-operation and criticism of traditional foreign policy influenced the Labour Party in setting its agenda in the post-war period.¹⁹²

The Labour Party made a practical impact on inter-war British politics, especially in the area of foreign policy. Being keen to secure peace and prevent any possibility of another war, the Labour Party repeatedly demanded the adoption of a foreign policy based upon internationalism, that is, "a foreign policy based upon the idea that all people should harmoniously co-operate to promote peace and liberty in the world."¹⁹³ Thus it advocated open diplomacy, disarmament, conflict solving through international arbitration, the abandonment of all protective customs and barriers, the right of self-determination of colonies and the League of Nations policy, as the future direction of foreign policy and international relations.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ "December 1910 *Labour Party General Election Manifesto*," accessed 16 February 2015, <http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1910/dec/1910-dec-labour-manifesto.shtml>.

¹⁹² John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 26; Vickers, *Labour Party and the World*, 1:80-81.

¹⁹³ LPACR (1921), 5.

¹⁹⁴ LPACR (1923), 11-13; Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, 10-11.

Labour's increased concern with the larger world was not confined to its interest in international affairs. It believed that international peace and domestic policies were mutually related. This is clear from the *Labour and the New Social Order* of 1918, in which the Labour Party acknowledged that domestic and international affairs could not be separated from one another. Under the heading of "the Four Pillars of the House," reform was set in the wider international context and beyond domestic borders: "The House which the Labour Party intends to build, the four Pillars of which have now been described, does not stand alone in the world. Where will it be in the Street of Tomorrow?" According to the Labour Party, the socialist visions of post-war Britain would be laid in "a continually expanding friendly co-operation among all the peoples of the world."¹⁹⁵

From the end of the War and into the 1920s, Labour's internationalist ideas were declared and advocated over and over again at official party gatherings. Blaming capitalism, imperialism and secret-diplomacy between nations for the devastation of the Great War, the party consistently called for an opportunity for the Labour government "to bring peace, prosperity, and happiness to every corner of these Islands, and also demonstrate to all nations our desire for Brotherhood, Fraternity and International Co-operation in all things affecting our common humanity."¹⁹⁶

It was these international ideas that framed the Labour Party's approach to debates about immigration and race in the 1920s, when the atmosphere in the post-war government was dominated by an ever-growing suspicion of aliens.

2-2. Immigration Debates and the Labour Party

The First World War amplified hostility towards a foreign presence in Britain, and especially against Germans who were perceived as *enemy aliens*.¹⁹⁷ These nationalistic and xenophobic tensions continued to exist into the post-War period and affected state institutions dealing with alien immigration and residence in the UK. As soon as the conflict broke out in August 1914, parliament swiftly introduced and passed (in just one day) the Special Restriction Act. The Act, which was described later as "one of the least

¹⁹⁵ *Labour and the New Social Order*, 19.

¹⁹⁶ LPACR (1921), 147.

¹⁹⁷ For the anti-Germanism in Britain during the First World War, see Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*.

liberal and one of the most arbitrary systems of immigration law in the world,”¹⁹⁸ gave the Home Secretary wide powers regarding the entry, residence, registration, movement and deportation of all aliens, although in effect it was primarily concerned with Germans. Almost immediately the immigration flow that had begun in the 1880s halted. Further measures such as the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, appeared to deal with foreigners who were already in the UK, and was passed two days after the Special Restriction Act. This Act attempted to define British nationality and from 1915 provided guidance for the police and local military authorities in their treatment of aliens during the War.¹⁹⁹ Germans in Britain, regardless of how long they had been settled in the UK, were under tight control of the war-time British government. In order to “cleanse ethnically the country of any traces of the Germans,” an official propaganda machine existed which officially sanctioned Germanophobia, especially in the period before the introduction of conscription in January 1916.²⁰⁰ As a result of internment and repatriation schemes, the German community in Britain which numbered 57,500 in 1914 was significantly reduced to just 22,254 in 1919.²⁰¹

Despite the main object of the hostility being the Germans, this did not mean that existing hostilities against other groups, such as the Jews who had been the target of the Aliens Act of 1905, stopped or was dissipated in the general anti-alien atmosphere. Often, clear-cut divisions between anti-German, anti-alien, and anti-Semitic feelings were hardly possible. For example, in the case of Germans in Britain with Jewish origins, the focus of antipathy was their link with Germany, but this was often blurred with anti-Semitic discourse.²⁰² Jews, especially immigrant Jews, faced further trouble as the war continued in connection with conscription, as a number of unnaturalised Jewish immigrants in Britain were reluctant to serve in an army allied with Russia, a country from whose persecution they had fled.²⁰³ This antipathy exploded in 1917 when Jews were attacked in Leeds and the East End of London by natives for their alleged avoidance of conscription at a time of national crisis.²⁰⁴ The complaint that they did not fulfil their

¹⁹⁸ 776 H.C. Deb. 5s. 22 January 1969, col. 504.

¹⁹⁹ Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, 95.

²⁰⁰ Panayi, *Immigration History of Britain*, 208.

²⁰¹ Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst*, 97; Panayi, *Immigration History of Britain*, 214.

²⁰² Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 121-23.

²⁰³ David Cesarani, “An Embattled Minority: the Jews in Britain During the First World War,” in *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right, and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain*, edited by Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 61-81.

²⁰⁴ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 130-35; Cesarani, “Embattled Minority,” 72-75.

duty to their host country was common during the war. For instance, eugenicist and anti-Semite G. P. Mudge wrote, “our race played the game while these immigrants fattened in safety and under a double protection.”²⁰⁵ The hardship of the Jews continued even after the end of the war. In 1920, Oscar Tobin, the Secretary of the Stepney Labour Party, protested against the arrest and deportation of alien trade union officials by the government under the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act of 1919, and urged the parliamentary Labour Party to try to mitigate the situation.²⁰⁶

The changes brought about by the First World War, affecting state immigration law and immigrants in Britain, were directed by the ultra-patriotic and xenophobic fervour of the post-war times. The press also passionately took part, for example, *The Times* released a series of articles that tried to arouse attention to possible threats to London posed by aliens lurking in society.²⁰⁷ The legal frame of the 1914 Special Restriction Act, which had been passed to cope with the emergent situation of the War, became a permanent measure in peace time defining British immigration control. The Alien Restriction (Amendment) Act (the Aliens Act 1919), which had taken over the features of the 1914 Act, was enacted in 1919 to tighten controls relating to entry, residence, employment and deportation of aliens, and conferred comprehensive discretion upon the Home Secretary.²⁰⁸ The traditional *laissez-faire* approach of the previous century and the hesitation in the debates on the 1905 Aliens Act over breach of the liberal tradition were forgotten. The right of asylum was not deemed that sacred, and prospective immigrants were to be judged by their skills and assets to British interest.²⁰⁹ Parliamentary debates on the immigration law motioned by Conservative MPs continued into the mid-1920s, for the purpose of the continuation of the 1919 Aliens Act.

Suspicion of enemy aliens and the menace of unrest were the main drives for debates on immigration. But an attempt to control Britain’s ethnic make-up was also a powerful motive as had been demonstrated in the discussion of the 1905 Aliens Act. The Conservative MP Major Yerburgh, opening discussion on aliens and the existing Aliens Act, made it clear that “it is our duty as Britons to keep our race pure.”²¹⁰ The old fear of racial degeneration of Britain threatened by the influx of “poor wretched creatures” from

²⁰⁵ Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society*, 53-56.

²⁰⁶ Stepney Trades Council and Central Labour Party, *Annual Report 1919-1920*, 5.

²⁰⁷ “Alien London,” *Times*, 22 and 28 Nov 1914, also 2, 4, and 8 Dec 1924.

²⁰⁸ Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act, 1919, 9 & 10 Geo 5. c. 92.

²⁰⁹ Bevan, *British Immigration Law*, 74.

²¹⁰ 180 H.C. Deb. 5s. 11 Feb 1925, col. 286.

the continent and Eastern Europe was repeated. The imagined possibility of racial decay was further exacerbated by the fear that Britain was sending every year “our ‘very best blood’ to inhabit our great Empire,” while the immigrants who were filling the gap left by the British emigrants were a “distinct detriment.”²¹¹

For Labour MPs the right of asylum, which had been the primary basis for the Labour opposition to the 1905 Act, was still an important defence against the anti-alien voices, and appealed to a tradition deeply rooted in British history. Josiah Wedgwood who joined the Labour Party in 1919 deplored that the anti-alienism of the 1919 Aliens Act showed the same spirit of persecution that had been shown by the Popish Plot in the seventeenth century.²¹² He dwelt at length on the subject, reminding the House of the history of the nation that had maintained the right of asylum and the right to free speech.²¹³ George Lansbury also appealed to parliament reminding them of the pride of the old British tradition that “stood for the right of asylum, and for the right of Britain to be the land of the free.”²¹⁴ Ideas of Liberalism which had existed within the Labour Party from the previous century still remained strong. Although the fortunes of the Liberal Party had significantly waned during the War, many ex-Liberals who converted to the Labour Party after 1918 helped continued the liberal tradition.

The cherished tradition of liberty as the main argument for opposing immigration control remained particularly strong among the trade unions. Mr. M. Scatee from the United Garment Workers complained about the sudden arrest and deportation of one member of his union under the 1919 Aliens Act, criticizing the British government for abandoning the old traditions of being the only asylum open to refugees from other countries.²¹⁵ By the same token, Mr. H. Black from the Stepney Trade Council and Labour Party protested against the use of identity cards imposed upon alien residents. He said that the system, instituted by the police during the War, was still in use to curtail alien residents’ movements wherever possible, and he wanted to see a return to pre-War conditions, “when England was considered the haven of people who were oppressed.”²¹⁶

For some however, liberal England as a sanctuary for the oppressed was something to be firmly protected, not from the Conservatives who wanted to erect a fence around it,

²¹¹ 160 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1923, col. 2125.

²¹² 114 H.C. Deb. 5s. 15 Apr 1919, col. 2790.

²¹³ 120 H.C. Deb. 5s. 22 Oct 1919, col. 152.

²¹⁴ 160 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1923. col. 2102.

²¹⁵ TUCAR (1919), 384-85.

²¹⁶ LPACR (1923), 254.

but from canny aliens who would readily avail themselves of the British tradition. Ben Tillett, who had been a trade union leader of a docker's union and had supported the 1905 Aliens Act, spoke as a Labour member for Salford North in 1919, declaring that no possible loophole should be allowed for criminals and spies pretending to be refugees to take advantage of it.²¹⁷ He also added that honest British labour should be protected as well, along with traditional British generosity, since he wanted "the interests of this country to stand amongst all the nations."²¹⁸ Tillett's stance, however, was hardly representative of the official Labour position on immigration control of aliens, but more like that of the British nationalist and right-wing socialist groups in advancing the cause of "Britain for the British." Charles Stanton, National Democratic MP for Aberdare, strongly favoured the 1919 Aliens Act in parliament, and claimed, "this country is for Britishers and for the glorious British line who stood by it." He argued that admitting aliens into the country and allowing them to stay would be "a stain upon our British stock."²¹⁹

Meanwhile, although the right of asylum was still a powerful cause in Labour's opposition to any attempt at immigration control, arguments based on internationalism frequently began to appear at this time. Indeed, the internationalist ideal as the basis of the Labour Party's approach to the immigration issue was plainly verbalised by Labour MPs in the House a number of times. They framed the issue in a context that had emerged during the First World War, that in building a barrier at the border, the cause of international peace and relations should not be offended. The Labour Party opposed the 1919 Aliens Act because it stood up for that international cause. John Scurr, the Labour MP for Mile End, argued that "I stand as an internationalist on behalf of the whole peoples of the world, and I recognize neither class nor creed."²²⁰ On this statement George Lansbury agreed saying, "we are not afraid to say that we are Internationalist, all of us."²²¹

That the focus of the alien immigration issue was transferred from defending British liberty and Britain as a haven for the oppressed to its role in securing international peace can be also confirmed by the words of George Lansbury. A few days after the parliamentary debates on the issue, Lansbury blamed movers of the measure for neglecting its impact on international relationships, and put it in the same context as other

²¹⁷ 114 H.C. Deb. 5s. 15 Apr 1919, cols. 2781-82

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, c. 2783

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, cols. 2799-2800

²²⁰ 180 H.C. Deb. 5s. 11 Feb 1925, cols. 282-83.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, c. 278.

foreign policies:

... few outside the Labour and Socialist Party ever stop to think of international relationship from any point of view except that of purely selfish national interests. This has been simply demonstrated during the past week, when we have been discussing administration by British officials in India and Irak, and our own anti-alien laws administered by the secret police under orders from the Home Office.²²²

By the same token, a remark that most plainly summed up the position of Labour members was uttered by Jack Jones, MP for Silver Town. He linked the legislation with a deterioration in what the party hoped for, that is democracy and equality in the post-War international order: “so far as the Trade Union Congress is concerned, and the Labour Party Congress is concerned, we are against this kind of legislation. We want to see a new world for democracy, and all the nations of the world linked together, without any differentiation of the people of different nationalities.”²²³

The character of Labour’s inter-war internationalism, that is, the extent to which it could be described as socialist or liberal, has been a subject of discussion among scholars who have been especially concerned with the history of Labour’s foreign policy. For example, Michael Gordon has commented that Labour’s internationalism was one of four main principles, along with international working-class solidarity, anti-capitalism, and anti-militarism, that affected the socialist character of the Labour Party’s foreign policy.²²⁴ However, Rhiannon Vickers considers that the internationalism of the British Labour Party at this time lacked any ideological base of socialist character. Rather, it can be described as a different attitude which was influenced by radical liberal thinking and a Christian-socialist, Nonconformist streak among party members, that contrasted with a traditional government’s performance of foreign policy based on *realpolitik* concerns.²²⁵

However, an exact judgement on the nature of Labour’s internationalism will not be the foremost concern for this chapter. Rather, it should be enough to point out that Labour’s internationalism was promoted to position itself as a socialist party in the inter-

²²² George Lansbury, “Our Attitude towards ‘Aliens,’” *Daily Herald*, 3 Mar 1923, 4.

²²³ 120 H.C. Deb. 5s. 22 Oct 1919, col. 93.

²²⁴ Michael R. Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Labour’s Foreign Policy, 1914-1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969).

²²⁵ Vickers, *Labour Party and the World*, 1:5

War period, regardless of the actual content and character of the mixture of liberal and socialist influences which were neither clearly distinguishable nor mutually impermeable in reality.²²⁶ For example, Clement Attlee, who participated in the discussions on immigration, thought that the internationalist thinking that directed Labour's approach to the international question was definitely of a 'Socialist' character, unlike its pre-War stance when it shared its views with the Liberals,²²⁷ as "socialists in all countries are united by a common rejection of the doctrines and ideals of militarism and imperialism."²²⁸

The internationalist context of the Labour Party's response to the immigration restrictions can be found in statements and manifestoes made at the party's annual gatherings and at the International Labour and Socialist conferences. The most clearly defined stance on immigration and emigration that directed Labour appears in the resolution of the International Labour and Socialist Conference held at Berne in January 1919. The conference, formed as an alternative to the Treaty of Versailles which the British Labour Party thought inappropriate for the promotion of peaceful post-War world order, (and also as an alternative to the Communist International), approached the subject of immigration and emigration in terms of securing workers' rights of all countries. It declared that emigration and immigration should not be prohibited, though it clearly imposed certain conditions, and that migrant workers should have the same wages and rights of combination and association as those of native workers.²²⁹

In addition, the issue of immigration control was included in debates and resolutions concerning how to prevent a future catastrophe like the First World War which was defined as primarily an imperialist and capitalist war and an inevitable result of the capitalist system. The avoidance of opposing alien peoples was deemed "one of the most important tasks of the workers of all countries," along with other tasks such as watching over each governments' foreign policy and conflict settlement by impartial arbitration.²³⁰ Therefore, immigration control was not only against progress and freedom,²³¹ but also the protectionism against which the Labour Party insisted on fighting "in order to prevent international conflicts in their very origin" and "in favour of free trade, and the right to

²²⁶ Callaghan, *Labour Party and Foreign Policy*, 19.

²²⁷ Attlee, *Labour Party in Perspective*, 200-3.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

²²⁹ LPACR (1919), 202.

²³⁰ LPACR (1923), 11-13.

²³¹ 180 H.C. Dec. 5s. 11 Feb 1925, col. 296.

move freely from one country to another.”²³²

The restriction system introduced by the 1919 Aliens Act was also a clear example of the extreme nationalism of the kind that had resulted in the Great War. Attlee criticized it for being “an insult to other nations,” threatening the peace of Europe and the world once again.²³³ He maintained such nationalism was “only egotism writ large,” and a “true socialist cannot allow his sympathies to be bounded by anything so narrow as a nation.”²³⁴ This led to concepts of fairness and justice. While Britons “poked their noses into every corner of the globe,” it was plainly unfair to build a wall around their own country and to stop other people coming in.²³⁵ George Lansbury argued that the Aliens Act excluded aliens on the basis of “selfish nationalism,” and support for it engendered its most hypocritical aspect. He argued that men who “asserted the right of Britons to go anywhere they pleased and impose whatever form of government they thought fit on people who desired only to be left alone” declared that “aliens should be excluded from this country; first, because we must not have sedition preached here, and secondly, they might take work from our people.”²³⁶

As one might expect, the Labour Party’s stern opposition to any restrictive measure based upon its international ideal was derided as hypocrisy. Labour was accused of preferring interests of aliens to those of British workers,²³⁷ being “friends of every country but their own.”²³⁸ Underlying these attacks, from Conservative Robert Yerburgh and the National Democratic Charles Stanton, was the assumption that the interests of British workers were inevitably in conflict with those of immigrants, which the party refuted with the same confidence that Keir Hardie had shown in 1905. Josiah Wedgwood stated that:

we believe that the interest of the working classes everywhere are the same, and these gentlemen will find it difficult to spread a spirit of animosity and racial hatred amongst those people who realize that the brotherhood of man and the international spirit of the worker is not merely a phrase, but a

²³² LPACR (1923), 11.

²³³ 160 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1923, col. 2092.

²³⁴ Attlee, *Labour Party in Perspective*, 157-58.

²³⁵ 160 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1923, col. 2093.

²³⁶ Lansbury, “Our Attitude towards ‘Aliens.’”

²³⁷ 180 H.C. Deb. 5s. 11 Feb 1925, cols. 271-75.

²³⁸ 114 H.C. Deb. 5s. 15 Apr 1919, col. 2799.

reality.²³⁹

This conviction was not without the support of the sentiments of the British labour movement. British delegates at the British Commonwealth Labour Conference in 1928 said that they were of opinion that migration was “not a domestic matter, but should be regarded from the standpoint of human brotherhood and international Socialism.”²⁴⁰ When a demand appeared within the Furnishing Trades Association to withdraw a resolution to facilitated naturalisation for trade unionists of foreign birth, the official view of the Labour Defense Council was to deplore the inappropriateness of such a request, and claimed that “it is surprising to find anyone in the Labour Movement seeking to penalise, because of their place of birth, fellow-workers already here.”²⁴¹ Another example appeared in relation to the Unemployed Insurance Bill where the comradeship of workers was stressed. Harry Gosling, Labour member for Whitechapel, argued that aliens should not be disqualified from receiving benefit, which he thought an “absurdity,” and demanded the abolition of the rule.²⁴² The Labour MP for Nottingham West Arthur Hayday also said that benefit should not be withheld from a person on the grounds of being an alien, especially given that they shared the common experience of the War: “in the war we used aliens’ sons to fight for us, but when distress came we said there must be a separation ... Did they not suffer in common with the others? Nationality is a very little thing in the commons suffering that comes to us all.”²⁴³

In Labour’s official international thinking, working class interests were based upon and secured by the realization of internationalism, far from infringed by it: Following the First World War, millions of workers were driven out of employment and impoverished by the great “misery and destitution amongst the defeated nations through the continuous and increasing devaluation of money, and amongst the victorious and neutral countries through the destruction of world trade, the loss of markets for export, unemployment and the lowering of wages.”²⁴⁴ As the War, according to Labour thinking, was essentially an imperialist and capitalist war, and the Peace Treaties did not challenge the old order, the threat of a new war still existed. This tragedy, they argued, could only be averted by the

²³⁹ 120 H.C. Deb. 5s. 22 Oct 1919, col. 84.

²⁴⁰ TUCAR (1928), 271.

²⁴¹ “Protection Aliens: Necessary to Safeguard Union Standards,” *Daily Herald*, 5 Dec 1924, 6.

²⁴² “Labour MPs Fight to Amend the Gap: Unemployment Bill in Commons Committee - Promise to Aliens,” *Daily Herald*, 14 Mar 1923.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ LPACR (1923), 11-12.

power of the International Working Class to watch over each government and oppose every measure which might jeopardise international peace. Therefore, the lives and the welfare of workers in the world could only be stable when the International cooperation of the working classes succeeded in suppressing any possible threat to peace.²⁴⁵

However, another point also needs to be examined. When Labour's internationalist stance was used by its political opponents as an accusation of non-patriotism, that is the party was giving priority to aliens over British people, Labour made it clear that its internationalism was not a naive idealism of unconditional immigration. As a matter of fact, the Labour Party repeatedly noted its unwillingness to support unrestricted immigration. It is noteworthy that from the 1919 International Labour and Socialist Conference, quite concrete conditions were added to the immigration clause. Despite the fact that the resolution stated that "immigration shall not be prohibited generally," it also accepted the rights of each state to restrict immigration based on judgements pertaining to a) the economic situation, in order to protect the workers of that country as well as foreign immigrant workers; b) the public health of the nation; and c) the minimum standard in language skills of immigrants so as to maintain the standard of popular education of the country and to enable labour legislation to be effectively applied to industry where immigrants were employed. It added that these would be exceptional situations and that a ban on immigration should be permitted in agreement between countries concerned.²⁴⁶ It would not be entirely unreasonable to apply Casper Sylvest's perspective that the Labour Party's interwar internationalism involved a good deal of pragmatic considerations, and was far from being a naïve idealism that lacked the recognition of reality, though his analysis primarily deals with Labour's League of Nations policy in international relations politics.²⁴⁷

So, despite the fact that Labour gave much praise to the internationalist ideals of free movement, it was not categorically against immigration control itself. While there is no record of whether the socialists and the trade unionists before 1914 seriously considered unrestricted immigration in speaking against the 1905 Aliens Act, the party's discourse now reflected a stance closer to practical proposals for actual policies which could be implemented if in office. This change in dealing with immigration restrictions can be

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ LPACR (1919), 202.

²⁴⁷ Casper Sylvest, "Interwar Internationalism, the British Labour Party, and the Historiography of International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2004): 409-32.

viewed as part of a larger development of the Labour Party from 1918, when it started to be increasingly conscious of presenting its politics as that of a national party. Labour tried to promote itself as a party of the nation, not just of one section of society whose prospect for seizing power seemed remote and its position on many issues unrealistic. It did so by presenting its model of socialism as being moderate and British, in contrast to a revolutionary one, and “by accepting the concept of, and seeking to represent, a homogenous national interest.”²⁴⁸ In this respect, its internationalism rose out of a concern for peace of the world comprising of multiple nations, which could be withheld at a time of nations’ needs.

Of the three conditions that allowed restriction, economic depression was a particularly important concern for the Labour Party. Labour members who took part in parliamentary debates demonstrated that they were clearly aware of “how unrestricted immigration might do harm to our unemployed,” at the same time worrying that the restriction was “deliberately directed to prevent trade union organisation amongst persons of alien birth.”²⁴⁹ Clement Attlee went on to emphasize that Labour never insisted on unrestricted immigration: “I do not say we should invite the whole world straight away. ... I quite agree, that until we get our international organisation better, we cannot pretend to throw open the whole of this country to alien immigration.”²⁵⁰ Lansbury publicly announced Labour’s position:

We of the Labour movement will hear much more of this question. Our position needs to be made perfectly clear. We are not in favour of wholesale immigration. All the evidence available proves there is not the slightest danger of this happening. But we do stand for the freedom of our ports to be maintained, so that those who desire to come here to study and learn or to work, when such is available, may or able to do so. We do not think an alien, because of the accident of birth, is inferior to ourselves.²⁵¹

In this respect, as much as the British Labour Party after the First World War came to identify itself as a socialist party with internationalist orientation beyond the narrow

²⁴⁸ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 171.

²⁴⁹ 160 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1923, col. 2090.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 2092.

²⁵¹ Lansbury, “Our Attitude towards ‘Aliens.’”

domestic concerns of the pre-1914 years, it still built its socialism and internationalism on the deep attachment to patriotic and national sentiments rooted in British history. It was already articulated by Attlee that throughout history Britain had benefited from an inflow of immigrants, like Flemish weavers and French silk weavers. “To the making of this country have gone a good many other races. ... we have from time to time absorbed a very large amount of foreign people, to our strength.”²⁵²

The relation between Labour’s patriotism, socialism and internationalism can be inferred most vividly from a newspaper article written by George Lansbury. For him being a socialist did not contradict love of one’s own nation, because in order to be a socialist one needed to learn how to love one’s own nation to understand the love of other peoples for their countries. Socialism meant something bigger that included love at the levels of family, town, locality and nation, and eventually the human race. Lansbury wrote that the concrete experience of local patriotism was necessary to widen it to the international level, thus, what makes a person internationalist was essentially that person’s national patriotism:

The enemies of Socialism continually tell us that we are anti-patriotic and friends of every country but our own. ... It is true we sing our song glorifying the Red Flag, not at all because we hate our own land, but because the Red Flag is symbolic of something far bigger and far grander than one nation – it is symbolic of the whole human race. To love one’s own nation and own native land does not mean we cease to love our own mother, father, wife, family, or home. We love others because we learn our first lessons of love and duty at home. If these are not learned there, they are learned nowhere. ... Compared with other places, we [East Enders] are able to show as clean a record of local patriotism blossoming out in national and international service as any other place in the whole wide world. ... None of this love of England and home makes me hate other lands. No! Because I love England, I can and do appreciate a Frenchman who loves France, or a German who loves Germany. It is the fellow feeling which makes me an internationalist.²⁵³

Labour’s internationalism was not a Marxian version of socialist internationalism that

²⁵² 160 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1923, col. 2088.

²⁵³ George Lansbury, “Because these things we love,” *Daily Herald*, 22 Nov 1924.

denied working class national identity. Rather, it rose out of the English radical patriotism which originated since the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Radical patriotic sense of internationalism developed in the historical experience when English radicals advocated unity and co-existence of peoples of four nations under the banner of United Kingdom.²⁵⁴ Therefore, far from insisting on abolishment of existing boundaries, Labour's post-war internationalism meant harmonious relations of plural nation-states, and recognised that the economic and social interests of peoples of those nations needed to be protected from free movement of other peoples at times of exceptional conditions.

In this chapter, we have seen a considerable change in the focus of the Labour Party in its responses to immigration restriction. Unlike the pre-1914 years when the focus was largely directed towards defending the tradition of British liberty, symbolized by the open door for the right of asylum, the impact of the First World War shifted the issue to the internationalist context. Throughout the War, the Labour Party's interest in international affairs was considerably increased by its desperate desire to prevent further devastation. At the same time, this went hand in hand with Labour's growth in organization, membership and policy initiatives that included positioning itself as a socialist party with the ability of managing not only domestic working class issues but also those relating to international and foreign policy. Restriction on immigration was now regarded as an issue that should be considered in relation to international justice and peace, along with other foreign affair issues. By this consideration the Labour Party criticized the post-war restriction system of the 1919 Aliens Act for being an example of selfish nationalism that threatened international peace.

However, the Labour Party's internationalist approach did not mean parting from the pre-War liberal approach that was based on patriotic concerns. The right of asylum was still an important motive in criticizing the 1919 Aliens Act and stimulated further discussions in the 1920s. Moreover, post-War internationalism was deemed to be underpinned by patriotism, and love for one's country was the basis of that for international community. Far from denying the presence of nation-states, the post-War international approach of Labour actively defended each nation's right to secure its presence on the peaceful international stage.

At the same time, the Labour Party's internationalism was neither unconditional nor

²⁵⁴ Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, 94.

naive in its approach to immigration. It attacked the 1919 Aliens Act not because it introduced restrictions on immigration but because its enforcement was based on the unjust and unfair treatment of aliens that might ignite further international conflict. Furthermore, the Labour Party clearly declared that it did not advocate unrestricted immigration in times of national economic difficulty. As a result, the internationalism promoted by the Labour Party, expressed in its fight against the racial exclusivism within the 1919 Aliens Act, meant that it had the potential of becoming an unstable and highly conditional principle. This point is supported by the context in which Labour's socialism was presented. The rise of the Labour Party's internationalist thinking went together with its proclamation of being a socialist party, but at the same time its socialism was presented as appealing to wider sections of society and serving the interests of the British people and nation.²⁵⁵

As we have seen, the national characteristics that were inherent in the Labour Party's socialist internationalism needs to be noted when examining the Labour's history on immigration and race up to the second half of the century. In this respect, it would be superficial to deem it simply a conflict between internationalism and nationalism, as two elements of totally opposite characters, as has been typically suggested. The flexibility and practicality present in Labour's stance on immigration, which allowed exceptional concessions for restriction, eventually became the norm when the Labour Party formed minority governments in 1924 and in 1929-31. The restrictive element of the Aliens Act was neither changed nor mitigated under Labour administration. Far from it, the Labour government tried to administer it as strictly as their Conservative opponents. This had a particularly harsh impact on imperial subjects, such as the coloured seamen employed in the British merchant shipping industry who were not recognized as genuine British citizens by either Labour or the rest of society. They are the subject of the next chapter.

²⁵⁵ Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*, 167-95.

3. “For Our Own Flesh and Blood”? The Labour Party’s Perception of Coloured Seamen in the Early Twentieth Century

So far, we have examined two cases of immigration restriction which illustrate the change of focus in the way the Labour Party dealt with exclusivist measures. At the turn of the twentieth century, fear of the racial degeneration of Britain was driven by the influx of Jewish immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe. An attempt to create a bar against them was realized with the passing of the Aliens Act in 1905. A few Labour MPs and socialist organisations stood against the act arguing that it was a serious breach of the British liberal tradition of providing a haven for all the oppressed. During the First World War, anti-alien measures as part of immigration restrictions started to be viewed by Labour from a new angle. The Labour Party of the post-War period, mostly led by parliamentary members, promoted the cause of international peace and justice and was against the restrictions of the 1919 Aliens Act which Labour deemed an example of unfair nationalism. At the same time, as a party with an increased membership and widened policy areas aspiring to take government office, the Labour Party did not forget to add that it opposed not the control itself but the unfair and unjust way the restriction was implemented.

This chapter turns attention to how the minority Labour governments in the inter-War years actually executed the immigration controls, especially in relation to *coloured* (according to contemporary parlance) seamen in the British merchant shipping industry. Deemed as causing harm to white British seamen for their alleged wage undercutting, they were the target of the white seamen's anti-foreign-labour campaigns during the inter-War period. The position of these workers in the seafaring industry became extremely marginalized due to a series of measures devised to protect white British workers by the seamen's union and the state.

This chapter will investigate the Labour discourse relating to non-white seamen from British colonies and their alleged threat to the jobs and well-being of white British workers, as contended by the seamen's union and Press. What was Labour's idea of Britishness as revealed in their policy concerning the legal status of *coloured* British subjects? To what extent did Labour share the contemporary fear that these seamen were instigators of public disorder? What did the Labour Party contribute, directly or indirectly, to their marginalization?

It will be shown that although specific themes in the Labour discourse covered in the previous chapters reappeared, they were presented in a very different way. The patriotic appeal to protect the British tradition of the right of asylum directed against the 1905 Aliens Act, was at this time, used to urge restrictive measures against *foreign*, or more precisely, *coloured* workers on British ships. The internationalist idea of the Labour Party, which advocated free movement of people and solidarity of workers in the successive post-War attempts at immigration control, was abandoned when the Labour government claimed the necessity of retaining restrictions for the protection of British workers in the job market.

The basic stance of the Labour Party towards non-white seamen during the early twentieth century was the need to protect Britain and the British people from their presence in every sphere of British society. Under the economic argument that emphasized the difficult employment situation, there was also a fear of racial mixing through the sexual relationship between white women and black men. In this situation, it was revealed that Labour's idea of who genuinely belonged to Britain rested upon whiteness as its essential pre-requisite, practically nullifying the technical definition of British nationality that included colonial *coloured* people.

This chapter is located within a wider historiography relating to black seamen, or more generally black people, in Britain. It is argued that the Labour Party (and the British labour movement as well) was also a part of the wider political structure that marginalized the black British.²⁵⁶ Above all, as Laura Tabili has clearly shown, the vulnerability of black sailors was apparent at various levels of British society – at that of the employers, the trade union and the government. Tabili has revealed that the most coloured workers in the British shipping industry were barred from the union's protection of wages and working conditions. They were placed at the bottom of the seafaring labour hierarchy through the conspiracy of, and negotiation between, the union leaders, employers and the state.²⁵⁷ This point of Tabili is also supported by the argument of Stuart Hall who pointed to the imperial economic relations as the root of their marginalization, that colonials were deemed an exploitable and cheap labour force for economic demand of the metropolis.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ For example, see Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis*; James Walvin, *Passage to Britain: Immigration in British History and Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin / Belitha Press, 1984); Fryer, *Staying Power*; Scobie, *Black Britannia*; Ramdin, *Reimagining Britain*.

²⁵⁷ Laura Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca; New York: Cornell University Press, 1994).

²⁵⁸ Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis*.

Jaqueline Jenkinson has focused on the specific moment in 1919 when the black population in major port cities in Britain became the target of the fury of the white crowd in the context of unemployment and scarce social resources. She has stressed that the victimization of black workers was, when triggered by more direct economic and social pressure, due to their long-established inferior position in contemporary British society's racial world-view. As a result, the negative racial images of black people were both inherited and strengthened. The 1919 race riots in British port towns did not stop when they were quelled by the police, as the government designed a repatriation scheme for the black people to the colonies. The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order in 1925 effectively institutionalized the vulnerability of black sailors by depriving them of their legal right to enter and reside in Britain.²⁵⁹ Neil Evans' study of the 1919 riot in South Wales, where the most serious disturbances took place, further illuminates the local contexts in which local and national elements interacted which resulted in heavy damage on black community and the deterioration of race relations.²⁶⁰

This chapter will supplement the historiography noted earlier, focusing on the British political agents who contributed to, or approved of, the marginalization of black people in Britain - the Labour Party politicians. Starting with the objection to the employment of Chinese seamen and Lascars (a term referring to sailors from India) on British ships, made at the turn of the twentieth century the chapter will then move to the post-First World War race riots when the Labour press reflected the contemporary British perception of blacks as trouble-makers. The third section will examine the two Labour governments' attitude to immigration laws, which will be contrasted with the earlier support of internationalism. The last part will pay attention to the 1930s debates about shipping subsidies and employment, revealing the explicit declaration of a white-centred notion of Britishness by Labour MPs.

3-1. Pre-1914 Objection to Coloured Seamen

The presence of people from the Caribbean, Africa, Indian sub-continent and China had

²⁵⁹ Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); Jenkinson, "The 1919 Riots," in *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Panikos Panayi (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996), 92-111; Jenkinson, "The Glasgow Race Disturbances of 1919," in *Race and Labour in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Kenneth Lunn (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 43-67.

²⁶⁰ Neil Evans, "The South Wales Race Riots of 1919," *Llafur* 3, no. 1 (1980): 5-29.

been a long-established feature of major British port cities such as Liverpool, London and Glasgow. By the 1850s there were already about 5-6,000 Lascars and Chinese seamen who were working on British merchant ships.²⁶¹ It was the rapid development of modern British shipping in the latter half of the nineteenth century that expanded this multi-racial feature of the British ports, drawing a number of people from the British colonies and its global trading network.²⁶² The result of this development was the formation of *coloured* communities in port towns, intensifying the distinct character of these settlements.²⁶³ The demographic and social characteristics of Britain's major ports were not exceptional, but typical of European port-cities. As foreigners and colonials were employed with lower wages in unskilled jobs, ethnic diversity tended to increase overcrowding, poverty and unhealthiness in these areas. While a rapidly thriving marine industry, which included seafaring and dock labour, led to population growth and urban expansion, the accompanying predominance of unskilled and casual employment exacerbated residential overcrowding and poor quality housing, providing little incentive for house construction and housing reform.²⁶⁴ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Liverpool, with its reputation of being an especially unhealthy and dirty place, had the highest mortality rate in England, and in Glasgow there was a close relationship between population density and death rates.²⁶⁵

Migrant workers from the colonies were at the bottom of the socio-economic structure of these ports, segregated in overcrowded residences and employed in unskilled and poorly-paid jobs. They were employed on British ships and were engaged in roles of the lowest position which required no specific skills - such as firemen, coal trimmers, cooks and stewards.²⁶⁶ But their position and labour division on the ships also reflected the contemporary racial hierarchy and stereotypes that allocated the toughest roles to the colonized races. These non-white sailors, most of them from the British colonies, constituted roughly one third of a c.200,000 seafaring workforce that operated in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. They were normally contracted on separate conditions from British white seamen, so-called Asiatic or Lascar articles of agreement, being paid one-third to one-fifth as much as white British or other European sailors, and

²⁶¹ Panayi, *Immigration History of Britain*, 101; Spencer, *British Immigration Policy*, 5-7.

²⁶² Spencer, *British Immigration Policy*, 5.

²⁶³ Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 12-13; Robert Lee, "The Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics of Port Cities: Typology for Comparative Analysis," *Urban History* 25, no. 2 (1998): 147-72.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 152-53, 166.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 152, 163-64.

²⁶⁶ Spencer, *British Immigration Policy*, 5.

were excluded from state or union-sanctioned protections. The derisory wages and hideous working conditions imposed upon the colonial sailors replicated the imperial racial relationship, in which colonial people were regarded as an exploitable and flexibly disposable labour force.²⁶⁷

Though there was undoubtedly plenty of discrimination against these non-white seamen both on and off the ships, it was not a simple persecution of the black and preference for the white. The presence of underpaid *coloured* labour corresponded to the race politics of employers and the union leadership. For employers, the colonial workers were not only keeping wages down, but also served as an alternative labour pool, which was used as a threat to disobedient white crews.²⁶⁸ The attitude of the union leaders was more complex. For, while constantly opposing the employment of colonial sailors for allegedly taking white British of jobs, the union leaders refused to unionize and integrate them into the union rates of wages and working conditions. Ironically this, as a result, helped maintain the black sailors' position as an attractive and cheap option to employers, against which the union leaders have consistently campaigned. At the same time, the union leaders kept their control over white union members and tamed white rank-and-file militancy, intimidating them that in case of disobedience they could be replaced by black sailors.²⁶⁹

The exclusion of *coloured* seamen from the average wage standard and union protection by employers and union leaders rested upon the economic perspective that the employment of white British seamen and their working conditions ought to be protected. The main campaigner for this anti-foreign, or anti-*coloured*, labour movement from the early years was the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland (NSFU), the largest seamen's union in Britain. It was established in 1887 in the period of the New Unionism. After a period of depression in the 1890s caused by attacks from the Shipping Federation which had been formed by ship-owners and employers against the Union, it had recovered by the 1910s to achieve official recognition from the authorities. Thus by 1913 the Union had about 70 branches inside and outside Britain, and included 82,851 members, representing 90 per cent of unionized workers.²⁷⁰ The Union occupied an influential place among similar seafarers' unions in that it was represented on the

²⁶⁷ Tabili, *Workers and Racial Difference*, 41-42.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 41-57.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 81-112.

²⁷⁰ Joseph Havelock Wilson, *My Stormy Voyage Through Life* (London: Co-operative Printing Society, 1925), 122-26.

National Maritime Board (NMB), which allowed the NSFU an almost closed-shop position in supplying the workforce to the industry. In August 1925, the Union was transformed into the National Union of Seamen (NUS), after integration with the National Union of Ships' Stewards, Cooks, Butchers and Bakers.

The officials of the NSFU largely controlled policies of the Union, and especially its leader Joseph Havelock Wilson who was also Liberal Member for Middlesbrough and maintained his leadership until his death in 1929. Several features of the industry made this possible: the unstable nature of employment; the weak unionization of the entire workforce which never exceeded 20 per cent even at the height of the Union's activity; and the nature of the jobs which involved long absence to attend union meetings and participate in policy making.²⁷¹ Therefore, the overall directions of the NSFU policies were heavily determined by Wilson himself. Having no keen interest in socialism of a political kind, he distanced himself and the Union from the mainstream labour movement and the Labour Party. He attached importance to industrial harmony and preferred dispute-settlement by agreement between the employer and the employed.²⁷² The acceptance of employers' demands for a series of wage reductions in negotiations in the NMB led to the dissatisfaction and ire of ordinary members in the mid 1920s. This attitude of the Union, which rejected taking part in the 1926 General Strike, and supported a non-political miners' union, was strongly criticized by the TUC. In 1928 it was officially expelled from the TUC, and re-affiliated only after the death of Wilson the following year.²⁷³ Equipped with an ethos of working-class patriotism with a jingoist touch, the seamen's Union emerged as a nationalist and anti-pacifist organisation.²⁷⁴ For example, in 1917 the NSFU attempted to prevent Ramsay Macdonald and his colleagues from sailing for Russia to confer about a peace treaty.²⁷⁵ This attempt met wide protests from trade unions affiliated to the Liverpool Labour Party.

From the early years, Wilson led lobbying in Parliament against foreign labour in British merchant ships. He demanded the same standards for foreign sailors in wages and working conditions, like food and accommodation, on British ships, points which

²⁷¹ Kenneth Lunn, "Race Relations or Industrial Relations? Race and Labour in Britain, 1880-1950," in Lunn, *Race and Labour*, 11.

²⁷² Tabili, *Workers and Racial Difference*, 85.

²⁷³ Clegg, *British Trade Unions since 1889*, 2:458-59.

²⁷⁴ Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 122-23.

²⁷⁵ Liverpool Labour Representation Committee and Labour Party: Minute Books, 1917, 331 TRA 6, LRO.

featured in the debates around the 1906 Merchant Shipping Act. Replacing British sailors with foreign seamen was a long-standing custom among British ship-owners and employers, which can be traced back to the early-nineteenth century.²⁷⁶ Therefore the outcry of the NSFU was not unfounded. As long as the foreign workers kept being hired at lower wages, British workers would be put in a disadvantageous position in the labour market. It was asked that the same wages and working conditions should be applied to both British and foreign sailors. It was debated that the employment of foreigners was helping worsen general working conditions near to sweating.

Parliamentary members with a trade-union background gave wide support to Wilson's arguments, that *coloured* seamen were a threat to the employment of white British workers. John Ward, the Liberal-Labour member for Stoke-on-Trent, said that the employment of Lascars was harming British seamen with regard to wages and accommodation on board, and the lower wages and narrow spaces given to them accorded with “a defence of alien labour in preference to British labour,” giving “a double advantage” to Lascars. Under such unfair wages and working conditions, “the British seamen would stand no chance in competition with these aliens.”²⁷⁷ William Brace, Liberal-Labour member for South Glamorganshire, also argued that the abolition of the inferior terms for foreign labour would be a direct inducement for the employment of foreigners at the expense of British sailors.²⁷⁸

Thus, the objection based upon the unequal terms of wages and working conditions was not necessarily founded upon racial grounds or the exclusion of foreigners for racial reasons. This point was plainly and incessantly declared whenever they contended for the exclusion of alien seamen from British ships. As Wilson emphasized, “I wish it to be understood that I raise no objection to foreign seamen. I do not object to any man on the ground of his nationality or his colour.”²⁷⁹

However, the focus for attacks was often shifted from ship-owners and employers to foreign sailors, who were being exploited through their inferior terms of employment.

²⁷⁶ With the repeal in 1849 of the Navigation Act, employers were released from the obligation to employ British, and were able to hire men of any nationality who would accept lower wages. The 1823 Indian Merchant Shipping Act enabled employers to hire Lascars on inferior terms to those of British sailors. See Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2016), 151-52; Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

²⁷⁷ 165 H.C. Deb. 4s. 15 Nov 1906, cols. 152-53.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, cols. 150-51.

²⁷⁹ 154 H.C. Deb. 4s. 20 Mar 1906, col. 260.

The term *foreign* or *alien* in reality referred to the Chinese seamen who had been the target of the NSFU during the pre-1914 years, and Lascar seamen. The anti-Chinese campaign of the NSFU was carried out with not only economic but also racial and cultural rhetoric. For example, a pamphlet entitled the “Chinese Invasion of Great Britain” published in 1913 ruthlessly attacked the “insidious invasion of the Chinese” describing them as the “canker which has been slowly eating into our great mercantile marine.”²⁸⁰ The NSFU calculated that the number of Chinese crews employed on British ships had risen from 1,000 in 1905 to over 5,000 in 1907.²⁸¹ But the Union’s contention that the increased number of Chinese and Asiatics hired was responsible for a corresponding number of unemployed white British is not plausible, as the number of Chinese was too small to dictate either wage levels or influence the labour market in general.²⁸²

A measure proposed and passed in Parliament, in order to drive the Chinese out of British ships, was a language test. It was recognized by the International Labour and Socialist Conference in 1919 as one of the exceptional conditions under which immigration restrictions could be imposed, as shown in the previous chapter. The reason given for the introduction of the measure was safety, that all the crew of a ship should have sufficient English in cases of emergency, in order to effectively respond to the command of officers.²⁸³ However, the real purpose of the language test was to “clear the Chinamen out from British ships.”²⁸⁴ When it was decided that the language test be applied to foreign sailors who wanted to sign on British ships, Wilson seemed to be satisfied with the measure: “if a Chinaman wants to sign on a British ship, if he cannot prove that he is a Britisher, he will have to pass the language test, and I am sure that not one Chinaman out of 20 can prove that he is a Britisher, and with regard to the language test, few of them will be able to pass that.”²⁸⁵ But in 1908, Charles Fenwick, a trade unionist and Liberal-Labour member for Wansbeck, called the attention of the House to whether extra measures above and beyond the language test were needed “to prevent abuses arising out of the employment of Chinese in the British mercantile marine.”²⁸⁶ He argued for tighter restrictions relating to proof of a seaman’s nationality. It was frequently

²⁸⁰ “Chinese Invasion of Great Britain,” NSFU, 1913, MSS. 175/3/14/1-2, MRC.

²⁸¹ Joseph Havelock Wilson to H. Jochade, telegram, 16 Jun 1908, MSS. 159/3/B/63/1-2, MRC.

²⁸² Kenneth Lunn, “The Seamen’s union and ‘Foreign’ workers on British and Colonial Shipping, 1890-1939,” *Labour History Review* 53, no. 3 (1988): 6-7.

²⁸³ 154 H.C. Deb. 4s. 20 Mar 1906, cols. 246-47.

²⁸⁴ Wilson to Jochade, telegram, 16 Jun 1908.

²⁸⁵ Wilson to Jochade, telegram, 19 Jun 1908.

²⁸⁶ 185 H.C. Deb. 4s. 3 Mar 1908, col. 618.

claimed that the Chinese were “cunning fellows”²⁸⁷ implying that they were trying to avoid the restrictions applied to foreign seamen by falsely claiming British nationality.

However, in the case of Lascars, though they were British subjects Labour members in Parliament insisted that they be treated the same as Chinamen, and their status as British subjects was not deemed important. Thomas Summerbell, Labour and ILP member for Sunderland remarked that: “so far as our sea-ports are concerned, the number of Lascars and other foreign seamen employed have not at all admitted of English seamen going to sea.”²⁸⁸ Not only were Lascars grouped together with foreigners rather than with the English, but they were also denied the practical validity of being a British subjects on the grounds that they were harming to British sailors by threatening established standards: “it is all very well to talk of the Lascar being a Britisher, but whether in that category or not he should be made to comply with the same regulations as the British seaman.”²⁸⁹

Discrimination between foreign and British was often made according to skin colour, that is, between Chinese / Lascars and white British and sometimes European seamen. One can detect a kind of fear in the remarks of Labour members that the British shipping industry might be swamped by Asiatics replacing white British and European sailors. As a result, the difference between British, European, and foreign was often not based upon the technical meaning of each. Charles Fenwick complained that employers and ship-owners were making British ports “practically collecting grounds for men of foreign nationality who by the lower rate of wages which they were prepared to take were practically driving Europeans out of the service of our mercantile marine.”²⁹⁰ Likewise, John Ward, Liberal-Labour member and trade unionist, worried:

Not only British seamen, but other European seamen were gradually being ousted from the mercantile marine, and that their places were being taken by the more docile Asiatics who would work under the most slavish conditions. . . . not prepared to assent to British workmen, either in the mercantile marine, or any other trade, being reduced to the conditions which it was possible to impose on Asiatics.²⁹¹

The opinion of Conservative members, except of those who were on the side of ship-

²⁸⁷ Ibid., col. 628.

²⁸⁸ 154 H.C. Deb. 4s. 20 Mar 1906, col. 287.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ 185 H.C. Deb. 4s. 3 Mar 1908, col. 625.

²⁹¹ Ibid., cols. 649-50.

owners, reflected fears of a decline in the British nation, and that outsiders were threatening Britain's national security. Such fears of course had been expressed widely a few years before, in reaction to Eastern European Jewish immigration. Gilbert Parker, member for Gravesend, welcomed the language test as a very effective means to restrict immigration. He said that the employment of foreign sailors itself would be a national danger to Britain's industrial power, naval supremacy and imperial position: "The danger is not alone an industrial danger. It is serious enough industrially, but it is also a national danger. It effects our very security and our position as a great mercantile nation; and not only this, but it affects us also as a great Imperial Power with vast interests in every part of the world to protect."²⁹² Robert Houston, a ship-owner and member for Liverpool West Toxteth, expressed "a decided objection to the employment of foreigners of any nationality in the British mercantile marine," as it could be "a source of danger to the country and an evidence of an element of the decadence of the British nation."²⁹³

It should be noted that during the debates on the 1905 Aliens Act it was the right-wingers who passionately appealed to the right of British workers to be employed against the influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. The Conservative politicians and right-wing campaigners asked for restriction on the immigration of the Eastern European Jews on the grounds that the Jewish immigrants were the cause of worsening labour conditions and wage-cutting by their *willing* acceptance of sweating. Yet this time, it was the Labour MPs who put forward surprisingly similar claims to those of the political right expressed in the debate on the 1905 Aliens Act. All the Labour members in Parliament shared and expressed the worry that British sailors were being displaced by Chinese and Lascars. They insisted that employers and ship-owners should apply the same rate of wages and working conditions to foreign seamen, but at the same time, often blamed the exploited colonial workers for accepting wages and terms of work "which practically amounted to sweating or unfair agreements which tended very largely to deprive British-born subjects of their legitimate calling."²⁹⁴

It is well known that Howard Vincent, a Conservative member and infamous anti-immigrant, who had arduously campaigned for the 1905 Aliens Act, shared opinions with Havelock Wilson and Labour members. He also regarded the exclusion of foreign workers as a matter of protection of, and justice for, British workers, saying that, "it is a

²⁹² 154 H.C. Deb. 4s. 20 Mar 1906, cols. 285-86.

²⁹³ 185 H.C. Deb. 4s. 3 Mar 1908, col. 635.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, col. 619.

question of justice to our countrymen in the shipping trade and to our own sailors. To our own people.” He joined Labour member Thomas Summerbell in expressing disappointment that nothing had been suggested regarding the employment of alien pilots on board British ships.²⁹⁵

So we might ask what stimulated the change in position? In 1905 most Labour MPs had strongly criticized the Aliens Act that targeted poor Jewish immigrants to enter the country. Then the very next year, almost repeating the arguments of their opponents, they fought to ban alien, or more precisely, *coloured* labour in the British mercantile marine. The difference in skin colour might have had an effect here, as at that time the degree of whiteness (or blackness) was a significant barometer of being racially superior (or inferior). However, this is not to say that Jewish immigrants were deemed as equal to the British. Although they were white enough to be differentiated from *coloured aliens*, the contemporary anti-Semitic slanders were full of vicious remarks which were no better than those directed towards *coloured* people.

What is clear from the two cases is the different positions held by various groups within the British labour movement itself. Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald took on a more liberal line than others on immigration issues, and were very cautious about adopting any measure that implied racial discrimination. In contrast, the Labour members who represented the trade unions more directly were likely to take the *British first* stance, blaming both the employers for not giving priority to the British, and the non-white seamen who contributed to the situation by being exploited.

Interestingly, despite the different messages, the basic frames of approach of both sections of the Labour Party were dominated by patriotic motives: while the progressive Labour leadership supported free immigration as a British tradition to be protected, the trade unionists highlighted the hardship of British workers driven out of the job market by foreigners. The judgement of contemporaries and later scholars confirms that the British Labour Party tended to follow a different route from that taken by European working-class parties.²⁹⁶ The former was more influenced by a particular British way of thinking, had a “greater feeling of national honour,” and did not hesitate to show their love of country.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ 154 H.C. Deb. 4s. 20 Mar 1906, cols. 289-90.

²⁹⁶ Sasson, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 15; Stefan Berger, “Labour in Comparative Perspective,” 309-10; Kendall, *Labour Movement in Europe*, 3-4.

²⁹⁷ Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party*, xiv-xv.

3-2. The 1919 Race Riots and the Labour Press

Now let us examine the perception of black sailors through the Labour Party press, specifically in the *Daily Herald*, where *coloured* seamen became the focus of public attention right after the 1919 race riots. As a result of a series of riots that occurred in nine major port towns over the period of nine months in 1919,²⁹⁸ a small number of black seamen were attacked not only physically by large white crowds but also by British police, government and the press who attributed the unrest to the presence of coloured men. The position taken by the *Daily Herald* was not so different to that of society at large. This section will present a brief background of the race riots, describe the treatment of the black victims and the recognition of the black communities by the Labour press.

The outbreak of the riots was a result of post-War tension caused by the combination of several elements: an increase in the size of the *coloured* population; depression and severe job competition in the merchant shipping industry; sexual imbalance in the port areas resulting in competition between black men and white for women; and unequal race relations which allowed white men's rage to be inflicted upon the black. After the First World war the colonial, or non-white, population of Britain grew significantly. As the War involved nearly all men of the nation, especially after 1916 when conscription was first introduced, the vacancies left by traditional male workers leaving for war service had to be filled with new sources of labour: women, and people from the colonies of the British Empire. Some came to Britain to find work in the war industries, such as munitions and chemical factories of the north and Midlands.²⁹⁹

The merchant navy, too, went through a similar process. Thousands of job vacancies were created by British merchant sailors leaving to fight the War, while European seamen from enemy and non-allied nations were barred from British ships, leaving the vacancies to be filled by *coloured* men - black, Arab, South Asian and Chinese - colonial British

²⁹⁸ The outbreak of the 1919 riots first began in Glasgow in January, then spread to other eight ports: South Shields in February; London from April to August; Salford in April, though at minor scale; In June, the riots were at a peak in Liverpool, Hull, Cardiff, Newport, and Barry. When a recession resumed in 1920 and 1921 there were further minor riots in Hull, Newport and Salford, again all in competition for signing on board. All the riots engaged a small number of blacks and a large number of whites, resulting in five deaths (three whites, two blacks) and many hundreds injured. See Jenkinson, "1919 riots," 92.

²⁹⁹ Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, 88-89.

workers.³⁰⁰ At the same time the merchant navy was required to increase tonnage to supply war-essentials, and the dangerous and unstable nature of the resulting work attracted a higher rate of colonial workers than other industries. Even though the pre-War hostility towards coloured workers continued,³⁰¹ the *coloured* population in the main port areas had markedly increased by the time of the Armistice. For example, Cardiff's black population which numbered about 700 in 1914, grew considerably throughout the War, "so that by 1919 an estimated 1,000 black sailors were out of work in the port."³⁰² Likewise, the estimated number of Arabs in South Shields grew from about 100 in 1914 to between 300 to 600 in 1920.³⁰³ On Tyneside, it has been suggested that the black population increased almost fourfold. As a result, the black population of Britain had increased by several thousand by the end of the First World War.³⁰⁴

The increased number of black workers put pressure on the merchant shipping industry which was already going through post-War depression, part of the wider economic difficulties affecting almost all sections of British industry. Tension surrounding employment and housing pervaded the country as more than 2,100,000 demobilized soldiers poured into the labour market from November 1918 to March 1919.³⁰⁵ The heightened competition for jobs and housing in port areas was one of the most serious problems in Britain. In addition to this general post-War condition, port towns had two more elements that made the situation particularly inflammable: the first the increased number of black workers as already mentioned, who were easily targeted as a vent for white workers' anger; the second the NSFU's poor management of the discontents of seamen in terms of negotiating wages and working conditions with employers.³⁰⁶

Thus, the mass violence inflicted upon coloured seamen in 1919 was a product of the post-War economic and social unrest. It was specifically the violent expression of the

³⁰⁰ Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 1-2.

³⁰¹ For example, the anti-Chinese campaign of the NSFU continued during the war to only end in 1917 when the National Maritime Board was established in the Board of Trade, which ruled wages and working practices in the shipping industry. The Board was a bilateral arrangement machinery built upon the NSFU and the Shipping Federation (employers' union) and the government. The "Joint Supply Board" was created to govern the job distribution, meaning that for sailors to be employed they must be a member of the NSFU, which was not easy for coloured seamen. The employment of Chinese sailors was constrained until British white or European white sailors were absorbed into employment. In April 1919 the NMB imposed priority to British sailors against non-British Chinese and alien coloured seamen. See Tabili, *Workers and Racial Difference*, 92-93.

³⁰² Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 17.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁰⁴ Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, 90.

³⁰⁵ Jenkinson, "The 1919 Riots," 92.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

frustration of the white working classes who found a channel through which they could relieve their grievances, heightened by their union's failure to offer an effective solution. When white workers encountered coloured men when competing for jobs, housing, and women, they deemed them as foreigners who were taking their livelihoods and homes. Their war time sacrifice, rather than being rewarded appeared to have offered opportunities for others, contributing to the intensification of 'anti-foreign' sentiment. White British rioters viewed the situation as unfair and used it to justify their attacks upon blacks.

For example, in Glasgow the British Seafarers' Union, which had been founded as a breakaway from the NSFU, started a series of public meetings directed against the employment of foreign labour. Emanuel Shinwell, one of the leaders of the Union and future Labour MP, addressed meetings against Chinese sailors, mainly urging the Government to take immediate steps to "clear that labour off the ships."³⁰⁷ Shinwell blamed the Chinese sailors for making it difficult for demobilized British soldiers to find jobs aboard.³⁰⁸ A few days after his speeches, a fight between black and white men over competition for on-board employment developed into the first riot, as other blacks and whites intervened.

While securing jobs was the most sensitive matter, competition for housing and women also played a role. Preponderance of single men was one of the demographic features of port areas,³⁰⁹ and as migrant workers from colonies came alone without partners in most cases, they naturally turned to local white women. The *Times* pointed out that "they [black men from colonies] are here without their women and it is not wonderful that their passions should run high after long periods of abstinence."³¹⁰ A riot in Poplar in London ensued after a white ex-serviceman raided a house after he had failed to take it from two Chinese men and their English wives.³¹¹ In Liverpool the strain surrounding the familiarity between black men and local white women contributed to another violent outbreak.³¹²

It is clear that the black seamen were the victims of the white crowd. However, before and after the riots, they were regarded as a source of trouble. Antipathy towards the small

³⁰⁷ *Glasgow Evening Times*, 28 Jan 1919, 1.

³⁰⁸ *Glasgow Evening Times*, 23 Jan 1919, 3.

³⁰⁹ Lee, "Characteristics of Port Cities," 154.

³¹⁰ *Times*, 14 Jun 1919, 8.

³¹¹ *Daily Herald*, 18 Jun 1919, 3.

³¹² *Liverpool Weekly Post*, 7 Jun 1919, 12.

black community was expressed by virtually all sections of British society, but especially by the police and the Press. The police regarded the blacks as trouble-makers, and the fact that the white men had started violent attacks was barely acknowledged. The unfair treatment by the police in quelling the riots resulted in the arrest of a relatively large number of blacks but only a small number of white attackers in most areas.³¹³

The press was more inclined to focus on undisguised racist ideas about black and white. They depicted black people as animal-like, and emphasized their barbaric features: “One of the chief reasons of popular anger behind the present disturbances lies in the fact that the average negro is nearer the animal than is the average white man.”³¹⁴ The most sensitive issue that enraged white society was sexual relations between black men and white women. It was reported that to average white Britons, “intimate relations between Black or coloured men and White women is a thing of horror.”³¹⁵ Many newspapers agreed that the riots largely resulted from the resentment of white society at black men’s attempts to attract white women with money.³¹⁶

Blacks were derided as cowards who had stolen the jobs of the white workers valiantly serving in the First World War, while making no contribution to the country’s war effort themselves: “there is...an unemployment grievance – the fact that large numbers of demobilized soldiers are unable to find work while the West Indian negroes, brought over to supply a labour shortage during the war, are able to ‘swank’ about in smart clothes on the proceeds of their industry.”³¹⁷ It was a wide-spread but unfounded belief, as blacks sacrificed their lives in the War as much as the whites did. For instance, the *Elder Dempster*, a British ship that served in the War as merchant fleet lost many West Africans to submarine attack, although the exact figure was not known.³¹⁸

³¹³ For example, in Liverpool, before the riot in June there had been occasional clashes and tension between the city’s black community and the police. But chased by a white crowd, the black men voluntarily entered police custody, searching for protection with no other alternative. One of the most controversial aspects of the Liverpool riot was the police measure to take all the Liverpool’s black population into custody. This indicates the seriousness of the riot and that it threatened the black community to the fear of their lives. But the more important result of this custody was that it led to a repatriation scheme for the black population in Britain to the land of their ‘origin’. In Glasgow, the police quelled the riot by taking thirty black men into custody and prosecuting them for disturbing public order, while only one white man was arrested. The black population in Cardiff was locked in the Bute-town area where black community was ghettoized. In Hull in June 1920, even it was clear that the whites were the aggressor, but only four black men were arrested, two of them with very serious charge. See Jenkinson, “The 1919 Riots,” 98; Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 136-37.

³¹⁴ *Liverpool Courier*, 11 Jun 1919.

³¹⁵ *Times*, 14 Jun 1919.

³¹⁶ *Times*, 21 Jun 1920, 11; *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 Jun 1920, 5, quoted in Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 207.

³¹⁷ *Liverpool Courier*, 11 Jun 1919.

³¹⁸ Jenkinson, “The 1919 Riots,” 109.

The tone of the Labour Party newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, was not very different from other contemporary newspapers. One reporter from the paper covering the Cardiff riot, incorrectly reported that the number of blacks involved outnumbered that of whites, thus implying black men's responsibility for violence and disorder.³¹⁹ Another article titled "Race riots: the root cause" suggested that racial trouble was "an outcome of the importation of coloured men during the war," which was spreading "with the return of our men to civil life."³²⁰

The fear that blacks had usurped the place of *our* men while they were bravely fighting in the War was wide-spread among white seafaring workers. W. Sullivan of the National Sailors and Firemen's Union was reported by the *Daily Herald* to have said that officers – captains, mates, chief engineers - in the mercantile marine refused to hire blacks because of patriotic motives and that the white men who have done the fighting should be shipped before the blacks. He also said that white employment priority should also be adopted in other industries, because "men who have fought must have preference."³²¹ In a similar vein, Chinese sailors were once again made the focus of attention in the context of the riots. One Liverpool correspondent reported that Chinese labour had "long been regarded as a curse of the mercantile marine," threatening the British seamen "to whom so much lip service was done during the war, idling their time in the streets."³²²

Another trades union official, interviewed by the newspaper, said that there was a strong feeling that the great numbers of coloured men who had been brought to this country since the beginning of the War ought to be repatriated by the government. Firemen and sailors, who were of especial concern, had the gravest fears regarding the effect which the coloured influx was likely to have upon the rate of wages, and he warned that unless checked in time it would spread to other industries and dominate the Labour market.³²³

Yet, like other newspapers, more than the employment and housing, it was the social impact, the relation of coloured men and white women that made the media observe more keenly the effect of black communities. Here we can witness fear of a multi-racial community, which we will also see in the next chapter on the East End of London, but here it is expressed with much more openly racist languages. It reported that at the root

³¹⁹ *Daily Herald*, 13 Jun 1919, 1.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² *Daily Herald*, 19 Apr 1919, 4.

³²³ *Daily Herald*, 13 Jun 1919, 4.

of the disturbances there were always problems around the white women. “The white girls in the East End - Poplar in particular - are fermenting trouble by their actions. The Home Office ought to step in.”³²⁴ Another correspondent of the *Daily Herald*, named Mr. Hobden, attributed the racial disturbances very largely to the sexual relationship between blacks and whites, and added that white women were to some extent responsible. He believed “the problem is ineradicable, and strikes right down to the roots of our different civilization.”³²⁵

The newspaper printed an article written by Rev. Dr. F. B. Meyer who advocated the restriction of coloured immigration into white countries because of the danger of mixed marriages of different races. He said he had spent years in South Africa witnessing a somewhat similar “colour problem” connected with Indian coolies, and set forth a view that the immigration of coloured people into white countries had to be restricted in order to prevent a mixture of different races on behalf of the next generation, as “mongrel races were always despised.” At the same time, he appeared to have no problem in extolling the virtue of the brotherhood of man, and the equality of all human races. It was only that these humanitarian ideals should be sought among the separate inhabitants of each race. Therefore, “the true policy of the Empire must be to govern so that each race should have the best chance of full development in its own country. It followed that immigration of coloured populations into white countries should be discouraged.”³²⁶

Ten years after the riots, in January 1929, the *Daily Herald* printed a series of articles about mixed marriage and *half-caste* children, based upon reports from several port cities – Cardiff, Liverpool, Hull, and Glasgow.³²⁷ In this series, the immorality of the people involved was highlighted. The white women living with black men were viewed to have “loose moral character” but at the same time to be the victims of coloured men, who decoyed them with money and with “evil intention ... [were] quick to take advantage of the existing state of social disorder.”³²⁸ The reports also censured the cafes kept by “Indians and Maltese of immoral and dishonest habits, debased and degenerate types” for providing meeting places for mixed couples. The “mixed” relations were attributed not to drunkenness but to the lack of moral standards of the couples, resulting in the birth of

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ *Daily Herald*, 14 Jun 1919, 1.

³²⁶ *Daily Herald*, 13 Jun 1919, 4.

³²⁷ *Daily Herald*, 10 Jan 1929, 5; 11 Jan 1929, 2; 23 Jan 1929, 5.

³²⁸ *Daily Herald*, 10 Jan 1929, 5.

half-caste children “with the vicious hereditary taint of their parents.”³²⁹ What these articles presented was gloomy scenes of the multi-racial communities where the moral standard of white community was being decayed by *racial mixing with the coloured*.

The strongest tone came mostly from the report of Cardiff Chief Constable J. A. Wilson, which attracted comments from other port cities. Wilson attributed the crux of the problem to the absence of legislature beyond local efforts to prevent or penalize relations between white and coloured races.³³⁰ J. T. Clatworthy, one of the Cardiff Councillors and the Labour representative of the Docks area, suggested that strong representations should be made to the Home Secretary with the co-operative efforts of all port areas in Britain.³³¹

While most Labour members hardly advocated the solidarity of workers over racial boundaries, which was its basis as a socialist party, the only support for coloured seamen came from Sylvia Pankhurst and her newspaper *Workers’ Dreadnought*. Pankhurst approached the issue from the point of the black seamen as victims. After a disturbance in London in June 1919, an editorial submitted a few scathing questions reminding readers of British capitalists as the real cause of racial hatred between black and white workers, and argued that the attacks upon blacks would not solve the employment problem:

Do you not know that many employers do not care whether the workers are black or white, or whether they are German, British, French, or Russian, so long as it is profitable to employ them? ... Do you not know that if it pays to employ black men employers will get them and keep them, even if the white workers kill a few of the blacks from time to time? Are you afraid that a white woman would prefer a black man to you if you met her on equal terms with him?³³²

The newspaper also reprimanded seamen’s union for banning the employment of black seamen, on the basis of the same workers’ solidarity: “Is this fair play? The fight for work is a product of capitalism: under Socialism race rivalry disappears.”³³³

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid., 23 Jan 1929, 5.

³³² *Workers’ Dreadnought*, 7 Jun 1919, 1354.

³³³ Ibid., 21 Jun 1919, 1368.

3-3. Labour Governments and Their Line on Immigration Restriction

In the previous chapter, we noticed that after the end of the First World War, liberal views on immigration began to rise within the Labour Party, especially among the parliamentary radical Labour members such as Josiah Wedgwood, Clement Attlee, and George Lansbury. The Labour Party resisted the Conservative Government's attempts to tighten up immigration control in 1919, 1923, and 1925, on the grounds that the way the control was operated lacked fairness and justice. Labour's resistance was based more on the international and liberal principles of peace, equality and free movement of peoples. Those were the values with which the Labour Party officially attacked excessive nationalism and international competition that culminated in the catastrophe of the First World War. While the patriotic appeal to the tradition of the right of asylum which had been dominant in Labour's opposition to the introduction of the Aliens Act in 1905 was still observed, there arose with increasing frequency the advocacy of free immigration based upon the principles of internationalism. This was a noticeable change in Labour discourse that was brought about by the effects of the First World War.

However, the trend towards immigration became established as a result of the extremely nationalistic fervour following the First World War. The temporary restriction measures adopted by the 1914 Aliens Restriction Act during war-time was made permanent in the 1919 Aliens Act which conferred comprehensive powers relating to the entry, registration, and deportation of aliens on the Home Secretary. The Council Orders in 1920 and 1925, and the further demands of some Conservative members in the mid-1920s to tighten the existing Aliens Act, shows that the laissez-faire migration of the previous century which had its vestiges in the 1905 Aliens Act had become a thing of the past.

The fear of public disorder and racial mixing inflamed the restrictive trend. In addition to the deaths, injuries and damaged property, the riots of 1919 had an equally significant and longer-term influence on the fortunes of non-white British subjects within and beyond Britain. Now, it was justified to use skin colour as a criterion to determine who should (or need not) to prove his genuine Britishness at the entry to the UK. The 1925 Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order ruled that coloured seamen without documentary proof of British nationality had to register themselves as aliens with the

police at one of the designated ports.³³⁴ The same Order also gave police powers to apprehend and register anyone who failed to do so. In reality, it was rarely possible for most coloured seamen to demonstrate that they were British subjects. Most sailors came from regions where there was no systematic recording of birth or nationality. Furthermore, sailors were not usually required to carry passports. Their continuous discharge book which recorded previous voyages was the most commonly borne identification paper, but this was not accepted as proper evidence because it was considered that “the entries as to date and place of birth are based merely on the statements of the person to whom it was issued.”³³⁵ Likewise, birth certificates were also deemed ineffective proof of British nationality by the authorities: “the mere production by a coloured seaman of a birth certificate is no proof at all that he is the person named in that certificate, and, therefore, a British subject.”³³⁶

The difficulty the *coloured* seamen encountered in proving their British nationality was not due to an unintended operational error or side-effect of the 1925 Order. Early studies of the 1925 Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order consider that it was formulated as a result of popular racism by ordinary workers and rank-and-file union members. According to information from the League of Coloured Peoples gathered in 1935³³⁷ and the research of anthropologist Kenneth Little in 1947,³³⁸ the grassroots-level racial antipathy of polices, union members and officials appears to have been the power behind the 1925 Order that pressed the government to bring the measure into effect.³³⁹ However, as more critical sources such as government papers became available it turned out that the central government had played the critical role. The Order was passed by Baldwin’s Conservative government in the full knowledge that most sailors only carried a continuous discharge book as an identification. The 1925 Order removed the validity of the discharge book only from black seamen regardless of their nationality, while still recognizing it for white seamen, whether foreign or British.³⁴⁰

The Order almost immediately had an impact on the fortunes of British sailors with

³³⁴ These were Glamorgan, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Liverpool, Salford, Newcastle-on-Tyne, South Shields, Middlesbrough and Hull. But this expanded throughout all regions in Britain from January 1926.

³³⁵ 195 H.C. Deb. 5s. 15 Mar 1926, cols. 40-42.

³³⁶ 210 H.C. Deb. 5s. 19 Nov 1927, cols. 335-37.

³³⁷ In 1935 a series of articles appeared in *The Keys: Official Organ of the League of Coloured People*.

³³⁸ Little’s study has been reprinted many times. See Kenneth Little, *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2013).

³³⁹ Rich, *Race and Empire*, 121.

³⁴⁰ Tabili, *Workers and Racial Difference*, 121.

dark skin colour who could not prove their status as British subjects. For example, John Zarlia, a Liverpool sailor was deported to West Africa after its operation. He had been employed on the Elder Dempster line, and been domiciled in Britain for more than 10 years with a British wife and a child. He had also been called up during the Great War for service in the army, but given exemption on the grounds that his work was of national importance. He had been contributing to the National Insurance Scheme for years. But all this circumstantial evidence was not accepted as a full proof of his British nationality.³⁴¹

The first Labour government of 1924 and the second one from 1929 to 1931, though at times the butt of Conservative suspicious and scorn that accused them of wanting to remove all the barriers to immigration, essentially agreed with the restrictive framework that had been established by, and handed down from, the Conservatives. From their first time in office, the Labour government generally followed the established policy. This was not wholly unexpected, as Labour had already made it clear when in the Opposition that it did not approve of wholesale unrestricted immigration. After the First World War, when the political environment had changed, the Labour Party accepted some measures of control as a norm, and the party only questioned how the restriction should be operated.

There were, to a certain extent, efforts within the Labour Party to ameliorate the harsh immigration restrictions through its administration. George Lansbury approached Rhys Davies, the Under Secretary of the Home Department of the 1924 Labour government, and proposed that the system should be “administered in a more humane and reasonable manner” than it had been by the previous Conservative government.³⁴² During the second Labour government, the National Executive of the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress sent a deputation to the Home Office to discuss modifying the present methods adopted by Scotland Yard in the examination and deportation of foreigners at British ports. They urged that the process by which aliens were examined upon entry needed to be less irksome and no alien should be deported without having the right to appeal against a deportation order.³⁴³

It was not that the first Labour government of 1924 immediately deserted its principled advocacy of free immigration, albeit seen as an ideal. Rather, it was a compromising

³⁴¹ Captain (George) Garro-Jones, Liberal Member for South Hackney and who moved to the Labour Party in 1929, spoke for the reinstatement of Zarlia’s British nationality for several times. see 218 H.C. Deb. 5s. 21 Jun 1928, cols. 1733-34; 219 H.C. Deb. 5s. 11 Jul 1928, cols. 2369-71, 2384-86.

³⁴² George Lansbury to Rhys Davies, 7 Apr 1924, HO45/24820/456725, TNA

³⁴³ Manchester Guardian, 14 Mar 1930, scrapped in HO45/24820/456725, TNA.

attitude that balanced between the ideal and the reality. The resolution passed by 1919 International Labour and Socialist Conference stipulated that any state should have a right to restrict immigration when facing a crisis of “economic depression,” “public health,” or “the standard of popular education.”³⁴⁴ Once in power the Labour government had to operate within the existing political structure and administrative procedure that had been handed down to them. The matter of immigration restriction was viewed as a test case by which the Labour Party could prove its ability for responsible government of a nation state.³⁴⁵ Indeed, during the short period of the first Labour government, questions of whether it was willing to maintain the immigration restriction was very frequently asked by the Conservatives. For example, Arthur Henderson as the Home Secretary of the 1924 Labour government, when asked by one Opposition member whether he would reject the entry of an alien on the grounds of taking employment from a Britisher, answered in terms of balancing the interests of the nation state with fair treatment of foreigners:

It is the intention of the Government to administer the law relating to it with due regard, on the one hand, to the needs of this country, which demand vigilant control over alien immigration, and, on the other, to the desirability of avoiding unnecessary individual hardship.³⁴⁶

The right of free migration regardless of nationality was not abandoned, but in practice immigration control needed to be maintained. This was more clearly stated by Rhys Davies, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department. When one Conservative member asked whether the Labour government accepted the principle of individuals’ right to move freely from one country to another, and whether it proposed to modify the regulations governing the immigration of aliens, Davies answered:

I can accept the proposition in the first part of the question in the abstract and as an ideal; but I cannot recognize the suggestion which follows as a practical consequence. The present circumstances and the needs of this country, ...

³⁴⁴ LPACR (1919), 202.

³⁴⁵ The position regarding the immigration control can be safely located in the wider context of Labour’s imperial policy when it held the office. The imperial policy of the Labour government was deemed as a test board to show the opponents that the Labour government was a reliable patron of the British Empire and responsible protector of the interest of British state. S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 46-47.

³⁴⁶ 170 H.C. Deb. 5s. 6 Mar 1924, col. 1584.

render necessary very vigilant control over alien immigration. We are moving very cautiously in this matter.³⁴⁷

Moreover, the need to control the presence of coloured seamen in Britain had been considered even before the Coloured Alien Seamen Order was enforced in 1925. Sidney Webb, the President of the Board of Trade of the 1924 Government, admitted the need for legislation dealing comprehensively with the question of the repatriation of destitute colonial seamen.³⁴⁸

The second Labour government from 1929 to 1931 did not depart from this restrictive line either. Labour politicians in the Home Department asserted to Parliament that every effort was being made by the immigration officers and the police to enforce the provisions of the Aliens Order.³⁴⁹ However, when Arthur Henderson Jr. asked what measure would be taken to deal with the cases of the coloured seamen who were forced to register as aliens, the Home Secretary John Robert Clynes (J. R. Clynes) showed a somewhat indifferent attitude shared with their Conservative counterparts: he answered that as long as the seaman concerned could prove his British nationality he would not need to register as an alien, avoiding the issue of the practical impossibility of black seamen being able to do so.³⁵⁰

This aversive attitude of the Labour Party actually increased the hardships of non-white seamen. The Society of Friends, an organization speaking for coloured seamen in Cardiff, reported to the TUC that a number of British coloured sailors were not able to sign on board because they had difficulty in proving their British nationality. It called for the TUC's help in demanding that the continuous seamen's discharge books and army discharge certificates be accepted as valid proof of nationality. However, it only received the half-hearted reply that it had better contact the union concerned, the NUS.³⁵¹ Furthermore, the Society felt that the situation was getting worse after the interference of some Labour members who in parliamentary discussion on shipping subsidies strongly supported the exclusion of coloured seamen regardless of their nationality.³⁵² This will be

³⁴⁷ 170 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1924, cols. 712-13.

³⁴⁸ 170 H.C. Deb. 5s. 4 Mar 1924, cols. 1147-48.

³⁴⁹ 236 H.C. Deb. 5s. 4 Mar 1930, cols. 265-66.

³⁵⁰ 241 H.C. Deb. 5s. 17 Jul 1930, cols. 1454-55.

³⁵¹ John Evelyn Wrench to Walter Citrine, 2 May 1935; Walter Citrine to John Evelyn Wrench, 8 May 1935, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁵² John P. Fletcher, "*Coloured Seamen in Cardiff. Fresh Difficulties*," copied in the letter from John Evelyn Wrench to Walter Citrine, 2 May 1935, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

examined in detail in the next section of this chapter.

The Labour government's support of immigration control was founded on its prime concern: the competitive nature of the labour market in Britain. In nearly every case where the issue of immigration was mentioned, unemployment and the economic situation were used to justify maintaining the present control. This is clearly shown in the following remark made by the Home Secretary J. R. Clynes: "The conditions in this country are very different, economically and industrially, from what they were before the War, and no one in the present conditions of unemployment and economic stress would dream of giving a free access to aliens to come in just as they please."³⁵³

Unemployment was cited as a much more important factor, sometimes more than colour discrimination, among the workers. In April 1930, a violent clash took place between white and Arab/Somali sailors in North Shields. Both parties were members of the National Union of Seamen. When the Arab sailors tried to sign on to a British ship, they were hampered by a number of white sailors and shipping office officials who prevented the Arabs from entering. As the fight became inflamed, many ended up being injured by razors and knives and the police had to intervene with a baton charge. A couple of months after the event, the Conservative Lord Lamington pointed out that the colour question was central to the event: "the curious thing is that while our seamen refuse to allow these men to sign on, they allow Greeks, Swedes, and men of other nationalities to work on board our ships. It is merely a question of colour."³⁵⁴ But the Labour peer, Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, responded that the unemployment issue had been more important than the colour-bar, emphasizing economic factors over racism:

I think perhaps in his speech he a little bit overestimated the colour prejudice, and did not take into account another factor which at the present time is of very serious account – namely, unemployment. ... In any case, His Majesty's Government would consider it most undesirable to take any action to promote the employment of Arabs in preference to British seamen.³⁵⁵

The definition of British in the Labour governmental discourse in the inter-war period,

³⁵³ 238 H.C. Deb. 5s. 7 May 1930, col. 1041.

³⁵⁴ 77 H.L. Deb. 5s. 2 Jun 1930, col. 1314.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, cols. 1315-16.

appears to have been restricted to white British. Therefore, the *coloured* seamen whether they were British or foreigners could not be *real* Britons. This is amply revealed in the bureaucratic language used which rarely differentiated between *alien coloured* and *British coloured*, as much as white and British which were tacitly interchanged. In the discourse of government politicians and parliamentary members, people who were *coloured and British subjects* were often called just *coloured seamen* in contrast to *white British*, as a result those *coloured British* ended up being grouped together with foreigners. Whether British subjects or not, the coloured seamen were treated as a threat to the real Briton's, that is the white Briton's, employment.

The remark below made by J. R. Clynes reveals how the division between *coloured alien* seamen and *coloured British* seamen was gradually becoming blurred, and both were pitted against the employment of the British worker, whose rights needed guarding:

These coloured seamen are of two kinds, British subjects and aliens. ... all practicable steps are taken to prevent any unauthorized addition to the alien coloured seamen population. ... we should use the power to deal with coloured British subjects, and that, as regards both classes of seamen, the most effective remedy in my judgement would be for British shipowners to give a preference to the employment of British over coloured seamen wherever they can possible do so.³⁵⁶

The transition within the use of the terms referring to the non-white seamen, from *coloured British* to *alien*, reflected the perception of Labour politicians that denied the colonials genuine Britishness. But at the same time it also enabled them to avoid facing the irrationality of excluding the colonial seamen.

3-4. The 1930s Labour Debates Concerning Britishness

Giving preference to white British over coloured workers in employment was the very reason why the parliamentary Labour politicians raised their voice over the British Shipping Assistance Act of 1935. Designed to give an advantage in the extremely competitive international marine trade and revive the British mercantile industry, the

³⁵⁶ 238 H.C. Deb. 5s. 7 May 1930, col. 1044.

Shipping Assistance Bill sought to give subsidies to British tramp steamers in the face of rival European nations who subsidized their mercantile marines. The Labour MPs did not take issue with the rationale behind the Shipping Assistance Bill, which was to establish British supremacy on the sea once again. The subject brought up by Labour members was that the subsidy should not be used by the shipowners to employ cheaper coloured labour. Behind the MPs in Parliament was the seamen's trade union, the National Union of Seamen(NUS) which was the former NSFU. According to records, the NUS and the Trade Union Parliamentary Committee for the Shipping and Waterside Industries appear to have asked Labour MPs to speak for the interests of the workers in the shipping industry through imposing certain conditions, one of which was the exclusion of coloured men from British ships.³⁵⁷ The Labour MPs contended that Britain's national interest from a revived shipping industry created by the subsidy would not be complete as long as the men filling that industry were not white British.

Once again, *foreign* seamen were contrasted with *white* British seamen. Arthur Greenwood who was Member for Wakefield noted that, "with 40,000 white British seamen unemployed in this country to-day, we ought to pay no subsidy to ship-owners who are prepared to give preferential employment to non-domiciled seamen."³⁵⁸ Likewise, Neil Maclean, Member for Glasgow Govan, strongly argued that "a subsidy ought not to be given to British shipping so long as there is a single white British seaman unemployed. ... So long as one of these white seamen who is capable of being employed remains unemployed, no foreign seaman should be employed under the British flag."³⁵⁹

In this discourse, the relationship between the Red flag and the Union Jack, between standing up for internationalist ideals and loving one's own nation, reveals a different picture to that described by Labour politicians in the early 1920s, as shown in chapter 2. Then being an internationalist was only possible through patriotism at a local level, for one's own town and nation, as a way of learning how to love others and understand other peoples' patriotism. In this vision, the Union Jack was a part of the Red Flag which was "symbolic of something far bigger and far grander than one nation."³⁶⁰ However, during the inter-war period, the two were not so easily compatible and the priority was clear among Labour members based at port areas. Joseph M. Kenworthy, Lord Strabolgi of the

³⁵⁷ W. R. Spence to H. V. Tewson, International Department, Trade Union Congress General Council, 25 Jun 1935. MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁵⁸ 295 H.C. Deb. 5s. 4 Dec 1934, col. 1430.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 1521.

³⁶⁰ George Lansbury, "Because these things we love," *Daily Herald*, 22 Nov 1924.

Labour Party, admitted his preference for white British nationals over foreigners despite his Party's official ideological line advocating internationalism: "This question of employing foreigners in British ships is most serious. We on these Benches are internationalists, but at the same time we put our own people first."³⁶¹ Of course, his reference to foreigners did not consider their nationality, for they included "Asiatic of British or doubtful nationality" like "Lascars, Arabs and Chinese."³⁶²

Lord Strabolgi added another point that he feared that the subsidy would in any case lead to an increase in the number of mixed marriages and so-called half-caste children. The issue of the sexual relationship between white and black was still powerful, and the fear of miscegenation and resultant half-caste children received popular, press and academic attention. In 1930 a *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports*, researched by Miss R. M. Fleming, was released under the Liverpool University Settlement. This report not only gave academic authority to the popular prejudice against blacks and inter-racial relations, but also reinforced the position of the NUS and the state by concluding that many non-white seamen claiming British nationality could not be trusted.³⁶³ The multi-racial feature of port towns was viewed with suspicion, as a seedbed of social problems, disorder, and conflict:

These Arabs settle down in this country, unlike the Lascars, form alliances with white women, and create colonies of half-caste children in Bristol, Cardiff, Hull, Liverpool and other cities. I have nothing against them because they are Arabs or because they are Mahomedans, but these colonies of half-caste children are creating a social problem in the seaports. ... There has been a good deal of lawlessness as a result. When you get these mixtures of Arabs in the working-class districts of a great seaport you are bound to have occasional clashes. ... the subsidy should be paid only when a reasonable proportion of European domiciled white seamen of British nationality are employed.³⁶⁴

As will be covered in detail in the next chapter, the coexistence of diverse ethnic groups

³⁶¹ 95 H.L. Deb. 5s. 12 Feb 1935, col. 877.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Rich, *Race and Empire*, 132.

³⁶⁴ 95 H.L. Deb. 5s. 12 Feb 1935, col. 878

in the East End London in the 1930s, was believed to have inherent potential for social trouble and public disorder. But here, it was thought to be much worse and more serious because of the *colour* element. Given this thinking on the multi-ethnic community, it was a natural consequence that the Labour government in 1945-51 considered repatriation of Jamaicans when faced with the first wave of the post-1945 New Commonwealth immigration, which will be examined in chapter 5.

The formation of a multi-racial Britain was pictured as an invasion by outsiders that threatened the well-being of real, that is white, Britons. David Logan, Labour Member for Liverpool Scotland presented a gloomy scene of Liverpool where “our brothers” with no jobs idly wandered around the streets while employed coloured men were all well-to-do, which was of course far from the truth. Although he denied any charge of colour prejudice his remark reveals a clear demarcation between white and coloured Britons, without any factual accuracy in relation to wages and working conditions of black and white workers.

Is it a nice sight, as I walk through the south end of the city of Liverpool, to find a black settlement, a black body of men – I am not saying a word about their colour – all doing well and a white body of men who faced the horrors of war walking the streets unemployed? Is it a nice site to see Lascars trotting up the Scotland Road, and round Cardiff, and to see Chinamen walking along in the affluence that men of the sea are able to get by constant employment, while Britishers are walking the streets and going to the public assistance committees? ... We are our brothers’ keepers. ... That is the purpose of a Government.³⁶⁵

Another remark of his below reveals an open expression of Britishness exclusively defined by skin colour and race, “our own flesh and blood,” to quote. His comments also call upon Britain’s national prestige, but at the same time express anxiety over that prestige, endangered by subjects from her own colonies taking over metropolitan society. Logan's stance reflected a contemporary uneasiness over the difficulty of imposing controls upon imperial subjects, geography and resources solely to her own advantage, especially after the First World War during which the number of non-white colonials

³⁶⁵ 295 H.C. Deb. 5s. 4 Dec 1934, col. 1458.

increased hugely within the UK.³⁶⁶

If ever there were a subject that called for the consideration of this House it is that of the manning of boats and the employment of white labour. ... In all seriousness I suggest that from the point of view of the prestige of the British nation and of security, employment ought to be found for Britishers. ... while negroes in the same port get employment. ... our own men, our own flesh and blood who have fought for us, are wanting food and sustenance.³⁶⁷

The *coloured* seamen in the British shipping industry not only brought an imperial context to the domestic sphere, but also created repercussions in imperial politics. The arguments of the Labour politicians in the British parliament reverberated outside Britain, mainly in India. The following episode reveals an example of the uncomfortable relationship between the two labour movements of Britain and India, and the deep disappointment and anger of the Indian trade unions, rising out of British Labour's open support of the preferential right of the white British.³⁶⁸ The General Council of the National Trades Union Federation in India expressed its dismay, "this attitude is, ... fundamentally opposed to the recognized labour principles and international solidarity of the working classes."³⁶⁹ Moreover, in a long letter of April 1935, J. A. Mehta, the President of the National Trades Union Federation of India, strongly criticized the Parliamentary Labour Party for the colour prejudice shown in the debates about the British Shipping Assistance Act. In this letter, Mehta expressed unpleasant surprise that it was "wholly unexpected from the Labour Party" to make such nationalistic and racist demands, which "reek with race and colour prejudice, with economic nationalism of a particularly virulent type, redolent of imperialistic fervour, all but respecting the international solidarity of the working classes and amazed in their disregard of facts."³⁷⁰

³⁶⁶ Rich, *Race and Empire*, 121-22.

³⁶⁷ 299 H.C. Deb. 5s. 26 Mar 1935, cols. 1795-96.

³⁶⁸ This can be situated in a similar context in which the history of the British Labour Party and the Indian national movement is debated. Despite the agreement of both sides on the cause of Indian self-governance, British Labour's paternalistic, sometimes condescending attitude based on the 'British superiority' and missionary zeal resulted in an uncomfortable relationship. See Owen, *British Left and India*.

³⁶⁹ Resolution passed by the General Council of the National Trades Union Federation, 10 May 1935, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁷⁰ J. A. Mehta, the National Trades Union Federation, to Walter Citrine, 2 Apr 1935. MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

Mehta pointed out that Britain's mercantile supremacy had been achieved through the monopoly of British ships in the marine trades between Britain and its Colonial Empire, resulting in the absence of mercantile marine industries in any Indian ports. Thus, he said, "to object therefore to the employment of Indian seamen on British ships on the ground that they are foreigners is to exhibit a form of mind wholly out of consonance with principles of Trade Unionism."³⁷¹ Mehta required "a definite withdrawal by the leaders of Labour Party both out of Parliament of the mistaken demand for discrimination against Indian Seamen and a prompt effort to fix a fair quota for British seamen of all races and then to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the task of progressive improvement in the wages and conditions for all seafarers on British ships without consideration of race and colour."³⁷²

Mehta's letter was debated at the International Committee Meeting of the TUC. W. R. Spence of the NUS and the TUC Parliamentary Committee for the Shipping and Waterside Industries strongly denied the charge of the colour-bar, and argued that he and the Labour MPs had not attacked the employment of coloured seamen simply because of their skin colour. He explained that their objection to coloured seamen was due to their exploitation by British shipowners to the detriment of British white seamen, by making them preferable alternatives for the employers.³⁷³ Yet the NUS has refused to admit coloured seamen into the union, so they were not entitled to the National Maritime Board rates of wages and working conditions.

Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the TUC, reiterated Spence's arguments to the International Federation of Trade Unions, which received a protest from Mehta about the attitudes of the British Labour MPs and the labour movement: "we do not object to the employment of Indian seamen as Indians. Our opposition arises solely from the fact that they accept the lowest possible sweated wages, to the detriment of other seamen of the British Commonwealth, who ask for a living wage."³⁷⁴ Finally, one and half years after Mehta had sent the protest and after several attempts by the Indian TUC to discuss the matter with the British TUC and the NUS, the two parties met in November 1936. Indian representatives suggested that the British Labour Party could solve the problem by helping the Indians build trade unions and increase wages, if the problem was essentially

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Spence to Tewson, 25 Jun 1935.

³⁷⁴ Walter Citrine to W. Schevenels, International Federation of Trade Unions, 26 Jun 1935, MSS. 292/655/11.

the low wages of the Lascars.³⁷⁵

However, contrary to British labour's argument that the critical problem was the low wages of coloured seamen, it failed to solve it by showing little support for the efforts to raise their wages. Requests for help from British labour and for co-operation with Colonial (or coloured) labour were rejected. In 1938 the Colonial Seamen's Association, the organisation of the coloured NUS members created in order to protest against the 1935 Shipping Assistance Act, asked the TUC and the Labour Party for aid in order to uproot unjust racial discrimination within the Union and the customary bribery in employment.³⁷⁶ The NUS denied the existence of any racial discrimination within it, and answered that it was already doing its best.³⁷⁷ The TUC insisted that the matter should be dealt with in India as it was a domestic problem.³⁷⁸

In a similar way, when C. E. Kingaby from the Watford Trades Council asked the TUC to get the Parliamentary Labour Party to table a bill making the rampant bribery and corruption under which the Indian sailors suffered illegal,³⁷⁹ the TUC answered that there could be no bribery or corruption regarding the employment of coloured men, and that the matter should be dealt with in India.³⁸⁰ Likewise, the TUC also turned down the request of the Indian National Union of Seamen because the organisation was targeting a specific religious group (Hindu), which was contrary to the principle of British Trade Unionism, adding, "the division of the workers on religious, national, political or other bases ... constitutes a great source of weakness."³⁸¹

So far, it has been shown that during the early twentieth century the Labour discourse surrounding coloured seamen in British merchant shipping focused on their impact on white British seafarers and British society as a whole, in terms of two main areas: employment and social disorder. At the turn of the century Chinese sailors and Lascars

³⁷⁵ Report of Meeting Regarding Employment of Indian Seamen on British Ships, 4 Nov 1936, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁷⁶ S. Alley, Secretary of the Colonial Seamen's Association, to the General Secretary of the TUC, 22 Nov 1938, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁷⁷ George Reed, Assistant General Secretary of the National Union of Seamen, to the Colonial Seamen's Association, 6 Dec 1938, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁷⁸ Assistant Secretary of the TUC to S. Alley, 12 Dec 1938, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁷⁹ C. E. Kingaby, Secretary of the Watford Trades Council, to the TUC, 14 September 1939, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁸⁰ "Recruitment of Indian Seamen," Assistant Secretary of the TUC to C. E. Kingaby, 29 Sep 1939, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

³⁸¹ "Indian Seamen's Union," Assistant Secretary of the TUC to L. W. Matters of The Hindu, 8 Feb 1939, MSS. 292/655/11, MRC.

were presented as a threat, blamed for taking jobs from white British seamen and lowering working conditions. Putting forward this economic claim, Labour politicians and the unions adamantly and constantly denied that they were opposing coloured men for their being black, but for their accepting underpay. Behind that *just* claim was reflected the wider and deeper fear of contemporary British society, the so-called moral and racial degeneration of British port towns through the mixed marriage of white women and black men to produce half-caste children.

The Labour leadership which for the first time assumed actual political power in the two minority governments did not show a volte-face in the immigration restrictions set by the previous Conservative government, which they had opposed so vehemently when in the Opposition. When in Office, politicians clearly drew a line between the ideal and the reality. It was once again the unemployment of British workers that was presented as the spur to retain immigration control over aliens. Even if coloured sailors were British nationals, they would be affected by the governmental restriction. Indeed, the second Labour government continuously claimed that no seaman would face any problems as long as he could prove his British nationality. The problem was that it was nearly impossible for those coloured seamen to do that under the 1925 Coloured Alien Seamen Order. While the government refused to recognise this, its assurance towards British coloured seamen was nothing more than an empty promise.

The open declaration of Britishness based on skin colour came from the remarks of Labour MPs whose seats were based in port areas and the seamen's Union and lay behind the debates on the British Shipping Assistance Act in the mid-1930s. The legal difference between British coloured and coloured aliens was almost meaningless in the Labour MPs' discourse, both of whom were seen to endanger the well-being of "our own flesh and blood." When this colour-coded recognition of differences within British nationalities caused offense to the colonial labour movement outside Britain, the seamen's Union and the Trade Union Congress consistently denied the existence of racial discrimination in the British labour movement and avoided any challenge to the unjust hardship of coloured labour.

Labour's approach to seafaring labour in British port towns revealed where its priority lay between two kinds of Labour's discourse: one was an inclusive and internationalist discourse that advocated solidarity of workers and a general principle of free immigration; the other was an exclusively defined boundary within which only specific members in the British Empire could claim full rights in employment and residence in Britain. The

emphasis was clearly on the latter. As the Home Secretary of the second Labour government, J. R. Clynes, claimed, “the acquirement of the privilege of British nationality” was deemed worthy and that “it should not be treated as something which belongs to everybody.”³⁸²

Labour’s approach to non-white colonial seamen, based as it was on the recognition of difference between white Britons and black colonials, set a precedent for its race politics after 1945, when New Commonwealth and Colonial immigration began. When non-white subjects began to move to the UK, dark-skinned subject people were regarded as invaders, not as children of the British Empire whom the mother country was supposed to guide towards civilised standards. Labour’s internationalist perspective on immigration gave priority to exclusive patriotism that demanded the protection of *real white* Britons, though this was always excused with economic reasons. In the next chapter, we will see again what Labour’s view of a multi-racial society was, and what it tried to preserve, in racial disturbances provoked by the fascists in London’s East End in the 1930s.

³⁸² 238 H.C. Deb. 5s. 7 May 1930, col. 1042.

4. “For the Good Name of Britain”: Labour’s Approach to Fascist anti-Semitism in East London in the 1930s

So far, it has been shown that the Labour Party in the early twentieth century approached certain racial issues with different priorities each time they came on the political agenda. At the turn of the twentieth century it was the immigration of Eastern European Jews that provoked debates on Britain’s racial quality at a time when confidence had already been shaken. The labour movement and the socialists of Britain officially opposed the Aliens Act of 1905 based upon their commitment to the tradition that Britain should be a haven for refugees. Attitudes emphasising liberal British tradition were to shift as a result of the experiences of the First World War. Labour’s concern to prevent another such catastrophe, placed the 1919 Aliens Act in the context of an internationalism which criticized the restriction system for being an example of extreme nationalism, breaching international peace and co-operation. This changed emphasis corresponded to Labour’s increasing self-declaration as a socialist party. But this socialist internationalism, declared by the Labour Party, was built upon a patriotic framework, rooted in the attempt to be seen as a national party. It praised free immigration as a principle, but allowed immigration control in times of exceptional national need, especially when that need was economic. Once in government, Labour accepted this system of control, saying that it accorded with reality. This was particularly harsh for British colonial subjects with dark skin colour. Though they had the legal right of unrestricted entry as British subjects, they were denied it on the grounds of exclusive British identity based upon whiteness.

Thus, three aspects of Labour’s approach to racial issues have been demonstrated so far. Patriotic concern for Britain’s liberal traditions and more socialist-biased internationalism were proposed as a basis for Labour’s opposition to any measure which presumed racial discrimination. However, the exclusivist approach to white Britishness led the party to contribute towards the continuation of discrimination based on skin colour against colonial subjects, despite their legal status as British subjects. In this chapter, we will see that patriotic concerns recur in Labour’s approach. While coloured seamen working on British merchant ships were being marginalized for their alleged threat to white British workers’ jobs in the 1930s, Jews in Leeds, Manchester, and above all, in the East End of London were the target of anti-Semitic attacks by British Fascists. It was these disturbances created by the domestic fascist movement which the Labour Party had

to deal with in the 1930s. Among fascist organisations that were forged in Britain during the inter-war period, only the British Union of Fascists (BUF), which had the largest membership, could claim any serious importance in politics and society.³⁸³ Established in October 1932 by Sir Oswald Mosley in the wake of his failed New Party of the previous year, the BUF adopted anti-Semitic propaganda as its main political strategy and actively conducted anti-Semitic campaigns mainly in the East End of London, the area under Labour Party administration which had held London County Council (LCC) from 1934 onwards. The part within the Labour Party with which this chapter is concerned is the London Labour Party led by Herbert Morrison. Morrison chaired the LCC from 1934 to 1940 and controlled most of its local activities, and he was a key player in dealing with East End fascism. He led the process of introducing the 1936 Public Order Act as a countermeasure against the fascist disturbances.

In the following, the focus will be on the language of patriotic concerns of the London Labour Party and Labour leadership. It will be demonstrated that Labour's priority in addressing the racial issues of these anti-Semitic disturbances was the protection of values and qualities that were regarded as peculiarly British. Firstly, this chapter will examine how the London Labour Party understood fascism and its racial activity in East London. What did they think should be protected from the racial activities of the BUF? Secondly, the London Labour Party's attempts to take action against the BUF movement will be explored. What did Labour do to tackle the movement, and what did it not do? It will be revealed that Labour Party's politics relating to the anti-Semitic attacks on Jews by the BUF, were largely centred around protecting a notion of Britishness embodied in public order and democracy. Labour's position on Britishness was defined in opposition to the

³⁸³ During the inter-war years, apart from the British Union of Fascists, several other Fascist organisations appeared in Britain: the British Fascists founded in 1923, the National Fascisti from 1925-7, and the Imperial Fascist League founded by a virulent anti-Semite, Arnold Leese, in 1929. But these organisations had only a small membership and did not last long. There were also a number of other Fascist groups which had even smaller followings, such as the United Empire Fascist Party. See W. F. Mandle, *Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascists* (London: Longman, 1968); Robert Benewick, *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (London: The Penguin Press, 1969); Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow, *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-war Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987); Kenneth Lunn and Tony Kushner, eds., *Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives on Fascism and Race Discourse in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Pimlico, 2003); Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918-39: Parties, Ideology, and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Mike Cronin, ed., *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Martin Pugh, *"Hurrah for the Blackshirt!": Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005); Stephen Dorril, *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism* (London: Penguin, 2007).

BUF' anti-Semitic politics which were labelled *foreign* and the opposite of Labour.

Writing on British Labour's strategy in countering domestic fascism has emphasised the difference between the Labour leadership and grass-roots level of the party, in their approach to and involvement in the issue. This tendency is particularly noticeable in the writings of far-left critics. The general verdict on Labour's official anti-fascist policy is negative: Labour leadership's guidelines for its members to refrain from both BUF provocation and anti-fascist counter-attacks in the street have been criticized for being passive and inappropriate. Conversely the popular activism of grass-roots members and some local Labour branches in participating in direct anti-fascist activities in coalition with the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) has been described in a more positive light. Dave Renton has argued that the passiveness of Labour's official policy could not be described as anti-fascist but *non-fascist* at best, if anti-fascism is understood to involve activism.³⁸⁴ In a similar vein, Chanie Rosenberg and Mike Power have considered that the Labour leadership barely contributed anything to defusing the BUF campaign towards the end of the 1930s.³⁸⁵

The passive character of the Labour leadership's response has also been negatively evaluated by Caroline Knowles, in her case study of Labour's anti-racism in the 1930s. Knowles contended that in approaching the race issue of BUF's anti-Semitic activities in the East End, the dominant concern of the LCC under Herbert Morrison was defending public order and democracy, rather than protecting the victims of fascists' racial attacks, the Jews. By criticising the violence and disorder caused by the direct confrontation of the BUF and anti-fascists, Labour asserted the superiority of its orderly approach. This strategy was more about defending the legitimacy of the Labour Party, than protecting the Jews as the victims. As Knowles's concludes, Labour's anti-racism failed in highlighting racial attacks upon Jews and in banning racial discrimination as a principle in itself.³⁸⁶

Jon Lawrence's work helps us understand the political culture of the official and leadership level of the Labour Party which was so passive, and which prevented direct counter-attacks by the grass roots level against the fascists. Political violence employed

³⁸⁴ Dave Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 5-7, 71-3.

³⁸⁵ Chanie Rosenberg, "The Labour Party and the Fight against Fascism," *International Socialism* 2, no. 39 (1988): 66; Mike Power, *The Struggle Against Fascism and War in Britain 1931-39*, *Our History* 70 (London: History Group of the Communist Party, 1979), 15.

³⁸⁶ Knowles, *Race, Discourse, and Labourism*, 109-23.

in the street was increasingly excluded from the main political arena since the end of the First World War. This was due to complex post-War developments including the creation of a large number of individual voters by the Representation of Peoples Act. This Act made election strategies focused more on peaceful methods of communication such as pamphlet distribution and radio address rather than on loud street canvassing. The War had created a wide public fear of violence which made it more and more unacceptable to deploy violence in the public arena, not to mention the main political stage. Therefore, the street politics of the Fascists involving disorder, physical attacks and counter-attacks were condemned by most British politicians including the Labour Party who stuck to parliamentary democracy.³⁸⁷

As pointed out in the historiography, public order and parliamentary democracy are the themes that stand out in the Labour leadership's, hence official approach to domestic fascism. Here it will be added that its emphasis on public order and parliamentary democracy needs to be understood within a wider patriotic frame that saw the matter as a battleground between British values and the foreign invasion of fascist anti-Semitism. Without taking on board this aspect, understanding Labour's anti-fascist policy as a case study of its race politics would be incomplete, especially when it is examined over a long-term perspective starting from the Jewish immigration of the late nineteenth century. As shown in the previous chapters, here it will be seen again that Labour's approach to, and discourse on, a racial issue, in this case the BUF's anti-Semitic disturbances, were largely framed by the language of patriotism as the defender of British values.

4-1. Labour's Understanding and Definition of Fascism

The anti-Semitic propaganda and violent campaigns of the BUF, the biggest fascist organisation in Britain, were a major political problem for the Labour Party as well as for the authorities in government. BUF's verbal and physical anti-Semitic attacks in areas with a large Jewish population reduced the residents to a state of panic and hysteria.³⁸⁸ "Jew baiting" activities of young fascists, including the breaking of Jewish shop windows, Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, and spreading anti-Semitic graffiti on a

³⁸⁷ Jon Lawrence, "Fascist Violence and Public Order in Inter-War Britain: The Olympia Debate Revisited," *Historical Research* 76, no. 192 (2003): 238-67.

³⁸⁸ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 193.

large scale, especially from early 1936, are well documented in local records.³⁸⁹

Even though there was in the BUF policies a clear tendency of anti-alienism particularly focusing on anti-Semitism from the outset,³⁹⁰ racial propaganda and deliberate attacks upon Jews were not the central tactic of the BUF until late 1934 when the BUF needed to find a new strategy of gaining a political foothold. Until the summer of 1934, the BUF enjoyed the support of Lord Rothermere, whose newspaper the *Daily Mail* undoubtedly gave the organisation publicity in the mainstream press.³⁹¹ Then a break with Rothermere came after the infamous event at Olympia on 7 June 1934, when violence incurring serious injuries inflicted by BUF stewards on their political opponents shocked and revolted most of the major press and politicians in parliament.³⁹² Lord Rothermere made it clear that he could not continue to give his support to such a violent, anti-parliamentary, and anti-Semitic movement.³⁹³ The split with Lord Rothermere was a considerable blow to Mosley's BUF movement, depriving it of a chance to become a national political force. Seeking a breakthrough, the BUF gave up its policy focusing on fascist political and economic programmes. Instead, it developed a tactic devised to exploit and appeal to specific regional grievances. For example, it supported the so-called "tithe war" in agricultural areas, a cotton campaign in Lancashire, and shipping policies in Liverpool. Political anti-Semitism of the movement was also targeted at a local context peculiar to the East End of London. Mosley instructed A. K. Chesterton to study Jewish influences on the nation, the results of which were predictable given Chesterton's anti-Semitism. Convinced of Jewish dominance and its harmful influence on the nation, Mosley approved of the anti-Semitic feelings which existed among the rank and file of the organisation, and developed them into an official strategy. The BUF's new political strategy adopted the techniques of low politics of open street conflict against its political opponents. Although his strategy resulted in the alienation of the movement from frontline politics, it gained the much-needed publicity that the movement had lost since the split with Lord Rothermere.³⁹⁴

Although the East End of London was chosen as an appropriate site for the

³⁸⁹ Ibid.; Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 11.

³⁹⁰ "Britain for the British: The Alien Menace," *Blackshirts*, 30 Sep 1933; Letter from J. S. Middleton, Secretary of the National Executive Committee, to Harry Pollit, 27 Jan 1936, in LPACR (1936), 51.

³⁹¹ For example, an article "Hurrah for the Blackshirts" advertised the BUF and recommended the readers to join. *Daily Mail*, 19 Jan 1934.

³⁹² Lawrence, "Fascist Violence," 249-54.

³⁹³ *Daily Mail*, 19 Jul 1934.

³⁹⁴ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 103-4.

organisation's new anti-Semitic tactics, the BUF's anti-Semitic campaign was also felt in other areas such as Leeds and Manchester. Here sizeable fascist anti-Semitic disturbances plagued the local Labour authorities. The mayor of Manchester, Joseph Toole, also played a part along with the London Labour Party in pressing the government for regulating measures. The reason for selecting the East End as a target was that the area contained all the elements for social conflict that could be exploited for anti-Semitic propaganda. As is well known, the East End had a long history as a destination for those seeking a new life but with bare means to support themselves, and here were included Jewish immigrants fleeing from Czarist persecution in Russia and Eastern Europe one or two generations previously. In the 1930s almost one third of the Jews in Britain lived in the East End, both new immigrants and British-born Jews of immigrant families, bringing with them Yiddish shops, newspapers, theatre, and the like, increasing the visibility of foreign cultures. This Jewish concentration, combined with existing antipathy towards them, attracted hostile reactions from some sections of the community. It was also true that long-standing problems such as lack of housing, unstable employment, and poor hygiene still existed, and were even exacerbated to a certain degree by the crowded environment of the area. Thus, the East End possessed ample elements that could be stimulated and stirred up by the anti-Semitic campaign of BUF, which gave discontented residents a focus for their frustration, and a solution to their problems.³⁹⁵

The BUF accused the Jews of damaging the interests of the British State prioritising their ethnic or racial origins over their duty to the nation. The *big* Jews were deemed a threat to Britain's economy because of their hold over finance and international usury, and the *little* Jews to the nation's cultural identity.³⁹⁶ Whichever type they were, according to the BUF, they put their loyalties to an international Jewish community before the British state in which they lived, "setting their racial interests above their national interests."³⁹⁷ Thus the BUF argued that its attacks on Jews were based not on racial hatred but on national concerns:

We do not attack Jews on account of their religion, ... and we certainly do

³⁹⁵ Elaine R. Smith, "Jewish Responses to Political Antisemitism and Fascism in the East End of London," in *Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives on Fascism and Race Discourse in Britain*, eds., Kenneth Lunn and Tony Kushner, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 53-54.

³⁹⁶ *Blackshirt*, 2 Nov 1934; Oswald Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 3rd ed. (London: British Union, 1938), 63-66.

³⁹⁷ *Daily Mail*, 19 Jul 1934.

not wish to persecute them on account of their race, ... Our quarrel with the Jewish interests is that they have constituted themselves a state within the nation, and have set the interests of their co-racialists at home and abroad above the interest of the British State.³⁹⁸

However, this claim by Mosley and the BUF actually came from the wide-spread myths that the activities of the Jews were fundamentally directed by, and based on, their Jewishness. For example, Jewish landlords were not denounced for simply being landlords. They were thought to become moneylenders or landlords because of their Jewishness, which gave them certain mental characters such as greediness.³⁹⁹ Although Mosley at first wanted to keep his movement from being charged with open anti-Semitism, there was a considerably large contingent within the BUF that could not be controlled by the official platforms. As a result, several important figures within the organisation like Jock Houston, E.G. ‘Mick’ Clarke, and Raven Thomson exerted their influence upon the rank and file, actively conducting open, more racially-grounded anti-Semitic campaigns in the East End area.⁴⁰⁰

The most urgent concern of the London County Council facing the fascist-inspired disturbances of the East End, was that public order was at peril. Despite the London Labour Party's criticisms of the BUF for producing both “racial strife” and “social disorder,”⁴⁰¹ the emphasis was plainly on the latter. The BUF street processions and its anti-Semitic attacks were marked by a rowdyism in style to older low politics which had not been endorsed by the mainstream politics since 1918.⁴⁰² What was more problematic was that the BUF's rowdyism anti-fascist leading to directly confrontation in the street. These anti-fascist forces were generally made up of Communists, some local Labour Party members, and Jewish youths, who kept their eyes on the BUF and collected information about its meetings in order to disrupt them. So the violence involved in BUF meetings was by no means unilateral. The BUF public meetings often ended up as fights between irreconcilable forces, culminating in the “Battle of the Cable Street” on 4 October in 1936, in which BUF members, anti-fascists, and the police clashed as a BUF

³⁹⁸ Oswald Mosley, *Tomorrow We Live*, 64.

³⁹⁹ Benewick, *Fascist Movement in Britain*, 151.

⁴⁰⁰ Benewick, *Fascist Movement in Britain*, 108-31; Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 175-90.

⁴⁰¹ “Disorders in East London,” Herbert Morrison to Sir John Simon, Home Secretary, LCC, 16 Oct 1936, ACC/2417/A/020 7041-43, LMA.

⁴⁰² Lawrence, “Fascist Violence,” 240-45.

march passed through the streets of the East End of London.

The Battle of the Cable Street was described by the far-left as a glorious victory of the anti-fascists over British fascism. The anti-fascist force, led by Phil Piratin of the Communist Party of Great Britain, included some local Labour Party members, anarchists, and Jewish youths as well as Communists and ILP members. Against the sound of the Black Shirts of the BUF jeering, “the Yids, the Yids, we are going to get rid of the Yids,”⁴⁰³ about 100,000 anti-fascists gathered to block the march with roadblocks and chalked the pavements with slogans such as “They shall not pass” or “Bar the Road to Fascism.”⁴⁰⁴ 6,000 policemen were present to clear the road for 2-3,000 BUF marchers. Various weapons like sticks, rocks, and chair legs were used, and after the confrontation Mosley finally decided to abandon the march leaving the anti-fascists rioting with the police. As a result, about 150 were arrested and about 175 were injured, including women and children.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, about fifty Fascists raided Jewish shops in Bethnal Green that night.⁴⁰⁶ After the event, the London Labour Party pressed the Government to take a firm stand against violent street politics that could breach public order. This demand was met by the Home Secretary later in that month. The extent of the disturbances persuaded John Simon, the Home Secretary, to abandon his previous reluctance to introduce any measures that were likely to restrain the right of freedom of speech. He tabled in the following month the 1936 Public Order Bill which will be discussed later.

For now, let us first look at how the London Labour Party approached and viewed the situation caused by the BUF’s anti-Semitism in the East End. Above all, fascist anti-Semitism and its resultant disorder were defined as a foreign threat to British values such as public order, peace, and tolerance. Fascism and what it stood for were regarded as foreign things which were “contrary to British traditions and the best instincts of [the] British public.”⁴⁰⁷ Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, adamantly asserted that “there is no place in British national life” for fascist politics.⁴⁰⁸

Herbert Morrison’s depiction of the character of the East End as a multi-racial society clearly reveals this clash between concepts of British and foreign in Labour’s discourse. The most salient feature of the area was its mixture of people where almost all sorts of

⁴⁰³ *Daily Herald*, 5 Oct 1936, 2.

⁴⁰⁴ ILP, *They Did Not Pass: 300,000 Workers Say No to Mosley* (London: ILP, 1936), 5.

⁴⁰⁵ Benewick, *Fascist Movement in Britain*, 226-28.

⁴⁰⁶ *Daily Herald*, 5 Oct 1936, 1.

⁴⁰⁷ “Disorders in East London,” 16 Oct 1936.

⁴⁰⁸ LPACR (1934), 129.

ethnic groups and religions coexisted:

Oriental of every race and colour walk the streets and sell their wares. In Limehouse, Chinamen have settled and maintained their own language and habits. The large Jewish element comes one, two, or three generations back from Poland, Russia, Germany, Spain and Portugal. The Catholics are mainly of Irish extraction, though Italians and Lithuanians are not infrequent.⁴⁰⁹

The essence of the region's character, the various people and their walks of life, was at times positively illustrated as liveliness and friendliness, and as representing the "drama, comedy, and tragedy of man,"⁴¹⁰ which is quite different in tone to the almost apocalyptic view of multi-racial port-towns as examined in the previous chapter. However, here again, a multi-ethnic community was thought to inevitably involve public disorder. It was recognised that behind that positive exterior image was "underlying possible friction between races, underlying sub-conscious religious and racial antipathies."⁴¹¹ The diverse character of the East End held the potential for trouble when exploited by evil forces aiming to stir up racial antipathy: "Diversity is too great for the mind to compass, and each group is rigidly exclusive, knowing little of the way of life, and nothing at all of the spirit and outlook of any other group. ... I have always realized that the lack of any kind of unity in the district was potentially dangerous"⁴¹² The other distinctive feature of the East End acknowledged by the London Labour Party was its poverty and social problems. The region was depicted with its slums, congested streets, and riverside industries, in which people united by their comradeship in grinding poverty struggled for better conditions.⁴¹³

Despite the problems associated with poverty and mixed cultures the Labour Party depicted the East End of London as an orderly and peaceful place, before the BUF marched in. Morrison on behalf of the London Labour Party praised it as "one of the most well-behaved and orderly parts to be found in the civilized world," and this was attributed to the public order, law-abiding spirit, and patriotic pride in their town and country:

⁴⁰⁹ "Disorders in the East End," Deputation to the Home Secretary, LCC, 20 Oct 1936, ACC/2417/A/020 7049-52, LMA.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ 317 H.C. Deb. 5s. 16 Nov 1936, cols. 1463-64.

⁴¹² "Disorders in the East End," 20 Oct 1936.

⁴¹³ "Britain Disgraced – Government Must Restore Peace in London's East End. This is More than Politics," LCC, 20 Oct 1936, ACC/2417/A021 7057-60, LMA.

the glory of that place, which is a credit to public order, is that the East End of London ... living together orderly, lawfully, and the whole jolly lot of them, despite their mixed origin and mixed religion, proud to be East-Enders, proud of their district, proud of their London, pleased to celebrate at the time of Jubilees and Coronations, proud of their country.⁴¹⁴

Moreover, the laudable character of the area was claimed to be closely connected to the existence and the influence of the Labour Party and the Labour movement. Despite the potential mutual antipathies of the residents, they evolved “from the status of economic and political serfdom to that of political and trade union independence” with their “comradeship of poverty.”⁴¹⁵

According to this view of the East End, the fascist disturbances were a foreign invasion that threatened the existing state of British order and peace. The methods of stirring up racial hatred and public disorder, learnt and adopted from abroad, resulted in “this beastliness, this ugliness which, consciously, deliberately, of malice aforethought ... has brought disgrace upon the good name of the East End of London.”⁴¹⁶ Furthermore, it was not only British order and peace that were threatened by the BUF attacks, but also the Labour administration of the LCC: “Left alone by imported and incongruous elements, the East End would have continued the peaceful life to which I have referred above, whilst the joint efforts of the people and the municipal authorities to bring about a radical change for the better in housing and social conditions would have steadily evolved an East End freed of its slums and its congested streets.”⁴¹⁷

Anti-Semitism and racial hatred were interpreted as a part of this foreign evil invading East London. Fascist anti-Semitism was regarded as a foreign method, something that Mosley had learnt and adopted from the Nazis, Mosley’s “paymasters.”⁴¹⁸ For example, George Lansbury, the Labour Party leader from 1932 to 1935 and member for Bow and Bromley, interpreted the BUF’s operations as an attempt to introduce into Britain “the horrible brutality which fascism has employed both in Italy and Germany, and to create an anti-Semitic campaign.” He concluded that the movement was “something entirely

⁴¹⁴ 317 H.C. Deb. 5s. 16 Nov 1936, cols. 1463-64.

⁴¹⁵ “Britain Disgraced,” 20 October 1936.

⁴¹⁶ 317 H.C. Deb. 5s. 16 Nov 1936, cols. 1464.

⁴¹⁷ “Disorders in East London,” 16 Oct 1936.

⁴¹⁸ 317 H.C. Deb. 5s. 16 Nov 1936, cols. 1463.

alien to the spirit of freedom which, for many years, we have enjoyed in this country.”⁴¹⁹ Stafford Cripps, member for Bristol East and a leading advocate of the Popular Front, for which he was expelled from the Labour Party later in 1939, also attributed the source of the movement to the Continent, saying, “if we look where he got his foreign ideas - from Germany and Italy - we can see Hitler in the pay of the German industrialists, Mussolini as the champion of capitalism in Italy.”⁴²⁰

Morrison emphasised that the anti-Semitism of the BUF was of a foreign origin, and a new phenomenon to Britain. He asserted that “this anti-Semitic business is relatively new.”⁴²¹ He added that the anti-Semitism of the BUF “more and more resembles the technique of the Nazis in Germany.” He blamed Mosley as one of the weakest individuals in British politics, as “he had to fall back on this anti-Semitism, the meanest and most cowardly policy of any; and, finally, he probably had to do what the paymasters of the organization demanded that he should do, and it became anti-Semitic.”⁴²² Morrison was right in arguing that the anti-Semitism of the BUF had not been its major tactic at the start of the movement, but had been adopted as a deliberate political strategy adopted from late 1934 when it had failed to increase its profile via the BUF’s national programmes. But his constant emphasis of the foreignness of anti-Semitic propaganda is somewhat misleading, for it was only a generation ago when the British Brothers’ League actively employed anti-Semitism in their campaigns against the Jewish immigrants in the East End.

To summarise, the BUF’s politics of anti-Semitism in the East End was blamed by the Labour Party for endangering British national values that had suppressed the potential of conflicts growing from the area’s ethnic diversity and poverty. These had protected the area from inherent potential conflicts between its residents in the past, and were now under threat. In dealing with this situation, two sets of characteristics were regarded as clashing: the one set represented public order, peace, and tolerance; the other set disorder, violence, and intolerance, all inflamed by racial hatred. In this respect, the problem with the anti-Semitic propaganda and attacks on Jews, was deemed to be “essentially one of law, order, tolerance, and sanity in the East End.”⁴²³ Moreover, it was argued that these British values had been maintained through the law-abiding spirit, trade-unionism, and

⁴¹⁹ *Daily Herald*, 11 Jun 1934, 9.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ 317 H.C. Deb. 5s. 16 Nov 1936, cols. 1462.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 1461-63.

⁴²³ “Disorders in the East End,” 20 Oct 1936.

patriotism under the Labour administration of the LCC. As a result, the BUF attacks were construed as an assault upon Labourite values. Morrison appealed to this point in a letter that he sent to the Home Secretary after the Battle of the Cable Street:

The great working-class area of the East End, with its varied population and its serious social problems, constitutes a body of citizens who have lived together in peace and amity and whose sturdy spirit and desire for social improvement has expressed itself in the orderly pursuit of trade union effort and the constitutional use of the ballot box.⁴²⁴

Labour's understanding of fascism as an attack upon Labour politics as well as upon British values is also present in the party's reading of events happening in the Continental Europe, and in Germany in particular. Since 1933 concerns about the rise of the fascist – or Nazi – regime began to frequently appear in Labour's discourse. In fact, it was from when Hitler seized power in Germany in January that year that the Labour Party began to pay attention to fascism as a serious threat to politics.⁴²⁵ The destruction of Europe's strongest labour movement, the Social Democratic Party of Germany, brought shock to the British labour movement. Thus, what made the British Labour Party consider the matter and establish its position were the events happening abroad. Here lay the origins of Labour's approach to the domestic fascist movement. Until this time, the domestic fascist movement had failed to prove its significance to the mainstream political parties including the Labour Party.⁴²⁶

Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, was one of the first Labour members to recognise the importance of the German situation and the grave danger rising from the fascist regime. He had first-hand knowledge, as he frequently visited Berlin as the President of the International Federation of Trade Unions. Citrine believed that Hitler had taken power in Germany because of the country's weak parliamentary democracy, which meant that Britain with its strong parliamentary democracy was unlikely to allow the rise of fascism, unless the economic situation further

⁴²⁴ "Disorders in East London," 16 Oct 1936.

⁴²⁵ Nigel Copsey, "'Every time they made a Communist, they made a Fascist': The Labour Party and Popular Anti-Fascism in the 1930s," in *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period*, eds., Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 54.

⁴²⁶ Michael Newman, "Democracy versus Dictatorship: Labour's Role in the Struggle against British Fascism, 1933-1936," *History Workshop* 5 (1978): 68.

deteriorated.⁴²⁷ In the light of this particular concern about the difference between the two countries' political regimes, he drafted "Democracy vs. Dictatorship" which was soon issued as an official Party manifesto on fascism by the National Joint Council in March 1933.⁴²⁸

In the manifesto, the essence of the fascist regime was defined as a political regime of dictatorship, which was sharply contrasted with democracy that the Labour Party advocated. Indeed, fascism was declared to be the antithesis of what the Labour Party and the labour movement stood for, that the two politics could not co-exist and develop at the same time and place. It urged that British Labour should united against dictatorship of fascism as well as that of communism.⁴²⁹ The same view was also expressed in detail at the Labour Party's Annual Conference held in 2 October 1933:

The uprising of Fascism will mean the downfall of Democracy. But it is the failure of Labour that will mean the success of Fascism. Neither the Labour Party, nor the Trade Union Movement, nor the Co-operative Movement – the three pillars of the working class in Great Britain – have anything in common with Fascism. Its aims are not our aims, nor its methods our methods. Fascism stands for Capitalism, for Subjection, for Dictatorship, for War. We stand for Socialism, for Freedom, for Democracy, for Peace. There can be no compromise on these great antitheses.⁴³⁰

Following this argument, the most vulnerable groups under a fascist (Nazi) authoritarian regime were the socialists and the labour movement of Germany. The destruction and persecution of German socialists, trade unions, and communists by the Nazis certainly brought considerable alarm to the British Labour Party. Thus, quite naturally, the racial persecution pursued under the fascist regime occupied only a marginal position in the British Labour Party's concerns, despite its recognition as a grave issue. Indeed, it is rather striking to note how rarely the party mentioned anything relating to the Nazi persecution of German Jews, in contrast to frequent expressions of concern for the German socialists and trade unionists. Although the Labour Party recognised that

⁴²⁷ Walter Citrine, "Dictatorship and the Trade Union Movement," in TUCAR (1933), 425-35.

⁴²⁸ LPACR (1933), 17.

⁴²⁹ "Democracy vs Dictatorship," in LPACR (1933), 277-78.

⁴³⁰ LPACR (1933), 134.

fascism was a reign of “political and racial intolerance,”⁴³¹ and worried that the Nazi persecution of Jewish citizens had reached levels “unknown since the worst days of Russian Czardom,”⁴³² fascist attacks on Jews did not occupy a major place in Labour’s discourse. Even in its sporadic engagement with cases of victimisation of Jewish people, the Labour Party went no further than denouncing the Nazi regime’s cruelty and inhumanity and expressing shock, often conveyed through a patriotic frame. In 1938 after the Kristallnacht, the London Labour Party issued a memorandum *Germany, the Jews, the Catholics and Peace – A Friendly Message to the German People* written by Herbert Morrison. What is interesting in this memo is that it condemned the Nazis’ racial persecution of the Jews using the same language that it adopted towards domestic anti-Semitism: appealing to the good name and pride of the nation. The racial pogrom was “cruel and unpleasant and was damaging to the good name of Germany,” and “this crude and brutal persecution of a helpless minority is bringing dishonour to the German name.”⁴³³

As Tony Kushner has illustrated, specific attention to racial or religious refugees was lacking in British Labour’s responses in general. Instead, the activities of the British labour movement in helping the German refugees were based on the labour-movement’s specific concerns, although only a relatively small number of refugees – political or racial – were permitted entry into Britain due to the combined reasons of economic and cultural considerations. The attitude of the British labour towards Jewish refugees, however, was not one-dimensional. It had sincere sympathies for the Jewish refugees, but at the same time, insisted that the strict control of alien immigrants under the 1919 Aliens Act should be maintained for the protection of British workers, not recognising that the two categories applied to the same people.⁴³⁴ Jewish refugees from Nazism had to pass the economic test of the Act in order to be admitted to the UK. This economic character of refugee policy had the effect of obscuring their distinct position of being refugees, and contributed to the perception of them as ordinary immigrants. Moreover, the fact that they were persecuted for belonging to a particular ethnic group, rather than for being of a certain political creed or religious belief, did not fit the traditional and familiar concept

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² LPACR (1933), 17.

⁴³³ “Germany, the Jews, the Catholics and Peace – A Friendly Message to the German People,” LLP, 21 Nov 1938, ACC/2417/A/023 8190-93, LMA.

⁴³⁴ Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 61-90.

of a refugee. The plight of Jewish refugees as a result evoked less sympathy than that if they had been political or religious refugees.⁴³⁵ To British Labour watching the development of the fascist regime in Germany, the Nazi persecution of German socialists, trade unionists, and co-operativists was the most urgent and sinister effect of the fascism, overriding concerns for anything else.

4-2. Against Dictatorship and Public Disorder: Labour's Anti-Fascist Measures

The measures taken up by the Labour Party to tackle the BUF's disturbances will now be examined. Exploring the Labour Party's political strategies against fascism in Britain will reveal its priorities of public order and parliamentary democracy. The principal strategy adopted by Labour to stem fascist disruption in East London was the advocacy of parliamentary democracy and strong unity of the British labour movement in which the Labour Party played a central role. Upon this principle, the Labour Party refused co-operation with the communists in the United Front, but carried out educational and judicial campaigns against the fascist disturbances.

It has already been shown that the Labour Party viewed the situation aroused by BUF's anti-Semitism as the result of a foreign invasion which threatened British order, liberty and democracy. Considered in this light, it is no surprise that Labour turned down the Communist's invitation to join the United Front against fascism, as the Labour Party believed that communism was also un-British. H. R. Lees-Smith, the former President of the Board of Education in the Labour Government, said that British people were "the most adult in the world, and communism for them means a degradation of their manhood."⁴³⁶

Labour felt that it had to fight not only against fascism, but also against the dictatorship represented by communism. It was a battle between democracy versus dictatorship, and between what stood for Britishness versus un-Britishness. Attaching greater importance to the parliamentary democracy was part of the long-held faith of British Labour since the late nineteenth century that viewed the parliament system as a guarantor and symbol of British liberty and fairness.⁴³⁷ For the Labour Party, communism as an authoritarian

⁴³⁵ Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees, and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 274.

⁴³⁶ *Glasgow Herald*, 17 Sep 1934.

⁴³⁷ Ross McKibbin, "Why was there no Marxist in British Labour?"; Ward,

regime was essentially the same as fascism. Labour saw a fundamental affinity between fascism and communism in terms of “their theories of government, the doctrine of dictatorship and their belief in the suppression of other political parties when one of them has triumphed.”⁴³⁸ In this respect, communism, like the fascism, was also the antithesis of the Labour Party and what it stood for, in particular, democracy: “Fascism and Communism alike are a challenge to our democratic institutions and to the system of society based on political, social and economic equality which we seek to establish.”⁴³⁹

The only difference between the two was that while the one was the dictatorship of the right, the other was that of the left. Indeed, when the official Labour Party manifesto on fascism “Democracy vs. Dictatorship” was drafted, the aim of attacking both fascism and communism was born in mind from the start: “The real point about the Manifesto is that we condemn dictatorship as such, whether that dictatorship is a dictatorship of the Left or of the Right.”⁴⁴⁰ The Labour Party declared that it “uncompromisingly opposed to all forms of Dictatorship.”⁴⁴¹ In addition, as Labour regarded the rise of fascism as the result of the fear of communism, it was no surprise that it repudiated all forms of co-operation with the Communist Party. In Citrine’s judgement of the German situation and the rise of Hitler, the German communists were responsible for that situation as they sapped the strength of the united power of the Social Democratic Party.⁴⁴² Therefore, it was a natural conclusion that it was incumbent on the labour movement and trade unionists to stick to their democratic principles and decline the call for united action by the Communists, who followed the principle of dictatorship. The manifesto was an explanation of why Labour could not work with the Communists as well as with fascism, after the Communist International called for united action and asked for the co-operation of Labour.⁴⁴³

The Communist-led United Front against fascism was also problematic for Labour because of its concern for public order. The strategy of the United Front was to directly face fascist anti-Semitic disturbances at the BUF public meetings or processions. As previously mentioned, anti-fascists’ counter attacks were also a part of the public disorder caused by the fascists’ anti-Semitism in East London. So there were always as many, or more, anti-fascists present at the BUF meetings, than fascists, which inevitably led to

⁴³⁸ 318 H.C. Deb. 5s. 26 Nov 1936, col. 612.

⁴³⁹ LPACR (1933), 135.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁴² TUCAR (1933), 321.

⁴⁴³ Nigel Copsey, “Labour Party and Popular Anti-Fascism,” 54-55.

violence. The National Joint Council of the Labour Party emphasised “in the clearest and most emphatic terms that the organised Labour movement repudiated entirely every form of organised interruption at public meetings.”⁴⁴⁴

The anti-fascists’ victory at Cable Street was perceived very differently by the Labour newspapers, compared with those of the Communists and ILP. For instance, “They Shall Not Pass,” a slogan which had been adopted from the anti-fascists’ battle in Spain and symbolized anti-fascist unity, was depicted by the Labour press as one of the elements contributing to the noise and disorder created by the anti-fascists.⁴⁴⁵ Morrison thought that although it was the fascists that had started the trouble, it was the counter-attacks of anti-fascists that created the worst trouble.⁴⁴⁶ He made it clear that he would not support such tactics but insisted on a more orderly approach to the situation. He indirectly referred to the Communists and others involved in the United Front: “it would still be possible for other people to organize another crowd to have a riot with them. Some people may like that sort of thing. I do not. I prefer peaceful, firm and ordered government to government by mobs, and I am going to stand for that principle – at any rate as long as I can.”⁴⁴⁷

It had already been decided at the annual Labour Party conference in 1921 that the affiliation of the Communist Party of Great Britain should not be accepted, on the grounds of the incompatibility of their constitutions, programmes and principles. In 1923 Morrison, who had been a leading anti-communist from the start, proposed to the National Executive Committee that local parties and trade unions be permitted to move against Communists, and this was agreed. The next year’s party conference imposed a ban on communists as candidates and party members.⁴⁴⁸ In 1930 the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party named certain organisations as ineligible for affiliation to the Labour Party on the grounds that they were of Communist origin or under communist influence. Among them were the National Minority Movement, the League against Imperialism, the National Unemployed Workers’ Committee Movement and many more. Members of the Labour Party were also urged not to associate themselves with such organisations. It was thought that there was a “fundamental difference between the democratic policy and practice of the Labour Party and the policy of dictatorship of the

⁴⁴⁴ National Joint Council of the Labour Party, 22 Aug 1934, ID/CI/24/12, LHASC.

⁴⁴⁵ *Daily Herald*, 5 Oct 1936, 2.

⁴⁴⁶ LPACR (1936), 164.

⁴⁴⁷ 318 H.C. Deb. 5s 26 Nov 1936, col. 611.

⁴⁴⁸ Thorpe, *Failure of Political Extremism*, 19-20.

Communist Party”, which was “irreconcilable.”⁴⁴⁹

Labour’s longstanding antipathy to Communism needs to be understood in relation to its identity as a social democratic party. As Andrew Thorpe has noted, “equal amount of weight should be given to both terms” - socialism and democracy. Labour Party’s socialism was not a kind of Marxian version in which the change towards socialism took place by subverting the existing order, but it moved gradually towards it by social reforms enabled by a prosperous and expanding capitalist economy. Ideas of any radical changes that challenged constitutional parliamentary methods appalled most Labour leaders at both a personal and political level.⁴⁵⁰

The participation in the United Front with the Communists was also derided on a practical level. In the first place, it was thought to be ineffective as the alliance with the Communist Party which was “small in membership and lacking in public influence”⁴⁵¹ would merely decrease effectiveness in tackling the problem of fascism, causing “confusion in our own ranks and weakening our hold over public opinion.”⁴⁵² The National Executive of the Labour Party warned that Communists would deliberately divide the forces of the workers and thereby weaken their powers of resistance, as “the communist campaigns split the working-class movements and rendered their overthrow possible.”⁴⁵³

The Labour leadership was also concerned that strong protest against fascism would give publicity to it. A few days before the battle of Cable Street, George Lansbury advised the East Enders and anti-fascists to keep away from the event, because, he insisted, the only attraction to the fascist movement was not its message but “the prospect of disturbances.”⁴⁵⁴ He went on to argue that if only people “withdraw that attraction, ... Fascist meetings would die on the organizers’ hands. ... it can be withdrawn whenever the opponents of Fascism are cool and disciplined enough to decide to do so.”⁴⁵⁵ The United Front tactics were based upon direct counter-attacks on the BUF during its street marches, so it was inevitable that the confrontations between the two groups were very

⁴⁴⁹ “The National Executive Committee’s Decision on the Application of Affiliation from Harry Pollit, the Communist Party of Great Britain,” Letter of J. S. Middleton, 27 Jan 1936, in LPACR (1936), 51.

⁴⁵⁰ Thorpe, *Failure of Political Extremism*, 16-19.

⁴⁵¹ “The Labour Movement and Fascism: A Special Memorandum, Joint Consultative Committee of the London Trades Council and the London Labour Party,” LCC, 26 Jul 1934, ACC/2417/A/018 6044, LMA.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Letter of J. S. Middleton, 27 Jan 1936, in LPACR (1936), 51.

⁴⁵⁴ *Daily Herald*, 1 Oct 1936, 10.

⁴⁵⁵ “Labour Movement and Fascism,” 26 Jul 1934.

visible. The Labour Party thought that agreeing with this United Front method would be to “become hysterical and neurotic about fascism” and thus “give to fascism such prominence that it may benefit from the considerable advertisement.”⁴⁵⁶ It went on: “it really is no good getting excited about fascist activity in East London, having meetings and consultations, pressing the Executive to act, and then failing to carry through the vitally necessary educational campaign.”⁴⁵⁷ For Labour, the adherence to the non-violent and non-confrontational methods was an effective way to fight fascism.

What then was the “vitally necessary educational campaign” that Labour advocated to effectively combat fascism? The Labour Party’s educational campaign was to publish three leaflets warning of the dangers of fascism: *British Women! Don’t Lose Your Rights!*; *British Liberty is Worth Saving – It’s a Dull Life under Fascism*; and *Fascism Hates Trade Unions*. The campaign was launched on the grounds that “the most effective method of dealing with fascism in East London is to conduct energetic Labour Party propaganda, by means of the systematic distribution of suitable literature and by canvassing to strengthen the Labour Parties in the area.”⁴⁵⁸ Moreover, Morrison argued that “mere anti-Fascist activities, which go no further than opposition to Fascism” were not likely to be efficacious. Instead, “the real resistance to Fascism in East London is to be found in the strength and unity of the official Labour Movement ... by far the best way of opposing Fascism is by establishing stronger Labour Party organisation.”⁴⁵⁹ Months after the event at Cable Street, Labour organised six demonstrations for “Socialism, Peace and Democracy against Fascism” which included speeches by Morrison and Dalton.⁴⁶⁰

However, Labour’s official policy against the fascism did not gain the entire support of the local Labour branches. Contrary to the expectations of the London Labour Party, only small quantities of the three educational leaflets were ordered by local Labour parties in East London. The London Labour Party had to urge them several times to purchase more leaflets.⁴⁶¹ In the end, as a result of the lukewarm response from the local branches, plans to publish further leaflets were frustrated. The London Labour Party bemoaned that the effort had not been adequately supported.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ “Leaflets on Fascism,” LCC, 20 Nov 1936, ACC/2417/A/021 7138-41, LMA.

⁴⁵⁸ “Fascist Activity in East London,” LCC, 6 Apr 1937, ACC/2417/A/021 7477, LMA.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 Dec 1936.

⁴⁶¹ “Leaflets on Fascism; Further Leaflets on Fascism,” LCC, 11 May 1937, ACC/2417/A/022 7512, LMA.

⁴⁶² “Proposed leaflets on Fascism,” LCC, 5 Jun 1937, ACC/2417/A/022 7546, LMA.

More important disagreements within the Labour Party came when rank and file members, local branches and members of the Labour League of Youths joined the anti-fascist activities led by the Communist United Front in response to BUF propaganda and marches in East London. Through the local United Front committees formed across Britain, rank and file members co-operated with Communists in the fight against the BUF. The outlook and extent of grass-roots' dissent varied according to local contexts even within East London. For example, while the Bethnal Green Council under local Labour control engaged in more active anti-fascist activities, Stepney Council also under local Labour spared itself from the United Front. When Joe Jacobs, Secretary of Stepney Communist Party, contacted three Stepney Labour MPs of calling for a united action, he failed to receive an answer, although some grass-roots Labour members of Stepney did take part in the united action.⁴⁶³

Disagreement on united action appeared from an early stage. In March 1933 the National Joint Council of the Labour Party unanimously declined the proposals of the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party to form United Front.⁴⁶⁴ The Labour leadership constantly warned against and banned any association with the Communists. Despite this official guideline the London Labour Party had to circulate letters to its branches, insisting they should communicate or consult with them before any action was taken.⁴⁶⁵

In fact, disagreement on the matter was not unexpected. The measures taken by the leadership level of the Labour Party, which had banned association with any action or organisation related to the Communist Party, was criticised by some Labour members as not only insufficient but also misleading. J. C. Little from the Amalgamated Engineering Union demanded that the National Executive "remove all obstacles which at present stand in the way of complete unity."⁴⁶⁶ The most bitter accusations were probably those of Charles H. Niblett of Brighton and Hove Trades Council and Labour Party and Alex Gossip of the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association. Niblett said that the only thing that the Executive had done to stop the menace of fascism was to combat the communist policy of the United Front, with no attempt to combat fascism. Gossip referred to the Executive's measure as a "foolish attempt to disrupt the Workers who are opposed

⁴⁶³ Joe Jacobs, *Out of the Ghetto: My Youth in the East End: Communism and Fascism, 1913-1939* (London: Janet Simon, 1978) 194-95.

⁴⁶⁴ LPACR (1933), 16-17.

⁴⁶⁵ "Fascist Marches," LCC, 12 Jul 1937, ACC/2417/A/022 7593, LMA.

⁴⁶⁶ LPACR (1936), 250.

to War and fascism, and who recognize the necessity for a United Front.”⁴⁶⁷ Such back-bench protests even went as far as condemning the instructions of the leadership as “heresy hunting,” “disciplining,” or “persecuting the rank and file.”⁴⁶⁸

Also, some Labour Party members insisted that it was the leadership’s responsibility for letting the so-called “two-penny half-penny” organisations - ones that the Labour Party banned its members from becoming involved with - to spring up to respond to fascism, because the National Executive had “not acted quickly enough, and has not acted in such a way as to appeal to the imagination.”⁴⁶⁹ Clearly the position of the Executive and the leadership in excluding any contact with other left wing groups but adhering to official Labour politics did not receive extensive support. As Ellen Wilkinson, MP for Jarrow, pointed out:

If you just sit there and say we will not have anything to do with the Communists or with the ILP or with anything that does not just keep on our tramway lines, I say the rank and file, whom we represent, will not listen ... We cannot allow this thing to go on and merely adopt this formal attitude.⁴⁷⁰

To the protests and criticisms of those rank and file Labour members, the leadership adamantly answered that the Labour Party and the labour movement should strictly stay within the official Party policy and strengthen a united front of their own. The united front that the Labour leadership meant was that of the Trade Union Movement, the Co-operative Movement, and the Labour Party – “the three great expressions of working-class purpose and working-class ideals.”⁴⁷¹ Hugh Dalton said that trying to strengthen and increase Labour’s own membership, improving its own propaganda, and building up a united front in the labour movement would be “more use than to go outside and talk about joining in with Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Pollitt or anyone else.”⁴⁷²

The other measure that Labour used against domestic fascist politics was judicial. The legislation of the Public Order Act in 1936, which was first introduced on 10 November

⁴⁶⁷ LPACR (1933), 220.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, (1934) 131.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 257.

1936, was passed the parliament in December that year.⁴⁷³ The Act was realized in large part by Labour's initiative, which had begun more than two years earlier, and directed at introducing practical restraints upon the fascists. Since witnessing the shocking violence of the fascists at the Olympia Meeting in June 1934, some leading members of the Labour Party had continued to press the government for action. In late June 1934, a deputation which consisted of Clement Attlee, Walter Citrine, Walter R. Smith, Andrew Conley, and Joseph Toole asked John Gilmour, then Home Secretary, to consider a measure banning the wearing of political uniforms in public in order to maintain order at public meetings. During this meeting, Labour representatives predicted that law, order, and democracy were going to become increasingly be threatened if firm steps were not taken limiting political uniforms and militarised organisations. They drew examples from what had happened to German trade unionists and socialists after Hitler had seized the power. Gilmour however remained reluctant to act upon Labour's proposals.⁴⁷⁴

The direct trigger for the Act came with the Battle of Cable Street on 4 October 1936. Immediately after the event, Labour condemned the Home Secretary for neglecting petitions from George Lansbury, East London mayors, and Jewish people to prevent the march in advance. Conversely Sir Philip Game, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, was praised for preventing further disorder by intervening and ordering the BUF to take another route.⁴⁷⁵ As a result at the annual party conference held on the day after the battle, the Labour Party passed an emergency resolution, moved by Herbert Morrison and seconded by Joseph Toole, the Lord Mayor of Manchester, urging the Government to take immediate steps to ban political uniforms, parade of force, and activities encouraging civil disorder and racial strife.⁴⁷⁶ Morrison wrote to the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, on behalf of the Executive Committee of the London Labour Party, Labour MPs, LCC and leaders of local Labour parties of East and North-East London, drawing attention to the fact that "there is an urgent and direct responsibility

⁴⁷³ The Public Order Act of 1936 was not made entirely in the Home Office and the parliament. Rather, it was the result of a compromise between various state agents that had very different opinions on the maintenance of public order and civil liberties. In addition to politicians and the Home Office, the Security Service and the Police all played an important part in the making of the Act. See Richard Thurlow, "Blaming the Blackshirts: The Authorities and the Anti-Jewish Disturbances in the 1930s," in *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Panikos Panayi (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 112-29.

⁴⁷⁴ Notes of a Deputation Received by the Home Secretary from the National Joint Council, 26 Jun 1934, Home Office Memorandum, PRO HO 144/20141/52-77, TNA

⁴⁷⁵ *Daily Herald*, 6 Oct 1936, 17.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

upon His Majesty's Government to take effective action ... to control happenings which, if not controlled, will lead to social disaster and political chaos."⁴⁷⁷

Morrison's letter proposed certain points that went on to make up the provisions of the Public Order Act: first, the prohibition of wearing political uniforms and quasi-military training; second, police powers to deal with processions which were likely to lead to civil disorder or racial strife. Lastly, taking records of speeches made at meetings with a view to possible legal proceedings.⁴⁷⁸ On 20 October, John Simon received the deputation which included Harold Clay, the Chairman of the London Labour Party, the Mayors and Labour MPs of Bethnal Green, Hackney, Poplar, Shoreditch and Stepney, other London Labour Party members and the Warden of Toynbee Hall. After this meeting, the Home Secretary who had been reluctant to do anything likely to infringe freedom of speech was finally persuaded to take action.⁴⁷⁹

In parliament, the Labour Party appealed to the patriotic concerns of the members to protect Britain's tradition of public order, democracy, and freedom --values that all politicians irrespective of party should be proud of. Supporting the bill, Herbert Morrison contended that the difficulty aroused by the domestic fascist movement should be dealt with not within the frame of party politics but in terms of keeping the "good name of the country for public order and democratic administration,"⁴⁸⁰ because "the duty of keeping order in the East End of London and elsewhere does not belong to a particular political party."⁴⁸¹ He emphasised his own concerns: "I think too much about the good name of my country and its reputation in the eyes of the world to stand idly by – and I am glad that the Home Secretary took the same view."⁴⁸² Ernest Thurtle, Labour member for Shoreditch, declared that he wanted action taken against "these disturbers of the public peace" before they became "a real menace to our democratic system."⁴⁸³

By framing the issue as a battle between British goodness versus foreign evil Labour shared its views with the Conservatives and the Liberals, rather than with the far-left members in the parliament. In this sense, Labour placed its position firmly within the established boundaries of politics, that is within parliamentary democracy as Britain's peculiar liberal tradition. Fascism and communism as extremist forms of politics were

⁴⁷⁷ "Disorders in East London," 16 Oct 1936.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ *Daily Herald*, 20 Oct 1936, 2.

⁴⁸⁰ 317 H.C. Deb. 5s. 16 Nov 1936, col. 1464.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., col. 1461.

⁴⁸² Ibid., cols. 1460-61.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., col. 1435.

equally loathed and rejected by the main British political parties, partly because of their perceived alien character to British political culture and particularly to parliamentary democracy.⁴⁸⁴ As explained above, the political violence of the 1934 Olympia meeting appalled the main parties, who saw the BUF as representative of foreign politics.⁴⁸⁵ At the second reading of the bill, the Home Secretary John Simon opened proceedings by expressing his worries that essential British liberties and tolerance were being threatened in the face of foreign doctrines - whether those of the right or the left.⁴⁸⁶ Likewise, Vyvyan Adams, Conservative member for Leeds West, giving his general support to “a measure to protect the country against an extremely sinister alien movement,” said that the Fascists were “the most un-British weed” and that anti-Semitic propaganda had not yet reached dangerous proportions in England as “decent people are ashamed of that emotion.”⁴⁸⁷

Opposition to the Public Order Bill came from the far left in parliament, from the ILP and the Communist Party members. Their criticism was mainly about the bill’s potential threat to working classes and their right to demonstration. Clause 3 was particularly controversial, as it gave police the power to impose certain conditions on planned demonstrations regarding their routes or time. Buchanan of the ILP said that even though the bill was born from the need to respond to fascism and its racial riots against the East End Jews, Clause 3 gave far wider powers to the Home Secretary and the police to deal with trade disputes and innocent demonstrations of the working people.⁴⁸⁸ Willie Gallacher from the Communist Party also protested that while Clause 3 “should deal with the evil that was responsible for the difficulties in the East End” it was devised as a “deliberate attack on the working class.”⁴⁸⁹ He pointed out that racial attack against an ethnic group and political provocation should be distinguished from each other: “Cannot Hon. Members opposite understand the simple difference between provocation directed towards a political end and other kinds of provocation, such as that used in the East End against the Jews?”⁴⁹⁰

Countering these protests, Herbert Morrison justified the necessity of Clause 3: “it is still possible, without uniform and without quasi-military organization, for people to go in mob processions into the East End of London or the City of Manchester – in its Jewish

⁴⁸⁴ Thorpe, *Failure of Political Extremism*, 72-74; Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, 101-105.

⁴⁸⁵ Lawrence, “Fascist Violence,” 238-40.

⁴⁸⁶ 317 H.C. Deb. 5s. 16 Nov 1936, cols. 1350-51.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, cols. 1439-40.

⁴⁸⁸ 318 H.C. Deb. 5s. 26 Nov 1936, cols. 601-2.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 604.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 604-5.

quarters – or in Leeds, and to shout, “Down with the Yids” and “Away with the dirty Jews” and to spread terror and fear.”⁴⁹¹ But his next words reveal that he was as worried about the disorder that could be aroused by the counter-attacks of anti-fascists, as about where and why that disorder was caused: “it would still be possible for other people to organize another crowd to have a riot with them. Some people may like that sort of thing. I do not.”⁴⁹²

The fears of the Communist and ILP members were not without substance: Even though the Public Order Act was born right after the Fascists’ anti-Semitic riots, behind the Act was a political question, debated for long time, of how to regulate the violent expression of popular politics which threatened public order. The main interest of the government was not only in stemming anti-Semitic violence but also in controlling militancy of the left-wing political groups. The issue of public order had become a political agenda as a result of the disturbances involved in the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement, particularly after its Hunger March in 1932.⁴⁹³

In this sense, the Public Order Act of 1936 was not exclusively dealing with the racial provocation of the fascists. There was no specific clause in the Act dealing with racial or religious attack, and no direct mention of racial hatred as an essential part of the problem tackled in the clauses of the Act. The Act had three main aims of: prohibiting the wearing of political uniforms; banning paramilitary organisations; and regulating and controlling public processions and assemblies.⁴⁹⁴ Section 5 outlawed the use of violent, insulting, or intimidating languages or acts that were likely to breach peace and public order, but this did not directly refer to racial provocation.⁴⁹⁵ This caused a number of difficulties for the police force in applying Section 5 to actual conflict situations. When the fascist speakers and propagandists attacked Jews as an ethnic group, not as individuals and when they mixed friendly jokes into their attacks, it was difficult for the police to define it as an abuse of section 5 and to intervene.⁴⁹⁶

It is rather interesting that while the anti-BUF measure was being debated in the Home Office after the Cable Street incident, it was Sir Philip Game, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, who viewed it as essentially a matter of racial hatred. In this respect,

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 611.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Thurlow, “Blaming the Blackshirts,” 114.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 126-7.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

he shared with the far-left MPs the opinion that the appropriate course should be banning anti-Semitic activities. Game pointed out that the whole discussion by the government and the Labour Party avoided the fundamental aspect of anti-Semitism which seemed to him “the crux of the whole matter.”⁴⁹⁷ He said that he did not agree with the government’s and London Labour’s treatment of communism and fascism as being identical in terms of their dictatorship and disorder, as the Communists “appeal to no racial bias.”⁴⁹⁸ He ended his suggestion by pointing out that banning political uniforms would not be very effective while anti-Semitism was allowed.⁴⁹⁹

Whatever the case, unlike the other attempts of the London Labour Party such as the publication of educational leaflets, the Public Order Act has been judged as successful to a certain extent in weakening the vigour of BUF anti-Semitism in the East End area. The presence of police at public meetings and processions did have some effect on decreasing the extent of its anti-Semitism, by blocking the rather dramatic expression of BUF propaganda through the wearing of uniforms and militarised style.⁵⁰⁰ Also, the BUF became more willing to maintain its campaign within the boundary of the law, even though this changed approach was made more for strategic reasons. For instance, it developed a tactic of attacking Jews not as individuals, but as an ethnic group, in order to avoid punishment. And there were still some sections in the movement which actively sought to increase their attacks on Jews particularly during the 1937 municipal election.⁵⁰¹ In the end, however, the BUF never secured its foothold in politics through its anti-Semitic campaigns. Although political anti-Semitism brought considerable support to the BUF in a particular locality, in general it aroused far more hostility and negative consequences to the movement, precipitating its degeneration into a political sub-group which was highly dependent on populist racial politics.⁵⁰²

In the 1930s anti-Semitic disturbances in the East End, the London Labour Party addressed the protection of Britishness and Labour politics rather than the anti-Semitic attacks of the BUF upon Jews. It was thought that a multi-racial community like the East End contained potential sources of conflict and antipathy between its various racial and

⁴⁹⁷ PRO HO 144/20159/157, TNA.

⁴⁹⁸ PRO HO 144/20159/156, TNA.

⁴⁹⁹ PRO HO 144/20159/157, TNA.

⁵⁰⁰ Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society*, 197.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁰² Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 116-17.

religious groups. In order to control such dangerous potential, what was deemed important were the qualities of order, peace, and tolerance – qualities that were regarded as defining Britishness. In this sense, anti-Semitic provocation of the BUF was understood as a foreign tactic used to stir up the volatility of the East End. Fascism was also regarded as the antithesis of both Labour politics as well as Britishness, for Labour advocated democracy whereas fascism stood for dictatorship. As a result, the racial aspect of fascist politics did not occupy a large part of the Labour discourse.

The measures that the Labour Party took in order to suppress fascist anti-Semitism and its accompanying disorders clearly reveal these priorities of the party. It emphasised an ordered, peaceful approach to solve the problem, thus constantly guarding against the United Front's methods of direct confrontation led by the Communist Party. Communism was regarded as identical with fascism in terms of its un-British authoritarian regimes and disorderly tactics. While distancing itself from the street confrontation between Fascists and Communist-led anti-fascists, London Labour carried out an educational campaign through publishing and distributing pamphlets. But the attempt received only a lukewarm response from local branches who neglected official guidance from the Labour leadership and joined counter-demonstrations with Communists, ILP members, and Jewish organisations, revealing the divided opinions within Labour. The judicial attempt, 1936 Public Order Act, did have some effect in decreasing the extent of the BUF anti-Semitic attacks in the East End, by indirect regulation of the style of political expression.

As in the previous debates on pre-1914 Jewish immigration, the post-1918 immigration restrictions, and coloured seamen in British merchant ships, the basic rationale stemmed from patriotic concerns. Languages of patriotism underpinned Labour's positions, whether they referred to opening British borders to the refugees, advocating free immigration as an ideal or excluding colonials from equal rights as British subjects, underpinned Labour's positions. Fascist racist agitation in the East End and the targeting Jews in particular, was regarded by Labour as a tactic of foreign totalitarian politics. Thus tackling anti-Semitic, racist agitation was seen as protecting British tolerance and public order which in turn suppressed potential conflicts innate in a multi-racial society like East London.

Labour's policy of defending British law and order against racist propaganda became topical again thirty years later when the country encountered a surge of immigrants from the New Commonwealth and racial discrimination against them. The first Race Relations Act introduced in 1965 by Wilson's Labour government also set protection of public order

as the foremost aim of the Act, and like the Jewish victims of the BUF in the 1930s, black immigrants became part of the problem of public disorder. The next chapter will examine how the Labour Party between 1945 and the 1960s, inherited ways of dealing with the issue of race, in this case the New Commonwealth immigration, from the earlier period examined in this thesis.

5. The Post-War Race Politics of the Labour Party from 1945 to the 1960s

In this chapter, we move to the period between the Second World War and the 1960s, where the idea of this thesis started. As already discussed in the introduction, most of the existing publications on the Labour Party and race have focused on the post-World War Second era. The 1960s was especially regarded as the starting point for the study of domestic race issues. This is mainly because Labour's position dramatically changed in this period. At the point when the Second World War was ended, the Labour Party was simply adhering to unrestricted Commonwealth immigration. But soon it accepted the idea of control, and then went further to combine that control with new measures for integrating immigrants. That Labour took an unprecedented bipartisan approach to the matter to establish a frame of British immigration-race policy has deservedly attracted scholarly attention.⁵⁰³ Having critically examined Labour's record of the period, many scholars argued that Labour abandoned its original principled objection to immigration restriction and increasingly converged with the Conservatives over practicing a racially discriminative control policy. By responding to white British voters, they also argued, the Labour Party contributed to racializing British society.⁵⁰⁴ In this perspective, the arrival of the non-white immigrants from the New Commonwealth in 1945 was seen as the root of all those changes.

On the other hand, some scholars have argued that Labour's position on immigration and race issue in the post-war era should be understood in a longer-term perspective. As early as 1965, Paul Foot examined Labour's responses to immigration control from the late nineteenth century Jewish immigration to the New Commonwealth immigration. He argued that there was already an "historical pattern" in which the Labour Party "[while] in Opposition bitterly opposed immigration controls ... yet [when] possessed of power ... it manipulated these controls much more ruthlessly than had its political opponents."⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ A number of studies have focused on the formation of bipartisanship in British politics on immigration and race issues, and the role that the 1964-70 Labour government played. For example, see Ira Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities: Race, Politics, and Migration in the United States, 1900-30, and Britain, 1948-69* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Anthony M. Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Saggar, *Race and Politics in Britain*; Layton-Henry, *Politics of Immigration*; Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*.

⁵⁰⁴ For example, in addition to the above studies, see Miles and Phizacklea, *Whiteman's Country*; Ben-Tovim et al., *Local Politics of Race*; Moore, *Racism and Black Resistance*; Rex and Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants*; John Solomos, *Race and Racism*.

⁵⁰⁵ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 186.

Thus, according to Foot, the 1964-70 Labour government did nothing exceptional or surprising, but just maintained its historical trajectory. Caroline Knowles also puts Labour's race politics in a wider timespan that goes back to the 1930s. She concluded that Labour's support for immigration control in the mid-1960s is less surprising if the party's approach to race issues in the 1930s is considered. Even by the 1930s, Knowles argued, Labour did not represent or protect racial minorities, and conceived their racial differences as something negative, which significantly influenced its politics relating to immigration and race in the 1960s.⁵⁰⁶

Agreeing that Labour's race politics needs to be viewed in a longer-term perspective, this thesis has paid attention to the ideological elements underlying the responses of the early Labour Party – radical liberalism, socialist internationalism, an exclusive notion of Britishness with whiteness in its core, and adherence to parliamentary democracy and public order. The Labour Party had to confront race issues such as East European Jewish immigration, the legislation of the immigration controls (the Aliens acts in 1905 and 1919), the race riots in some port areas targeting *coloured* seamen and the disturbances caused by the British Union of Fascist (BUF) in the 1930s in East London. It has been observed that the Labour Party in the early twentieth century officially opposed any attempt that had a touch of racism in it, and such opposition was often backed by ideological imperatives of liberalism and socialist internationalism. At the turn of the twentieth century, a patriotic appeal to the British tradition of liberty, tolerance, and an open-door, that was shared with the Liberals, was adopted as a weapon to fight the first modern immigration restriction, the 1905 Aliens Act. After the First World War, with the liberal advocacy of the British open-door tradition still prevailing, opposition to racist and anti-alien immigration controls, based on socialist internationalism, began to emerge in official Labour discourses, especially among parliamentary Labour MPs.

However, such an official anti-racist stance was rarely materialised on the political stage when the Labour Party was actually capable of making policies concerning immigration and race. On the contrary, the Labour minority governments in 1924 and 1929-31 not only accepted the Aliens Act that it had so fervently opposed, but constantly tried to show that it executed the Act to the utmost capacity. In addition, Labour MPs and trade unionists averted their eyes from the hardship of colonial non-white British seamen, openly admitting that consideration of “our own [white British] people,” was more

⁵⁰⁶ Knowles, *Race, Discourse, and Labourism*, 4.

important than international brotherhood. In so doing they revealed the priority of whiteness in their notion of Britishness.

Whichever causes the Labour Party advocated, at the centre of its race politics in the early twentieth century was the concern for what was thought to be British. Whether Labour was tackling anti-alien or racist policies with liberal and socialist principles, or to the contrary protecting interests of white British workers against the *foreign* and *coloured* threat to jobs, the most prevailing aspect of Labour's responses to race-related issues was that they always advocated themselves as protectors of British values. Patriotic rhetoric continued to play a central role in the face of the disturbances in the East End of London in the 1930s. The threat to various immigrants communities, particularly Jews, was understood by the London County Council, which was held by London Labour Party, as an attack on the British tradition of order and tolerance. These values were understood as a powerful means of suppressing potential conflicts inherent within a multi-racial society such as the East End. Therefore, London Labour Party's fight against the BUF was equated more with resistance to *alien* evils and the defence of British values rather than the support of the victims of racial attacks. Racial hatred was not seen as a problem in itself to be tackled, but something that created disorder and intolerance which were the antithesis of Britishness.

In the next part of the thesis comparisons will be made between the Labour Party's pre-1945 race politics and its later reactions to the New Commonwealth immigration since 1945. By doing so, we will be able to see that the race politics of the post-1945 era was not a new development made in response to the new phenomenon, but was shaped and influenced in large part by its earlier approach. To get a clear understanding of how Labour's position in party politics changed over time, this chapter will divide the post-war period into three parts: the 1945-51 Attlee Government, the long opposition period of 1951-64, and the Labour's return to power in 1964 until 1970. The Labour Party, encountering important events relating to *coloured* immigration in each period, employed similar approaches that were known in the early twentieth century. They included liberal patriotism, principled socialist internationalism, the notion of a multi-racial society and differences within British subjecthood based on skin colour. All of these will be revisited here in the context of post-Second World War Britain. The discussion in this chapter will use primary as well as secondary sources. There are a number of studies on post-war politics on immigration and race sufficient to provide evidence for the analysis of the Labour's approach to the subject.

5-1. The 1945-51 Labour Government

In order to deliver their 1945 election manifesto, which had asked the British electorate to “Let us face the future,” the Labour government had to deal with a number of post-war changes to politics, economy, and society. Britain was also experiencing a new migratory pattern, coloured immigration from the British colonies and the New Commonwealth. Clement Attlee’s Labour government dealt with two important events related to this new migration, although their significance and effect on future immigration and race policies in Britain was not fully appreciated at the time. The first of these events was the arrival of the first wave of post-war coloured immigrants in June 1948, when 492 Jamaicans disembarked from the *S.S. Empire Windrush* in London. They were the precursor of the mass migration that followed in the next decades. The other event was the 1948 British Nationality Act enacted in the same year, which imposed the fundamental structure and terms under which future immigration restrictions were enforced. At the time of the legislation, however, the Labour government did not realize the significance of the legal frame that the 1948 British Nationality Act would set in relation to the Empire and the New Commonwealth immigration.

Kathleen Paul has examined the two events in the context of how the Attlee government perceived Britishness. The 1948 British Nationality Act was a part of the Labour government’s grand imperial policy to maintain Britain’s influence in the world through tightening the unity between the UK and the Empire/Commonwealth. The 1948 Act would bind the Dominions and the colonies together within a single legal status of British subjecthood. The Labour government also devised migration schemes including emigration of white UK people to the Dominions to strengthen the unity of the UK and the Old Commonwealth through common British blood. The immigration of colonial people, in contrast, was unexpected and unwanted, so the government tried to exclude black British subjects from the narrowly defined community of white Britain, the *real* Britain. Labour was no different from the Conservatives in practising racially motivated immigration policies in the 1960s and afterwards.⁵⁰⁷

Refuting Paul’s argument that the British government devised immigration policies with racist motives, Randall Hansen has paid more attention to the conflicts between the

⁵⁰⁷ K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 9-24, 111-130.

causes of different ministers, and the balance of power between them, especially between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Colonial Affairs/Commonwealth Relations. The 1948 British Nationality Act was a reflection of the commitment of British politicians in the late 1940s and the 1950s to the Commonwealth, though that commitment was a conditional one reserved for the White Dominions. Thus, the immigration of colonials and the New Commonwealth people was an unforeseen migration, operating within the frame of the 1948 British Nationality Act but at the same time outside the intention of the government that had legislated it.⁵⁰⁸

The discussions of the Labour government about these two events remind us of the familiar themes that we have seen in the previous chapters. On the surface, in enacting the British Nationality Act the Labour government actively expressed its inclusive vision of Britain, speaking of its commitment to the international multi-racial community of the British Commonwealth where every individual residing in that community was to enjoy the same status and rights as British subjects, regardless of race, religion, and creed. In the realization of such commitment, the 1948 British Nationality Act declared that British subjecthood and the resulting right of free entry into the UK for all should unite Britain.

But a closer examination reveals that the Labour government envisaged a clear division within the peoples of the Empire and the Commonwealth made along the colour line. The division was made between the Old Dominions where the majority of residents were white British descents, and the New Commonwealth and the colonies where different races were to be guided towards an advanced civilization by Britain. Therefore, the same legal status of the colonials and the people of the New Commonwealth did not actually give them equality with white Britons or guarantee acceptance of them within the concept of the real Britons in any meaningful sense.

Hence, it is not surprising that the Labour government did not welcome the non-white immigrants in 1948, when dark skinned people from Jamaica actually moved to the British Isles. In an exclusively defined notion of Britishness in which white skin colour occupied a central place, these Jamaican immigrants were regarded not only as different people but also as invaders. This was repetition of what had happened in the early twentieth century, when the Labour Party advocated free migration and international brotherhood with inclusive rhetoric, but at the same time deemed the presence of dark-skinned people, the coloured British seamen, in the UK as a threat to the jobs and lives

⁵⁰⁸ Hansen, Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, v-viii.

of “our own people.”

The British Nationality Act 1948

The Labour government made a new citizenship law in 1948, the British Nationality Act. It defined the legal status of all peoples residing within the British Empire and the Commonwealth as British subjects, and conferred rights such as free entry to and from the UK, residence in the UK, and voting. The 1948 British Nationality Act changed the way by which the status of a British subject was defined, which had been hitherto based upon the allegiance of individuals in the British Empire and the Commonwealth to the Crown. From its enactment, the status of the British subject would be based on the citizenship of individuals divided into two categories: the Citizens of the United Kingdom and the Colonies on one hand, and the Citizens of the Independent Commonwealth Countries on the other.⁵⁰⁹

The importance of the 1948 British Nationality Act has not been neglected by scholars. Conferring unrestricted right of immigration into the UK, the Act imposed considerable limitations on the British governments’ hope to restrict such movement. The 1948 Act was commonly judged to reflect the Labour government’s naive idealism and hypocrisy which was soon exposed in the face of actual immigration. Gary Freeman noted that successive legislation of immigration restriction from the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was a process of curtailing the citizenship rights that had been too generously extended.⁵¹⁰ Vaughan Bevan deemed the Act a “misguided idealism” of the Labour government, which was enacted as there was “no immigration problem” in the UK at the time.⁵¹¹ The Labour government attached no serious consideration to the possibility of *coloured* immigration in 1948.

However, these judgements are only partially true. As Randall Hansen has rightly shown, the 1948 British Nationality Act never aimed to boast of Britain’s generosity in relationship with her colonies and the New Commonwealth. Rather, the main concern of the Act was the unity between the UK and the white Dominion countries. The Act was expected to consolidate it by providing a constitutional basis for unhampered movement between those areas. Indeed, the movement of people within the British Empire and the

⁵⁰⁹ Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 37-49.

⁵¹⁰ Gary P. Freeman, *Immigrant Labour and Racial Conflict in Industrial Societies: The French and British Experience, 1945-1975* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 38.

⁵¹¹ Bevan, *British Immigration Law*, 113.

Commonwealth had been dominated by that between the UK and the Old Commonwealth countries – that is, the white settled communities in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. This was the pattern that the Labour government hoped to maintain through the British Nationality Act.⁵¹² At the time of the legislation, Labour did not see that the Act would not only legally allow unwanted immigration but also restrain the government's authority to restrict it.

The fact that the government felt a need to unite the Commonwealth with the 1948 British Nationality Act reflected deep worries about Britain's weakening position in the post-war world. Elected right after the devastation of the Second World War, the Labour government took on the task of rebuilding the nation's damaged economy as well as its endangered international power. The solution that the Labour government found was strengthening the tie between Britain and its Empire and the Commonwealth. According to Paul, it was not only imperial glory that the Commonwealth offered, but also practical economic and political advantages: "The sterling area offered a financial buffer against Britain's true plight of accumulated wartime debt and major infrastructural damage and neglect. Australia and New Zealand provided dollar-free sources of meat, wheat, timber, and dairy produce and, with Canada, took in 40 per cent of British exports."⁵¹³ Charlotte Riley has also pointed out that the desire to regenerate the British economy through colonial bounty, especially that of Africa, led the Attlee government to establish the Colonial Development Corporation in 1948.⁵¹⁴ For British politicians the recognition that Britain was the centre of its vast Empire and the Commonwealth helped maintain the conviction that the country still occupied an equal position with the United States and Soviet Union on the international stage.⁵¹⁵

However, the members of the Old Commonwealth already slipped out of London's direct control, searching for their future interests in other countries, especially with the United States, rather than with Britain. Formally, the Old Commonwealth countries had enjoyed equal status with Britain since the 1931 Statute of Westminster which had stipulated that decisions by the imperial Parliament in London were no longer automatically applicable in these areas. The 1939 Ogdensburg Agreement between Canada and the United States was the first treaty between a Commonwealth state and a

⁵¹² Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 52-56.

⁵¹³ K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 1.

⁵¹⁴ Riley, "Monstrous Predatory Vampires," 72.

⁵¹⁵ K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 1.

foreign nation, and symbolically showed that the Dominion nations were beginning to search elsewhere for their future interests and strategic security. Australia and New Zealand were also starting to look for support from the United States after a series of war-time conflicts such as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. This trend of increasing autonomy among the Old Commonwealth nations came when their close co-operation with Britain was needed most. That Canada's declaration of a plan to create its own citizenship scheme in 1945, and the fact that other Old Commonwealth countries were considering similar plans, directly stimulated the British government to devise a concrete strategy to stop the Old Dominions from breaking away from the UK and draw them back.⁵¹⁶

Therefore, the inclusion of the New Commonwealth - India, Pakistan, and Ceylon - and the colonies was advocated with the inclusive language of grand idealism of Commonwealth unity, similar to the discourses used when opposing the early twentieth century immigration control. But it was the result of a scheme that was essentially aimed at the Old Commonwealth nations of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. It is true that the people from the former areas were allowed into the UK, and sometimes they were approached to do so, as it would be a visual expression of the ideal of the British Empire and the Commonwealth. However, their presence was neither thought to be permanent nor to represent an essential affinity through common *blood-stock*. Within the advocacy based on international language of the wider intercommunity of the Empire, the key element of British identity still remained to be the white skin colour.

Although the 1948 British Nationality Act was principally designed in response to concerns about the relations with the Old Commonwealth, the Labour government was also committed to the inclusion of the colonies and the New Commonwealth, though in a different way. The notion of "Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies," for example, reflected a commitment to the colonials in a genuine but paternalistic sense. Some members from the Opposition resisted the idea of grouping together people of the United Kingdom with colonials within the same category of citizenship on the grounds of essential differences between the two groups of peoples. The Home Secretary, James Chuter Ede, advocated the need to adopt such a system of citizenship:

I know there are also some who feel that it is wrong to have a citizenship of

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 1-2, 8.

the United Kingdom and Colonies. Some people feel that it would be a bad thing to give the coloured races of the Empire the idea that, in some way or other, they are the equals of people in this country. The Government do not subscribe to that view ... we believe and we hope it will be understood that citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies means that ... we recognize the right of the colonial peoples to be regarded as men and brothers with the people of this country.⁵¹⁷

The problem was that the idea of equality employed here did not necessarily equate with the equal ability to exercise given rights. Colonial people were, borrowing the Home Secretary's own words deemed not as *men and brothers*, but in effect as young children or pupils who needed the guidance of the mother country. His commitment to single citizenship reflected the faith in the civilizing effect of British imperialism: "We believe wholeheartedly that the common citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies is an essential part of the development of the relationship between this Mother Country and the Colonies who are administered in varying degrees of self-government and tutelage by the Colonial Office."⁵¹⁸ In the Labour government's view, therefore, colonials were the same as white British in the UK or the Old Commonwealth only in terms of their legal status as British subjects. The rights attached to that British subject status were generously conferred by the UK government on them as a symbolic expression of the united community of the British Commonwealth, and colonial subjects were expected to advance through British guidance to a level where they might practice their rights in some distant future. Ede noted that, "it is true that we cannot admit all these backward peoples immediately into the full rights that British subjects in this country enjoy."⁵¹⁹ Like the early twentieth century black seamen, coloured British colonials were not seen as genuinely British, like white Britons, by the Labour Party. The Labour government did not expect at all that coloured colonials would actually use the rights given to them. Therefore, it was understandable for the government to be perplexed when people from the New Commonwealth and colonies immediately grasped the opportunities the 1948 Act provided.

There was a clear division between the two groups who shared the same status and

⁵¹⁷ 453 H.C. Deb. 5s. 7 Jul 1948, cols. 393-94.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., col. 394.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., col. 398.

rights in the multi-racial community of the British Empire and the Commonwealth. The Labour government's commitment to that community was therefore twofold. For those of white British descent in the Old Commonwealth countries the constitutional basis of the 1948 Act would promote closer intimacy and frequent movement between kith and kin. For the other colonial and New Commonwealth subjects the Act would prove "the British Commonwealth of Nations of great historic nationalities"⁵²⁰ to be a multi-racial society where every region enjoyed equal status, privileged rights, liberty, self-government, and democracy, a point the Home Secretary stressed in his somewhat condescending speech.

By linking the United Kingdom and the Colonies, we must give these people a feeling that ... we recognize them as fellow-citizens and that our object, as far as they are concerned, is to hope to raise them to such a position of education, of training and of experience that they too shall be able to share in the grant of full self-government which this House has so generously given during the last few years to other places. It is in the full faith that the future development of this great bulwark of democratic civilization will be helped and strengthened by the Measure that we commend it to the House.⁵²¹

The First Consideration of Immigration Restriction

The first wave of post-war coloured immigrants, however, soon revealed what kind of 'multi-racial society' the Labour government had in mind. It was a wider community containing plural nations or ethnic units, *each in their place*, as we have already seen in the character of Labour internationalism in previous chapters. But a multi-racial community *within* Britain was viewed with suspicion as revealed in chapters 3 and 4. And that kind of suspicion became more alert in June 1948 when Arthur Creech Jones, the Secretary of Colonial Affairs, heard that five-hundred Jamaicans would soon arrive at a London port. He right away submitted a report explaining the background of the migration and proposed arrangements for the Jamaican immigrants. In this report, Creech Jones clearly recognized the right of the immigrants to freely enter the UK as British subjects as stated in the 1948 British Nationality Act: "the men concerned are all British subjects. The Government of Jamaica has no legal power to prevent their departure from

⁵²⁰ Ibid., col. 397.

⁵²¹ Ibid., col. 398.

Jamaica and the Government of the United Kingdom has no legal power to prevent their landing.”⁵²²

Despite the lawfulness of the immigration, and recognition of the subject-hood of the migrants, the focus was on how to prevent further arrivals from the British colonies. From the start, the immigration was viewed with suspicion, and perceived as a “problem” that had to be “tackled.” The report stated, “we do not know who were the ringleaders in the enterprise, ... The movement was certainly not organized or encouraged by the Colonial Office or the Jamaican government. On the contrary, every possible step has been taken by the Colonial Office and by the Jamaican government to discourage these influxes.”⁵²³ It went on to discuss possible administrative measures likely to curb departure from the colonies, such as explaining the difficulties the immigrants would meet in finding accommodation and employment in England.⁵²⁴ George Isaacs, the Minister of Labour, expressed his hope that “no encouragement will be given to others to follow their example.”⁵²⁵

The report shows that this time the Labour government did provide assistance to the immigrants, helping them find accommodations and transport to final destinations, which is different from Labour’s neglect of the hardship of colonial seamen. Underground shelter at South Clapham tube station was allotted to immigrants who had no pre-arranged accommodation, and food and transport were also prepared. But these measures were driven by the distrust of the immigrants rather than by generosity towards them. Accommodation, for instance, was provided as it was thought a “considerable convenience in having the men all together.”⁵²⁶ In aiding the immigrants, most attention was paid to the danger to social disorder they might pose: “Unless there is to be a public scandal and the possibilities of disorder, some arrangements must be made to deal with the situation.”⁵²⁷

All these responses were the reiteration of what had happened in in the East End and large port towns in the 1930s. The Labour government's debates on what to do with the Jamaican immigrants in the future, were similar to the discourses surrounding coloured seamen in the inter-war period. Just like them, the newly arrived Jamaicans were deemed

⁵²² CAB 129/28, CP (48) 154, 18 Jun 1948, TNA.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 118.

⁵²⁶ CAB 129/28, CP (48) 154, 18 Jun 1948, TNA.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

as different from the white British, and their arrival was also seen as an invasion that would create social disorder and threaten the quality of lives of 'our own people'. Despite their legal status as British subjects recognised by the government, they simply did not belong to British society.

In short, the multi-racial society that the Labour government advocated was not an individual country or nation within which people from various ethnic backgrounds mingled together. Rather, it was a world-wide community with national boundaries which kept the different peoples of the colonies and the New Commonwealth literally in their place. When these people attempted to settle in the UK, such advocacy vanished, and the 'fear of disorder and conflict' quickly framed the situation. Despite the changed post-1945 context in which Labour government sought to find a solution for domestic and international difficulties in a bold design of the unity of the British Empire and the Commonwealth, underlying vision of internationalism and a multi-racial community remained hardly changed.

Kathleen Paul has compared the Labour government's treatment and recognition of the colonial immigrants with those of the European Voluntary Workers (EVWs) - continental men and women including DPs (Displaced Persons) and veterans from the Baltic region like Ukraine, Poland, and Italy, who were recruited by the British government to fill post-war labour shortages. Paul points out that the two cases reveal the strikingly different attitudes of the British government towards the two groups of immigrants. The British government helped the EVWs' settlement in the UK by providing practical aids, such as cash grants, hostels, train journeys, and jobs. It also supported their emotional adjustment to British society. For example, the EVWs were provided with English classes, craft fairs, and information leaflets about the British way of life. The European aliens were expected not only to fill the job vacancies but also to be fully assimilated "into the British way of life and become in due course and to all intents and purposes, fully fledged British citizens."⁵²⁸ Therefore, the recruitment process involved careful consideration of their potential to be integrated into the British nation, and that is why it sometimes employed eugenicist languages like "a very tough and muscular race," "first class people," or "great benefit to our stock."⁵²⁹ The colonial immigrants, in contrast, "were met and housed to avoid 'disorder' and with the determination that this

⁵²⁸ K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 85.

⁵²⁹ 433 H.C. Deb. 5s. 12 Feb 1947, cols. 406, 749-66, 1531; K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 84.

was to be a once-only affair.”⁵³⁰

The records of the Attlee government’s later years vividly show that the Labour Party had wanted to impose controls upon New Commonwealth immigration long before it reluctantly accepted the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. Internal discussions on immigration of the Labour and Conservative cabinets reveal strikingly similar approaches to the matter, that is, the exclusion of colonial and the New Commonwealth British subjects. “The Cabinet’s discussion turned mainly on the means of preventing any further increase in the coloured population of this country,” because “social problems were more likely to arise if coloured immigrants into this country formed themselves into residential colonies.”⁵³¹ The Labour government examined possible ways to prevent the permanent settlement of the colonials. For instance, it discussed empowering the Home Secretary to deport overseas British subjects who were found undesirable, which would enable the authorities to concentrate on British subjects who entered the UK as stowaways.⁵³² In the end, none of these proposals were recommended to be adopted.⁵³³

At the centre of these discussions there was undoubtedly the question of 'colour'. Colonial British subjects were considered “other races.”⁵³⁴ As soon as the *Empire Windrush* had docked, several Labour Party members expressed concern that “uncontrolled immigration without any selection on grounds of health, education, character, or customs constituted a threat to the ‘profound unity’ of the British people.” In a letter to the Prime Minister they warned that “an influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to bring discord and unhappiness among all concerned.”⁵³⁵ The resistance to colonial immigrants did not change even when the labour shortages that Britain was facing were apparent. Ministers rejected the possibility of recruiting colonial subjects to fill vacancies in British industries. For instance, M. A. Bevan said, with “regards to the possible importation of West Indian labour ... we must dismiss any idea of this from the start,” as the colonial subjects would be “far more trouble than they are worth.”⁵³⁶

Ironically, the colour factor made the cabinet decide not to touch the right of unrestricted entry of colonials and New Commonwealth people that had been guaranteed

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 118.

⁵³¹ CAB 128/17, CM 37 (50), 19 Jun 1950, TNA.

⁵³² CAB 129/44, CP (51) 51, 12 Feb 1951, TNA.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ “Working Party on the Employment in the UK of Surplus Colonial Labour.” CO 1006/2, TNA.

⁵³⁵ HO 213/244, 22 Jun 1948, TNA.

⁵³⁶ K. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 122.

in the 1948 British Nationality Act. This points to the fact that the context surrounding the issue of race radically changed after the Second World War. ‘Race’ became a far more dangerous subject to handle after Nazi’s unprecedented racial crime, and the fact that Britain had led the battle against such evil made it very difficult for British politicians to openly speak that they did not want coloured people in Britain. Cabinet ministers knew very well that any measures implying racial discrimination could not be justified. The ministers were aware that “coloured persons would be mainly concerned” if such measure were implemented. “[A]ny solution depending on an apparent or concealed colour test would be so invidious as to make it impossible of adoption” and this would “give rise to resentment in India, Pakistan and Ceylon and in the more advanced Colonial territories.”⁵³⁷ So the conclusion was that “it would be difficult to justify restrictions on persons who are citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies, if no comparable restrictions were imposed on persons who are citizens of other Commonwealth countries.”⁵³⁸

Furthermore, if the immigration restriction on the New Commonwealth and the colonies led to the abolition of the principle of free entry for all the regions within the Empire and the Commonwealth, then this implied that there would be no privilege in remaining in the British Commonwealth, in which the UK played a central role. Along with the recognition of the unacceptability of skin colour-based exclusion, it was the commitment to Britain’s central role in the Empire and the Commonwealth that prevented the Labour government from introducing control: “The United Kingdom has a special status as the mother country, and freedom to enter and remain in the United Kingdom at will is one of the main practical benefits enjoyed by British subjects.”⁵³⁹

In other words, Labour’s consideration of restriction and its final decision to maintain unrestricted immigration was based upon the careful calculation of the practical advantages and disadvantages that each case would pose to the desperate need for Commonwealth unity: “Should not consideration also be given to the wider question whether the time had come to restrict the existing right of any British subject to enter the United Kingdom? ... Was it certain that the balance of advantage still lay against taking this course in the United Kingdom itself?”⁵⁴⁰ After such careful deliberation, the Attlee

⁵³⁷ CAB 129/44, CP (51) 51, 12 Feb 1951, TNA.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ CAB 128/17, CM 37 (50), 19 Jun 1950, TNA.

government decided that “it is undesirable particularly at the present stage of Commonwealth development, that such restrictions should be imposed on citizens of the independent Commonwealth countries.”⁵⁴¹

To conclude, colonial immigration during the 1945-51 Labour government period was an unpredicted and unwanted phenomenon, taking place within the constitutional safeguard conferred by the 1948 British Nationality Act that originally targeted the Old Commonwealth. Still, the Labour government chose not to curb such immigration because of the political unacceptability of restriction based on skin colour and the adverse effect that restriction would have on the Commonwealth. The government basically could not take the risk of jeopardising the unity between the UK and the Old Commonwealth countries. In this post-war context, as Randall Hansen has noted, colonial and New Commonwealth immigration was “tolerated in the name of the Old Dominions.”⁵⁴²

5-2. The Long Opposition Period, 1951-64

After defeat in the 1951 election, the Labour Party lapsed into a long period of Opposition until 1964. This period marks similarity in Labour’s approach to race issues when it was in opposition in the early twentieth century, in which the party spoke out its official stance of rejecting racist measures. As it did in 1905 and 1919, it attacked the attempt of Conservative government to impose restriction on immigration as selfish, exclusivist and racist measure. But this advocacy of racial equality as official party stance was expressed by the late 1950s. During the early period of the decade, the Labour Party’s involvement in race and immigration issues was confined to the activities of back benchers, which was also the case for the Conservatives. In the early and middle 1950s, both the Conservative government and the Labour front benches did not talk much about these issues in the Commons. This period has been marked as a time of pre-political consensus when immigration and race were implicitly excluded from central political discourse.⁵⁴³ The silence about the matter in the main political arena can be attributed to the judgement that the scale of the problem was relatively small, although the Conservative government did not welcome colonial and New Commonwealth immigration either. Most of all, however, nearly all politicians were reluctant to deal directly with issues like immigration and race

⁵⁴¹ CAB 129/44, CP (51) 51, 12 Feb 1951, TNA.

⁵⁴² Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 60.

⁵⁴³ Katznelson, *Black Men, White*, 125.

that were unfamiliar to them. Katznelson has explained the reason for such reluctance: “domestic racial issues, when first raised, were worrying, confusing, incoherent and anomic, unlike the class issues.”⁵⁴⁴ Therefore, through the implicit and unofficial consensus between the government and the Labour Opposition, immigration and race were not given political attention until the late 1950s. These issues were left to a few backbench MPs.

Like the 1945-51 Labour government, the Conservative government judged that the scale of immigration was not large enough to require official control. The cabinet discussions throughout the 1950s show that the preference was still for keeping the UK’s door open to all Commonwealth peoples. Though the Conservative government by no means welcomed the New Commonwealth immigration, it wished to keep the UK’s position at the centre of the British Empire and the Commonwealth. Hansen has shown that the deep commitment of the Conservative government to the Old Commonwealth maintained the open-door policy until as late as early 1961.⁵⁴⁵

Without discussions raised by the Labour Party front bench, several back benchers and local members brought up the issue individually, from either the integration or control point of view. On the control side were John Hynd, Harry Hynd, Albert Evans, George Rogers, and James Harrison. Unlike the Conservative anti-immigrant activists, such as Cyril Osborne and Norman Panell, who used openly racist language, these Labour MPs lobbied in parliament for immigration control on the grounds of insufficient social resources. John Hynd, initiating the first Commons debate on immigration in 1954, demanded a “way by which it [immigration] can be better regulated, even if it is not necessary in any way to restrict it.”⁵⁴⁶ He made it clear from the start of his remark that his demand for control had nothing to do with colour-concerns, and that immigration control and race were separate agendas. Hynd denied that the difficulties immigrants were experiencing in the areas of housing and employment were related to “a colour bar.”⁵⁴⁷ This position of the Labour lobby group, however, would soon be refuted by the official position of the party a few years later.

Other MPs campaigned for integration of immigrants. Marcus Lipton, Labour member for Brixton, kept pressing for the government’s assistance and a central guideline to deal

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 62-79.

⁵⁴⁶ 532 H.C. Deb. 5s. 5 Nov 1954, col. 821.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., col. 823.

with the problems immigrants and local government faced.⁵⁴⁸ Private bills for banning racial discrimination were also tabled several times by two Labour MPs – in 1950 by Reginald Sorenson, member for Leyton, and in 1956 by Fenner Brockway, member for Eton and Slough. Brockway was so persistent in his efforts to forbid racial discrimination that he introduced Private Members' Bills annually for nine years. However, all these attempts (and those proposing control), received little interest or support from within Labour frontbenches.⁵⁴⁹

In March 1955 the Commonwealth Sub-Committee of the National Executive of the Labour Party made a statement outside parliament, on colour prejudice. It denounced hostile reactions to immigrants as attacks “based on colour,” and suggested as a solution four courses of action: to call upon all affiliated bodies to oppose racial discrimination, to seek Commonwealth discussions on immigration, to request that the TUC establish a special committee to study problems of employment and union membership among immigrants and to call a conference of local authorities and coloured representatives to discuss the problem.⁵⁵⁰ In September 1955 the London Labour Group and the London Labour Party executive committee gathered to examine the immigration issue in relation to housing and welfare, opposing “any unilateral action by the Government to restrict immigration from the Commonwealth.”⁵⁵¹ In the 1956 Party conference a resolution opposing racial discrimination was passed.⁵⁵²

Then in 1958 the issue of New Commonwealth immigration became a matter of urgent national interest. In August and September that year, violent clashes between white and black residents in Nottingham and Notting Hill in London drew the attention of the whole country to the issue. The race riots of 1958, though not the first confrontation between black and white⁵⁵³, involved about 4,000 people, most of whom were white attacking a small number of black immigrants. Newspaper front page reports, television debates and opinion polls regarding the presence of the New Commonwealth immigrants followed the events, all of which revealed the hostile attitude of British society in general. After the event, coloured immigration was brought from back to front stage, and placed at the

⁵⁴⁸ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 166.

⁵⁴⁹ Anthony Lester and Geoffrey Bindman, *Race and Law* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 107-9.

⁵⁵⁰ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 167.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities*, 128.

⁵⁵³ There had been occasional clashes between white and black residents in Liverpool in 1948, in London in 1949 and 1954. Layton-Henry, *Politics of Immigration*, 37.

top of the political agenda.

The immediate response from the Labour Party was to officially deplore the violence as a manifestation of racial prejudice, and to oppose immigration control, plainly implying that it was related to the skin colour of the immigrants. The leader Hugh Gaitskell declared, “whatever local difficulties there may be, nothing can justify the riots and hooliganism of the past few days.”⁵⁵⁴ The Party endorsed Fenner Brockway’s bill banning racial discrimination, and the National Executive’s statement condemning all forms of racial prejudice was endorsed at the party conference held right after the riot. It crystallized that the Labour Party’s official approach which opposed to immigration control as essentially related to the issues of race. Support for controls was condemned as capitulation to the worst excesses of racism.⁵⁵⁵ There was also the consideration of the UK’s commitment to the New Commonwealth: “We are firmly convinced that any form of British legislation limiting Commonwealth immigrants to this country would be disastrous to our status in the Commonwealth and to the confidence of the Commonwealth peoples.”⁵⁵⁶

Though in a minority position within the Labour Party, and not supported by many, there were Labour members who pointed to black people as the root of the trouble. George Rogers, who was the MP for North Kensington which covered the Notting Hill area, and was also one of the Labour Party control lobby members, expressed his opposition to immigration more strongly: “the government must introduce legislation quickly to end the tremendous influx of coloured people from the Commonwealth ... overcrowding has fostered vice, drugs, prostitution and the use of knives. For years the white people have been tolerant. Now their tempers are up.”⁵⁵⁷ James Harrison, member for Nottingham West, also supported this view. Their conviction resonated with the white British people’s hostility towards the immigrants. Opinion polls taken after the event revealed that most respondents, in some case almost four out of five, favoured immigration controls.⁵⁵⁸

However, the Macmillan government did not immediately table an immigration control bill, despite an increasing demand from a Conservative backbench pressure group who used public opinion as evidence of the popular resentment of immigration. The Conservative government certainly did not want to be seen populist by swiftly

⁵⁵⁴ *Times*, 4 Sep 1958.

⁵⁵⁵ Layton-Henry, *Politics of Immigration*, 39.

⁵⁵⁶ Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 88.

⁵⁵⁷ *Daily Sketch*, 2 Sep 1958, quoted in Layton-Henry, *Politics of Immigration*, 39.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

conforming to extra-governmental and public pressure. On the other hand, however, the cabinet was seriously debating how to respond to the matter. Adoption of official control came only when the balance of departmental opinions leant towards control against an open-door policy, combined with increasing popular pressure for restriction. By mid-1961, it became increasingly uncertain whether keeping the open-door policy as an expression of commitment to the British Commonwealth would bring the UK practical advantages, especially when affairs like the Suez Crisis had already aroused disaffection for the Commonwealth ideal among politicians.⁵⁵⁹ In October 1961 the Conservative Home Secretary R. A. Butler submitted an ill-prepared draft of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill to parliament.

The Labour Party had, since its official declaration of opposition to immigration control and racial discrimination in 1958, kept this position. Labour MP Raymond Gunter even complained of the party's "perfunctory mentions of racial equality"⁵⁶⁰. Still, the immigration issue was hugely important for Labour, especially when it had to recover from its heavy defeat in the 1959 general election and the consequent disputes amongst the party. The belief in racial equality was one of few issues around which most members of the party could unequivocally unite. In March 1960 the National Executive issued a draft confirming the party's position based on the socialist international principle: "The British Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. Its central ideal is the brotherhood of man. Its purpose is to make this ideal a reality everywhere. Accordingly ... it rejects discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, or creed and holds that men should accord to one another equal consideration and status in recognition of the fundamental dignity of Man."⁵⁶¹

This principled stance of the Labour Party, in opposing immigration control as a manifestation of racial discrimination, culminated in the second reading of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill that took place in November 1961. The Labour MPs present united around their leader Gaitskell, though a small number of Labour MPs were dissatisfied. Rejoicing was particularly strong among the Labour left, who had been against the leader upon Clause Four and the disarmament issues.⁵⁶² Michael Foot praised the moment when "the spectacle of the Labour Party asserting its principles in the face of

⁵⁵⁹ Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 95-97.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶¹ Draft of the National Executive, released on 16 Mar 1960, quoted in Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities*, 136.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 137.

what is supposed to be the popular need of the moment and resolving to withstand all the pressures of expediency. ... The Party is united, and not merely united but exhilarated.”⁵⁶³

Labour’s arguments made in the second reading of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill were based on three points. Firstly, Labour saw the bill as incompatible with its socialist ideals. The government’s proposal was a “plain anti-colour measure” (Huge Gaitskell) constituting “bare-faced, open race discrimination” (Patrick Gordon Walker).⁵⁶⁴ Moreover, Labour claimed that the Conservatives knowingly weakened the UK’s commitment to the Commonwealth by not consulting the governments of the colonies and the New Commonwealth, which would be directly affected by the introduction of immigration control. When Saffron Butler, the Home Secretary, claimed that the consultation with oversea governments “goes on all the time,” Labour members kept pressing him to disclose the date and the contents of such discussion. The resultant bill, at least in Labour’s view, had no proof that it sincerely reflected the concerns of those oversea countries.⁵⁶⁵ Lastly, Labour accused the government of scapegoating immigrants. Proposed “in a period of full employment,” the bill assumed that the unskilled immigrants would be the main problem in a potential recession.⁵⁶⁶ To Gaitskell, this simply meant the government was ready to blame immigrants for all the problems the UK might face in the future, and was not willing to solve them.

Does the government deal with it[the problem] by seeking to combat social evils, by building more houses and enforcing laws against overcrowding, by using every educational means at their disposal to create tolerance and mutual understanding, and by emphasising to our own people the value of these immigrants and setting their face firmly against all forms of racial intolerance and discrimination[?] ... [T]here is no shred of evidence that the Government has even seriously tried to go along this course and make a proper inquiry into the nature of this problem. They have yielded to the crudest clamour, ‘Keep them out.’⁵⁶⁷

In conclusion, the record of the Labour Party on immigration and race in the 1950s

⁵⁶³ Michael Foot, “The Way to Beat the Tories,” *Tribune*, 24 Nov 1961, 5.

⁵⁶⁴ 649 H.C. Deb. 5s. 16 Nov 1961, cols. 706, 799, 803.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, cols. 692-93.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, cols. 693-94.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 801.

and the early 1960s repeated that adopted when in Opposition in the early twentieth century. It fiercely resisted anything touched with racism by the Tory government. As in the immigration restriction attempts of the earlier periods, the Labour Party attacked immigration control on the grounds that it contradicted several principles such as racial equality and the international brotherhood of men. The Aliens Acts in the early twentieth century were criticized chiefly as manifestations of racial discrimination and excessive nationalism that would hurt the solidarity of the international working classes. It was also denied that such restrictive measures would solve the problems that British workers were facing.

Here, it would be worth comparing the response of Kier Hardie with that of Gaitskell. In 1904 parliament debates on the Aliens Bill Kier Hardie disputed government's argument that Jewish immigrants were imposing serious burden on lives of British working classes, causing excessive competition for the housing and jobs. Kier Hardie, calling the Aliens Bill "a fraudulent and deceitful measure presented as a false remedy for British workingmen's problems to veil the genuine causes of such," argued that exclusion of immigrants would never "touch the fringe of question," and the Unemployed Workmen Bill should have "occupied the place which this fraudulent measure occupied."⁵⁶⁸

However, as we have seen, once the Labour Party seized power it did not apply its position on race and immigration to actual policies. The exemplary responses of a socialist party should not be taken at face value. When in Opposition the party followed the route expected of a socialist democratic party. For the Labour Party, the struggle for justice was not merely a struggle against a particular wrong, but against wrong in general. "The Labour Party cause, therefore, included a strong note of internationalism and anti-racialism."⁵⁶⁹ Furthermore, when it did not have to deal with the *problem* sitting on the Opposition bench, it was natural that it adopted the socialist language of international solidarity and equality. To take a remark of one Conservative Party member at that time, "Labour's traditions of the brotherhood of man left them with no option but to take a strong stand on multi-racialism."⁵⁷⁰ This principled position, however, rarely led to concrete action. For example, the private members' bills presented by Sorenson and

⁵⁶⁸ 145 H.C. Deb. 4s. 2 May 1905, col. 782.

⁵⁶⁹ Rex and Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants*, 59.

⁵⁷⁰ Remark of William Deedes in a Conservative political centre pamphlet, August 1968, quoted in Rex and Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants*, 59.

Brockway banning racial discrimination raised little interest or support from within the party. Likewise, despite Labour's declarations and resolutions on racial equality and unrestricted immigration during the 1950s, it did little to either educate the public or take the issue to public debate.⁵⁷¹

5-3. The 1964-70 Labour Government

In this period Harold Wilson's Labour Government gained an important lead in British immigration and race politics. By combining tight immigration control with measures for integrating New Commonwealth immigrants who settled in the UK, it established the foundation of British immigration-race policies. The coupling of two separate policies, within the basic concept of achieving domestic racial equality by regulating the number of incoming immigrants at the border, was a result of Labour's calculation that conflicting demands surrounding the immigration issue needed to be settled through political compromise. On one side, there were Labour MPs and supporters who wanted the government to show a progressive stance on the issue which touched the sensitive subject of race. On the other side was what was considered the popular demands for blocking the entry of coloured immigrants into British society. By satisfying these pressures coming from opposite directions of the political spectrum, the Labour government sought to keep the issue under control in order to prevent it from exerting a dangerous influence in elections and on public order.

As soon as they gained power, the Labour government followed the historical pattern of the early twentieth century. As Paul Foot summarised, in 1965 Harold Wilson's Labour government set out to implement immigration control more vigorously than Tories who had introduced it in 1961.⁵⁷² Immigration control under the Labour government went through further intensification twice, in 1965 and in 1968. Through the process, coloured immigrants from the New Commonwealth were driven to an outer zone of *real* Britishness, as tests at the border became increasingly based on white descent and skin colour rather than on the economic needs of the UK, while the 1948 British Nationality Act defining the legal Britishness of immigrants was still valid.

A departure from both the party's own historical attitude to immigration control and from the Conservatives came when the Labour government created two Race Relations

⁵⁷¹ Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities*, 128.

⁵⁷² Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 186.

Acts in 1965 and in 1968. The primary aim of the Acts was to ban racial discrimination against immigrants in public places and integrate them into the society. But the measures were also expected to deflect liberal pressure within and outside the party from the very fact that the government had accepted immigration control. As there was no way of turning back to the laissez-faire years of immigration, particularly after having seen the dangerous power of the race issue in the general election, the Labour government adopted a new liberal policy initiative to oppose and tackle racial discrimination. In other words, while the Labour government in the mid-1960s abandoned its traditional official liberal line on Commonwealth immigration by accepting restriction, it redirected its progressive impulse towards the integration and prohibition of racial discrimination. At the same time, the Labour government made these two policies inseparable in one coherent approach. This is most clearly shown in junior Home Office minister Roy Hattersley's famous declaration, "Without integration, limitation is inexcusable; without limitation, integration is impossible."⁵⁷³

But Labour's liberal step toward a policy of integration was severely limited by the immigration control of its partner policy, which operated on the notion that British subjects with dark skin colour could not belong to Britain in a genuine sense. Integration backed up by measures banning racial discrimination was primarily aimed at securing public order, rather than establishing racial equality as a principle in itself. Labour's approach to racial attacks against coloured immigrants followed a path that had been laid down about thirty years earlier. In the 1930s, the London Labour administration, facing the fascists anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish people, defined the situation as essentially a threat to public order rather than as an assault on a specific ethnic group. In a similar fashion, hostilities against the New Commonwealth immigrants were approached in terms of public order, not of racial equality. From this perspective, both the coloured immigrants in the 1960s and the Jews in the 1930s were simply a part of the problem to be resolved by governmental policies rather than beneficiaries of them.

Overall, the Labour government in this period followed an emerging consensus in British politics on the issue of immigration and race. While immigration control aimed to reduce the number of immigrants and to cut off the cause of the problem, integration was designed to prevent public and political insecurity. The latter was easily aggravated by the hostility of white residents' towards immigrants who had already entered the country.

⁵⁷³ 709 H.C. Deb. 5s. 23 Mar 1965, col. 443.

Labour's main focus here was to satisfy various voices within and outside the party, and to prevent it from exerting an influence on elections. In short, the Labour Party wanted to keep the race issue out of party politics.⁵⁷⁴

The 1965 White Paper and the First Race Relations Act

In 1965, the first set of combined immigration and race policies was launched. In April that year the Race Relations Bill was proposed as a measure to tackle racial discrimination that immigrants were suffering and to integrate them into British society. In August, the government's White Paper entitled *Immigration from the Commonwealth*, which contained tightened provisions of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, was released. When introducing the two measures, the Labour government made it clear that one complemented the other as a part of a coherent scheme responding to the *problems* resulting from the New Commonwealth immigration.⁵⁷⁵ The focus of Labour's package deal, as Randall Hansen put it,⁵⁷⁶ was to keep immigration and race from becoming controversial issues in elections and from inciting public disorder. It was based on the premise that the least number of immigrants was desirable. It was also based upon the inherited approach to race issues which regarded the presence of British subjects with dark skin in Britain as akin to an invasion or threat, and dealt with racial attacks targeted on immigrants from the perspective of public order.

The Wilson government's measure for immigration control was the result of the gradual shift in Labour's position during the last years of its long opposition period. At the time of the second reading of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, Labour showed unconditional opposition to any form of control that the party deemed racially-motivated, detrimental to Commonwealth relations, and a fraudulent solution to existing social problems. After this peak moment in Labour's principled opposition, the party's

⁵⁷⁴ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*; Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities*; Layton-Henry, "The Politicization of 'Race,'" chap. 4 in *Politics of Immigration*; Layton-Henry, *Politics of Race*; Messina, "Political Consensus and the Depoliticisation of Race," chap. 2 in *Race and Party Competition*; Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*; Saggar, *Race and Politics in Britain*; Hansen, "Labour and Party Competition: The Race Relations Act, 1965," chap. 6 in *Citizenship and Immigration*.

⁵⁷⁵ It was explained during the second reading of the Race Relations Bill on 3rd May 1965 that the government's approach comprised of two aspects, one the exercise of an effective control on the numbers who come to the UK and the other achieving the task of settling the new arrivals into British society, which the Race Relations Bill was concerned. The White Paper 'Immigration from the Commonwealth' was introduced to cover the whole subject of Commonwealth immigration. In it, measures to promote integration were also included along with provisions for further restriction, though the focus of the paper was clearly on the latter.

⁵⁷⁶ Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 137.

enthusiastic commitment to free immigration from the Commonwealth started to diminish, and it carefully moved to conditional opposition to control. At the third reading of the bill in February 1962, Denis Healey, the front-bench spokesman on colonial affairs, said that his party did not see the necessity of control in present circumstances, but “if the information collected by a serious survey of the whole problem revealed that immigration control was necessary, we should regard it as essential to consult the other Commonwealth Governments.”⁵⁷⁷ This did not necessarily mean that the Labour Party immediately withdrew its opposition to the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill. Rather, Labour kept fighting to make its provisions as tolerable to immigrants as possible. For example, due to Labour’s efforts, a check for students and dependents of immigrants was removed, and the initial operation period of the Act was also shortened from five years to one and a half.⁵⁷⁸ After the third reading of the 1962 bill, Eric Fletcher, Member for Islington East, said that the bill had been “substantially improved since second reading ... by Honourable members on these benches.”⁵⁷⁹

The 'circumstances' requiring further action, however, came quickly. After Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell suddenly died in January 1963, many right-wing MPs who had supported Gaitskell’s defense policy no longer felt bound to follow his commitment to an open-door and the Commonwealth ideal. At the same time, a small number of Labour MPs who had argued for control in 1961 and 1962, and MPs who had had a sense of uncertainty about Gaitskell’s categorical opposition to control, began to take a part in leading the party opinion towards control.⁵⁸⁰ With Harold Wilson as the new leader, the Labour Party moved towards a more pragmatic stance on the matter. In addition to the changes in leadership, the fear that the 1962 Act was not working satisfactorily to reduce the number of incoming migrants was widespread among politicians.⁵⁸¹ In such an environment, opposition to control increasingly appeared to be off the point. In 1963 alone, 57,000 coloured immigrants entered the UK, which increased to 62,000 in the following year. These numbers were greater than when there was no immigration control at all. This was largely due to secondary (family or dependents) immigration that was not

⁵⁷⁷ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 173-74.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 176; Eliot J. B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations* (London; New York; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), 220-21.

⁵⁷⁹ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 173.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 174-75.

⁵⁸¹ Norman Brook, the Conservative Home Secretary, said that the 1962 system was “inadequate” to control immigration, so further measures were necessary. CAB 128/38, CM 64 (44), 30 Jul 1964, TNA.

regulated under the 1962 Act.⁵⁸²

At the end of 1963, therefore, the Labour had to face a difficult question, should it vote for the renewal of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act upon its expiration? As Foot has pointed out, Labour would have regretted its record. When Labour had struggled to shorten the renewal period of the Act two years previously, it argued that the Act was racially-motivated and thus needed to be revised or repealed as soon as possible. Therefore, it would be politically embarrassing for the party to vote for renewal. Having effectively given up its opposition to control from then, however, it was also not feasible to vote against it. The dilemma was not missed by right-wing media like *The Spectator*. In a sarcastic manner, it reminded Labour that Michael Foot, a strong left-winger who later turned down Wilson's ministerial offer in protest against restrictive immigration policy, had boldly remarked "[w]hen it comes to the end of 1963 we will wish not merely to re-examine it, but wipe it from the statute book altogether."⁵⁸³ In the end, Labour decided to vote against the renewal, making an excuse that the Tories rejected Labour's suggestion of the need to discuss the means of control with the Commonwealth governments involved.⁵⁸⁴

The most decisive factor that shifted Labour's position was the powerful influence of the immigration issue on voters. The concern that inappropriate handling of immigration could bring a disastrous election outcome was widespread among Labour members well before 1964. At the second reading of the 1962 Act, there were party members who thought Gaitskell's attitude was unrealistic. Even Patrick Gordon Walker who was the front bench spokesman in the debates, privately expressed worries that Gaitskell's categorical opposition to control would alienate him from the majority of the party members as well as the party's supporters.⁵⁸⁵ From the end of 1963, the worry and confusion within the party over how to determine its stand became visible from outside. As shown above, right-wing papers criticised Labour's hesitation around the renewal of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, claiming that it showed lack of consistency and candour. Even ordinary Labour supporters began sending letters to Transport House, advising that Labour might lose in the election over the immigration issue, that the position of the party was unclear, and that it might be easy to be idealistic in London but

⁵⁸² CAB 129/120, C (65) 12, 29 Jan 1965, TNA.

⁵⁸³ *Spectator*, 6 Dec 1963.

⁵⁸⁴ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, p. 176.

⁵⁸⁵ Dennis Dean, "The Race Relations Policy of the First Wilson Government," *Twentieth Century British History* 11, no. 3 (2000): 262.

it was more serious living with the matter.⁵⁸⁶ Although the Labour manifesto clearly stated that it “accepts that the number of immigrants entering the United Kingdom must be limited,” Transport House advised candidates to be as quiet as possible on the matter.⁵⁸⁷

The shocking defeat at Smethwick, however, showed Labour that avoidance of facing the issue in public was not the best way to deal with it. In that campaign, which is still remembered as “Britain’s most racist election”⁵⁸⁸, Patrick Gordon Walker, Shadow Foreign Secretary and one of the closest men to Gaitskell, lost his Smethwick seat that he had kept from 1945 for nearly 20 years to his Conservative rival Peter Griffiths. In the constituency that was home to more immigrants than almost any other town in Britain, Griffiths won the election using openly racial slogans that touched the feelings of the town’s white residents, such as “If you want a nigger for a neighbour vote Liberal or Labour.” It was even more shocking given that the defeat of Walker was on a 7.2% swing which was more than double the national swing of 3.5%. A further defeat at the Leyton by-election in January 1965 ensured that Walker could not return to parliament and government as a Foreign Secretary.⁵⁸⁹

Smethwick, although it did not stop the Labour Party winning the overall election in 1964, showed that the issue of immigration and race could play a serious role in an election. In facing their worst-case scenario came true, the Labour Party had no choice but to accept the public's hostility to immigration, at least in some parts of the country. Since the Smethwick election, “it has been quite clear that immigration can be the greatest potential vote-loser for the Labour Party” if the party was seen to be “permitting a flood of immigrants to come in and blight the central areas in all our cities.”⁵⁹⁰ Gordon Walker’s defeat, which confirmed the white voters’ hostility to Commonwealth immigration, had a considerable influence on turning Labour to immigration control.⁵⁹¹ The issue of immigration and race proved to be so hazardous in British politics that even the Conservative Party, which could have taken advantage by playing the race card,

⁵⁸⁶ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 178.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; *British Labour Party Election Manifesto*, 1964, accessed 20 Oct 2016, <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab64.htm>.

⁵⁸⁸ *Guardian*, 15 Oct 2014.

⁵⁸⁹ Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 132-33.

⁵⁹⁰ Richard Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, vol. 1, *Minister of Housing 1964-1966* (London: Hamilton and Cape, 1975), 149-50.

⁵⁹¹ Messina, *Race and Party Competition*, 32; Nicholas Deakin, “The Politics of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill,” *Political Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1968): 42.

eventually agreed with Labour to exclude the issue from party competition. The Conservative leadership was embarrassed by Griffith's racist campaign as much as Labour, and disapproved of it.⁵⁹²

When back in the office after victory in the general election, there was no doubt that the Labour government would maintain the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. The Labour Home Secretary Frank Soskice took steps to close a number of loopholes the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act had, which ironically were measures made by the Labour Party while in the Opposition. The provisions once deemed as improvements by Labour now became deficiencies that had to be fixed by stricter approaches.

Cabinet discussions about tightening immigration rules show that issues about control and integration were aimed at resolving disagreement between the government's own cabinet members. When Soskice proposed his plan to tighten restrictions, he encountered resistance from the ministers of the departments related to foreign affairs.⁵⁹³ To introduce strong control, especially so soon after the incident at Smethwick, might be seen as a breach of implicit agreement among political parties that the race card should not be played. On the other hand, some cabinet members supported the Home Secretary's plan on the grounds that the public discontent surrounding immigration was not something the government could simply walk away from and expect it to be eased. Ray Gunter, the Secretary of Labour pointed out that more and more workers felt uncomfortable "to work alongside coloured immigrants" or "to accept coloured people to supervisory positions."⁵⁹⁴ Richard Crossman, Secretary of Housing and Local Authority, also argued that the government should not give the public an impression that it was concerned more for immigrants than it was for white people on this issue, which would be equivalent to "simply ask for racial trouble."⁵⁹⁵

Soskice must have had a strategical worry that it would be practically impossible to introduce any control without offering a more compensatory and positive measure. In his letter to the Prime Minister, Soskice expressed his sense of urgency, noting that: "Under the existing control, I am almost entirely powerless ... [if] we are not going to take any adequate steps to make the control effective, I believe public opinion will become exasperated." But he also understood that it was also important "to integrate the coloured

⁵⁹² Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, 141-42.

⁵⁹³ These were the Commonwealth Relations Secretary, Arthur Bottomley; the Colonial Secretary, Anthony Greenwood; and the Minister for Overseas Development, Barbara Castle.

⁵⁹⁴ CAB 134/1504, 21 Dec 1964, TNA.

⁵⁹⁵ CAB 134/1505, 1 Feb 1965, TNA.

immigrants in a genuine sense into the community as first and not second-class citizens” in order to make the system sustainable.⁵⁹⁶

His solution was to propose a package deal. On the one hand, the government would curb certain forms of immigration that had been uncontrolled under the 1962 Immigration Act, such as settling in the UK under the status of student or dependent. On the other hand, it would adopt an anti-discrimination act with specific reference to race-related misbehaviour, and give immigrants in the UK equal status and rights with white natives.

When Soskice submitted his proposal to parliament, it received huge support across nearly all political spectrum. Surprisingly, even Conservative MPs approved the proposal for its strong restrictive measures. Answering their questions about how far the Home Department was willing to adopt control, Soskice replied that the pre-entry screening would be strengthened “to the fullest scrutiny ... [on] Commonwealth citizens seeking entry as visitors or students.” He also added that the government would especially scrutinise immigrants with dependent claims and even review “the present practice ... of allowing ... children under 16 coming here to join close relatives.” The most welcomed aspect of the legislation, however, was that under the new law, the Labour government would execute all deportation orders given by the court “unless there are very strong reasons for making a special exception.”⁵⁹⁷

While the Conservatives welcomed Soskice’s proposal for adopting a “more realistic approach,”⁵⁹⁸ many Labour members who worried that control on immigration would act as a *de facto* discrimination, greeted the bill for clearly stipulating the anti-racist principle of the government. At the same reading, backbenchers asked the Home Secretary’s assurance that the new law would not make “any distinction ... between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth citizens,” and that “no Commonwealth immigrant accepted in this country shall be treated on a different basis from our own citizens.” Soskice replied, “There must be no sort of discrimination on the grounds of colour or any other reason of that sort.”⁵⁹⁹

By March 1965, a bipartisan consensus on the matter of immigration and race was established between Labour and Conservative, as the Opposition also wanted to exclude the matter from party competition. The Conservative MP Nigel Fisher expressed his

⁵⁹⁶ PREM 13/382, 4 Jan 1965, TNA.

⁵⁹⁷ 705 H.C. Deb. 5s. 4 Feb 1965.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, cols. 1286.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, cols. 1288.

party's willingness to settle the issue: "many hon. Members on both sides-most hon. Members, I hope-very much desire to take this awkward and difficult problem out of party politics altogether."⁶⁰⁰ As Junior Home Secretary Roy Hattersley summarised, the control and integration of immigration became inseparable as the foundation of British immigration-race politics: "Without integration, limitation is inexcusable; without limitation, integration is impossible."⁶⁰¹

However, the relationship between the two ended up being weighted toward limitation, as was evident from the fact that immigration control was required as a prerequisite for harmonious race relations and successful integration. The Labour government viewed the presence of New Commonwealth immigrants as a source of *problems*. Recalling the battle over the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, Hattersley confessed, "the Labour Party of that time should have supported it. ... unrestricted immigration can only produce additional problems, additional suffering and additional hardship unless some kind of limitation is imposed and continued."⁶⁰² No matter how carefully it was managed, the imbalance between limitation and integration was soon to be revealed in the 1965 Race Relation Act. Under the government White Paper *Immigration from the Commonwealth* published in August 1965, the basic frame of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was maintained but its provisions became much tighter. The work permit vouchers that were applied to most applicants from the New Commonwealth were abolished; stricter regulations would be imposed on dependents of immigrants; medical inspections could be required of all applicants; and the Home Secretary was empowered to deport immigrants who entered the country illegally and had resided less than 5 years.⁶⁰³

The White Paper, moreover, was drafted and decided without discussion with the Commonwealth, which the party had promised. The Labour government's attempts to contact the Commonwealth governments was simply a gesture to show that the UK was willing for open discussion. Thus, Lord Mountbatten's mission to Malta, India, Jamaica, Trinidad, and elsewhere clearly had no real powers, as it "cannot settle policy; in any event policy will ultimately be settled by our own needs rather than those of the Commonwealth countries."⁶⁰⁴ One of the areas marked out by the British government as the main source of immigration control evasion, Pakistan, remained outside his remit.

⁶⁰⁰ 708 H.C. Deb. 5s. 9 Mar 1965, cols. 248-55.

⁶⁰¹ 709 H.C. Deb. 5s. 23 Mar 1965, col. 443.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, cols. 380-81.

⁶⁰³ *Immigration from the Commonwealth 1965* Cmnd. 2739.

⁶⁰⁴ PREM 13/383, 18 Mar 1965, TNA.

The reaction of the Commonwealth governments reflected a mixture of anger and derision: Eric Williams, the President of Trinidad, pointed out, "If the regulations were being mainly abused by Pakistanis was there any reason why the cut should fall on immigrants from the West Indies?" The Jamaican government reacted bluntly. "Britain's right to restrict immigration is not questioned but new restrictions are based on colour and not on economic consideration."⁶⁰⁵ After all, the ultimate decision on how to restrict immigration was taken while Mountbatten was travelling between the capitals of the New Commonwealth countries.

It was certainly a great disappointment to many Labour backbenchers as well as the party's traditional supporters with liberal inclinations. For them, the shock came more from the symbolic aspect of the White Paper than from its content. The 1965 White Paper was clear evidence that the party of the Commonwealth ideal, faced with a difficult situation, adopted the same line as its predecessor whom the party had once severely criticised. In the *Economist's* telling phrase, the Labour Party had "pinched the Tories' white trousers."⁶⁰⁶ One letter to the Prime Minister observed that, "we ... have gone back on so many of the firm principles enunciated by Hugh Gaitskell only a few years back." Views that the limitation-integration equation was imbalanced were expressed: the restrictions were "draconian" while the integration measures were "utterly inadequate."⁶⁰⁷

A group of Labour backbenchers signed an Appeal for a Rational Immigration Policy, in which they sharply attacked "the severe and arbitrary nature of the restrictions" of the White Paper. They insisted that the government's policy was not based on "real study or understanding ... but appears to be based on too close attention being paid to expressions of fear, prejudice and muddled thinking."⁶⁰⁸ These Labour critics demanded that the White Paper be withdrawn and a thorough review of immigration legislation be undertaken. Presses that traditionally sided with Labour also expressed disappointment. The *New Statesmen* accused the Labour government of reinforcing a "colour bar," and the *Tribune* derided the paper "as white as leprosy." *The Spectator* also condemned the White Paper by describing it as "surrender to racial prejudice, dressed up as

⁶⁰⁵ Dean, "The Race Relations Policy," 275-76.

⁶⁰⁶ *Economist*, 7 Aug 1965. quoted in Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 228.

⁶⁰⁷ MS. Wilson c. 891, Fred Moorehouse to Harold Wilson, 10 Aug 1965, quoted in James Hampshire, "Immigration and Race Relations," in *The Labour Governments 1964-1970*, ed. Peter Dorey (London: Routledge, 2006), 313.

⁶⁰⁸ MS. Wilson c. 891, Appeal for a Rational Immigration Policy, 21 Sep 1965, quoted in Hampshire, "Immigration and Race Relations," 313.

reasonable.”⁶⁰⁹

The first Race Relations Act legislated in the same year revealed that the Labour Party, despite its acceptance (and moreover tightening) of immigration control, had not abandoned the liberal inclination in the matter. However, it largely reflected the concern to suppress immigration and race issues so as not to inflame political controversy or public disorder. The Home Secretary Frank Soskice made this point clear in the second reading of the Race Relations Bill. He stated that it was basically “concerned with public order”⁶¹⁰, and that acts of racial discrimination should, above all, be forbidden as it “breeds the ill will which ... may disturb the peace.”⁶¹¹ Naturally, the Race Relations Bill was debated as an extension and replacement of the function that the 1936 Public Order Act. This point was explicitly raised by Sir Dingle Foot, the Solicitor General, who stated that the Race Relations Bill was “to prevent arising in this country in relation to the coloured immigrants the kind of situation which arose in relation to the Jews in this country in 1935 and 1936.”⁶¹² As the 1936 Act had dealt with the racial attacks on Jewish populations from the public order-oriented perspective, the 1965 Race Relations Act also prioritized the maintenance of public order over the principled objection to racial discrimination.

As in 1936, patriotic grounds for drafting the bill were expressed. To see the “beginnings of the development of a distinction between first and second class citizens and the disfigurement which can arise from inequality of treatment” would be a tragedy of the first order for Britain with its “unrivalled tradition of tolerance and fair play.”⁶¹³ Sir Dingle Foot, closing the parliamentary debate, said the bill would “do as much as any measure could to restore this country’s image in the world,” by bringing Britain in line with the Civil Rights Act of the United States and the United Nation’s declaration of the eradication of racial discrimination.⁶¹⁴ The difference in the 1965 case was that it added a paternalistic view that the UK had a duty “to inspire and guide ... a great Commonwealth of free nations numbering 700 million people of all races,” thus tackling the problem was UK’s duty.⁶¹⁵

⁶⁰⁹ *New Statesman*, 6 Aug 1965; *Tribune*, 6 Aug 1965; *Spectator*, 6 Aug 1965.

⁶¹⁰ 711. H.C. Deb. 5s. 3 May 1965, col. 927.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, col. 1047.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, col. 926.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, col. 1050.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 926.

As a result, the first Race Relations Act had more symbolic than practical importance and function. For instance, when an incident of discrimination on racial grounds happened in places of public resort, the case was supposed to be directed to the Race Relations Board which then would help the victim to secure compensation from the offender. However, the Board had only three members and limited power, and the whole procedure was often very lengthy and complex.⁶¹⁶ Moreover, racial discrimination in the fields of employment and housing “where the worst abuses occur and where attempts at conciliation ... would be particularly effective” was not even addressed in the Act.⁶¹⁷ Already at the stage of reading, this problem was noticed by some MPs, who repeatedly tried to broaden the scope of the bill. However, the Home Secretary declined their request for amendment, on the grounds that the government should not make “a mistake to open the door to individual complaints.”⁶¹⁸ Rather, there is some evidence that the loophole was clearly intended by the government. In Soskice’s own words, the complex procedure was for preventing “trivial prosecutions ... by over-sensitive people.”⁶¹⁹

Another deficiency of the Race Relations Act was that it could neither suppress all forms of racial hatred nor protect ethnic minorities from such abuses. Under the 1936 Public Order Act, a person could be prosecuted for the public expression of “threatening, insulting or abusive words or behaviour” on the grounds that it was “a breach of the peace.”⁶²⁰ While the 1965 Race Relations Act taking same principle, it specifically defined stirring up “hatred against that section on grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins” as criminal offence.⁶²¹ However, as Gavin Schaffer has clearly demonstrated, the new law, although it did discourage more serious threats from far-right activists and organisations, still permitted racist rhetoric when it was delivered in a less aggressive tone not directly inciting violence. Consequently, while some unreservedly racist speech could escape indictment, organisations and activists for black people using less offensive language often could not.⁶²² The main focus of the 1965 Race Relations

⁶¹⁶ The actual procedure is as follow: First, victims of discrimination report complaints to Local Conciliation Committee under the Race Relations Board which would arrange conciliation. If the conciliation attempt fails, the committee would submit a report to the Race Relations Board which then decides whether the case should be handed to the Attorney-General. Lastly, the Attorney-General determines legal proceedings.

⁶¹⁷ CAB 129/121 C (65) 77, 18 May 1965, TNA.

⁶¹⁸ Lester and Bindman, *Race and Law*, 116-17.

⁶¹⁹ CAB 129/121 C (65) 77, 18 May 1965, TNA.

⁶²⁰ The Public Order Act, 1936, 1 Edw. 8 & 1 Geo. 6 c. 6, section 5.

⁶²¹ The Race Relations Act, 1965, c. 73, section 6 (1).

⁶²² Gavin Schaffer, “Legislating against Hatred: Meaning and Motive in Section Six of the Race Relations Act of 1965,” *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no. 2 (2014): 251-75.

Act was not specifically on protecting the black or other minorities but on ensuring public order in general.

In the 1965 Racial Relations Act, the Labour government set out its dual commitment to immigration control and integration. While the former was effectively carried out by restricting the number of coloured immigrants and strengthening screening procedure, the latter was overshadowed by the government's preoccupation with tackling public disorder associated with immigrants. Integration of immigrants as equal citizen was only allowed to work on the premise of entry based on skin-colour.

The Second Immigration Act and the Race Relations Act, 1968

The idea that successful integration depends on tight restriction on the number of immigrants was further consolidated three years later. In 1968, immigration control and the integration of immigrants were once again tightly combined under the Race Relations Act and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act. As in 1965, this combination also proved to be an imbalanced alliance in which commitment to integration was restrained by the attempt to restrict qualification for entry to people with blood relationship. As a result, New Commonwealth immigrants were increasingly driven outside legitimate places in society.

The period between 1965 and 1968 has divided scholars' assessment of the 1964-70 Labour government's policies on race and immigration. On one hand, some praised this period as a liberal hour in British race relations. The series of development of anti-racial discrimination laws and enforcement agencies involved a number of bodies and personnel, which can be called a race relations industry. This contributed to promoting racial equality and encouraged higher standards of thinking and behaviour in related matters. The result was deemed disappointing when compared to the input, nevertheless, the period began in 1965 fostered liberal climate in British race relations.⁶²³ On the other hand, this period is remembered as when racism in Britain was institutionalised. The Labour governments of the 1960s and the 1970s was criticised for playing a key role in this process, legislating an immigration law whose character was even more racist than its predecessor introduced by Conservatives. Labour's record on race relations in this period, was regarded as a failure.⁶²⁴

These divided assessments are largely due to the fact that the Labour government had

⁶²³ Michael Banton, *Promoting Racial Harmony* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁶²⁴ Miles and Phizacklea, *Whiteman's Country*, vii-viii, 45-78.

confusing, if not contradictory, records. Labour combined intense restriction with initiatives in integration. The new initiative in integrating immigrants into society, started with the efforts to widen the scope of the 1965 Race Relations Act. Given that there was no sign or expectation that the government would adopt new policies dealing with immigration and race,⁶²⁵ it was an unexpected advance in the field of integration of immigrants. First of all, Roy Jenkins who became the new Labour Home Secretary after Soskice in December 1965 was personally committed to the issue and led the path towards more advanced and extensive legislation. Following Jenkins, a few Labour backbenchers like Fenner Brockway and Maurice Orbach, and organisations including the Society of Labour Lawyers and Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), all of whom had long been committed to racial equality, united. While the 1965 Race Relations Act had been created partly as Labour's compromise to accept control, the issue of integration now began to emerge as an important agenda separate from immigration control. The alliance set out for the new Race Relations Act in order to cover the fields of employment and housing, the two areas where racial discrimination most frequently took place. but had not been included in the scope of the 1965 Act.

Events in the United States also fostered an atmosphere congenial to such legislation. Increasing tension and violence in the US civil rights movement during the late-1960s clearly alarmed British politicians, who were fearful that Britain might experience the same situation unless some improvements were made to the Race Relations Act. Around 1968, worries were expressed that Britain might be a "future Detroit," and its rulers should "not be Bourbons." Race relations in the US were a continuing reference point for progressive British intellectuals, the Society of Labour lawyers in particular. A change in the 1965 Act's from traditional criminal punishment to conciliation was one of the few suggestions the Society made after studying American cases. Two members of the Society, Anthony Lester and Jeffrey Jowell, had spent time in the US prior to 1965 in order to study the American experience in race relations. They attempted to make the Race Relations Bill similar to those of North America. They indeed got the idea for a statutory interference in racial discrimination complaints between individuals from the US. In short, each observations of US situation made by the Society has stimulated the legislation of the two British Race Relations Acts. Until 1965 progressive groups like Labour lawyers had tried to import an American model which was deemed to be more

⁶²⁵ Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France*, 67-69.

effective in settling racial conflicts. However, towards 1968 the change in the American situation and its explosive mood created a sense of alarm amongst British politicians, which provided Jenkins' alliance with a further stimulus to action.⁶²⁶

British race relations were about to take a leap forward. The idea of the co-existence of various ethnic groups in British society began to be envisaged, which was epitomised in the vision of a multi-racial society proposed by Roy Jenkins. In 1966 Jenkins declared that his race relations policy aimed to build "an integrated multiracial society" with equal opportunity as its essential character.⁶²⁷ Jenkins' vision of integration clearly differed from that of earlier times. In the past, the presence of peoples of diverse backgrounds in multi-racial societies such as the London East End and several port-towns had been deemed as a potential source of disorder and conflict. Thus, the pluralistic character of multi-racial communities was seen as something that had to be removed as much as possible, and the successful settlement of immigrants into British society was judged by the concept of assimilation in which such plurality effectively vanished. The integrated multi-racial society pictured by Jenkins, however, positively recognized that diversity. The integration of his version was not "a flattening process of assimilation but rather as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance."⁶²⁸ The plural features of immigrant societies, then, were to be protected, or even promoted by the new race relations act.⁶²⁹ This point was judged by writers as the most distinctive legacy of the liberal hour. Backed by objective and detailed evidence about racial discrimination taking place outside the scope of the 1965 Race Relations Act, most notably in the fields of housing and employment, the alliance of Jenkins, the Society of Labour Lawyers, and the CARD finally succeeded in persuading those, inside and outside parliament, who have been sceptical about the need for a new race relations legislation.

The drive for the new Race Relations Act however met with problems in November 1967 when there was a sudden devaluation in the British pound. This forced an emergent Cabinet reshuffle. James Callaghan became the Home Secretary and Jenkins moved to the Chancellor of the Exchequership. According to the later recollection of Jenkins,

⁶²⁶ Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France*, 52-62, 79-87.

⁶²⁷ NCCI pamphlet, "Address given by the Home Secretary the Rt. Hon Roy Jenkins MP on the 23rd May 1966 at the Commonwealth Institute to a meeting of Voluntary Liaison Committees" in Labour Party Archives, File 331. 61, quoted in Saggar, *Race and Politics in Britain*, 83.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*; Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*, 514.

⁶²⁹ Saggar, *Race and Politics in Britain*, 83.

Callaghan was not personally interested in the Race Relations Act at that time.⁶³⁰ The most decisive step in moving the bill through the parliament now fell into the hands of a person with little passion for the case. But the most serious and fundamental problem came from the Kenyan Asian crisis, which eventually led to the rapid enactment of the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, creating an atmosphere of fear of the *invasion* of immigrants and thus once again prioritising strong immigration control over integrative measures.

Within only three days, the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was passed in an atmosphere of fear and alarm, based on the grounds that it was an emergency. The government argued that the immigration of Kenyan Asians went beyond Britain's capacity to absorb them and permitting their arrival meant worsening domestic race relations.

... our best hope of developing in these Islands a multi-racial society free of strife lies in striking the right balance between the number of Commonwealth citizens we can allow in and our ability to ensure them, once here, a fair deal not only in tangible matters like jobs, housing and other social services, but, more intangibly, against racial prejudice. If we have to restrict immigration now for good reasons, as I think we must ...⁶³¹

Once again immigration control was seen to be an essential premise for good race relations. Callaghan introduced the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants bill to parliament as, with the impending 1968 Race Relations Bill, “essentially parts of a fair and balanced policy on this matter of race relations.”⁶³² MPs who opposed the Bill criticised it on the grounds that it was hesitantly devised and based on racial prejudice in the face of Kenyan Asians immigration. Callaghan refuted these allegations, saying, “the origin of this Bill lies neither in panic nor in prejudice but in a considered judgment of the best way to achieve the idea of a multi-racial society.”⁶³³ “The best way” meant the smallest coloured presence in Britain would make a better multi-racial society.

The Labour government effectively got rid of the rights of about 200,000 Kenyan

⁶³⁰ Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France*, 83.

⁶³¹ CAB 129/135, C (68) 34, 12 Feb 1968, TNA.

⁶³² 759 H.C. Deb. 5s. 27 Feb 1968, col. 1242.

⁶³³ Ibid.

Asians to enter the UK. They had no legal status but had been allowed entry as British subjects under the 1948 British Nationality Act which was still valid. Now owning a British passport issued under the authority of the UK government became insufficient for a Commonwealth citizen to freely enter the country. The person had to have a “qualifying connection” to the UK, which meant being born in, naturalized or adopted in the UK, or being a child or grandchild of such persons. This was a euphemism for blood and skin colour as the determinants of eligibility. As one Labour backbencher said, the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act “deals basically with non-whites,” and the Act would not have been legislated if the immigrants had been white.⁶³⁴

With the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the Labour government not only officially declared that the skin colour and blood were a precondition of belonging in Britain, but also that it clearly took over the ground that the Conservatives had promoted in the debates over the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. Citing the remark of R. A. Butler in 1961, that the colonial and the New Commonwealth people do not belong to the UK, Callaghan explained that the goal of the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Bill was to supplement the intent of the 1962 Act to exempt from control any “person who in common parlance belong[s] to the United Kingdom.”⁶³⁵ The Home Secretary explained that the immigration of Kenyan Asians was an accidental result of what had not been foreseen in 1962, and the situation had to be addressed :

there has been a substantial increase in the arrival of a large number of holders of United Kingdom passports who do not, ‘in common parlance belong’ to this country. Lord Butler was quite clear about what he meant by ‘belonging to this country’. He meant people who were born and lived here ... large numbers of citizens whose ancestors had been born here, whose forebears were born here, and who had lived here for a number of years. Those were the very people whom the bill was to exempt from immigration control.⁶³⁶

Labour’s principled advocacy of unrestricted immigration under Gaitskell, and the 1964 general election manifesto that the party would consult the Commonwealth countries about control had become a memory of the past.

⁶³⁴ 759 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1968, col. 1710.

⁶³⁵ 759 H.C. Deb. 5s. 27 Feb 1968, col. 1249.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

In the atmosphere created by the ardent and prompt prevention of the arrival of Kenyan Asians, the commitment to integrative efforts was placed under the premise that only the least number of immigrants would make integration possible. Despite the speedy passage of the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, popular anti-immigration fervour continued for a while. In April 1968 Enoch Powell stained politics and society with his so-called “river of blood” speech. To his apocalyptic prophecy of multi-racial Britain, the public gave firm support.⁶³⁷ In addition, news from the USA of the civil rights movement and the assassination of Martin Luther King created fear amongst the public that similar disturbances were awaiting Britain in the future.⁶³⁸

The debates on the Race Relations Bill that took place only three days after Powell’s speech focused on public order, mirroring what had happened in 1965. Callaghan introduced the bill as a means “to protect society as a whole against actions which will lead to social disruption and to prevent the emergence of a class of second-grade citizens.”⁶³⁹ The emphasis was clearly placed upon public-order. The foremost interests of the Home Secretary and the Labour government were to suppress the danger that the sensitive issue of race could have in the party politics and society, and to show that the government was officially opposed to racial discrimination. The initial motivation of the second Race Relations Bill that Jenkins’ had introduced was once again overwhelmed by the imminent political need to settle the popular anti-immigration feelings and defuse the potential for public disorder.

The post-war Labour Party certainly inherited its approach to the issue of race from the early twentieth century. There is a continuity in its thinking in relation to definitions of Britishness, its position on immigration control, and understanding of a multiracial community. Defining who belonged to the British community became increasingly based on blood connections and white skin colour. The inclusive definition of the late 1940s which embraced all individuals within the Empire/Commonwealth, though there was a division between *us* (the white from the Dominions) and *them* (people from the colonies who needed Britain’s guidance to self-government), was replaced by a division within a single citizenship and the declaration of superiority of blood connection in the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. The priority of blood and white skin colour, which was

⁶³⁷ Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France*, 74.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶³⁹ 763 H.C. Deb. 5s. 23 Apr 1968, col. 55.

shown in the discussions surrounding the presence of coloured seamen in the early twentieth century, was officially declared to be the condition of genuinely belonging to Britain in 1968. It was also present in legislating the 1948 British Nationality Act, although it was not officially declared.

The liberal and socialist principle regarding equality and objection to racial discrimination was, as it had been in the early century, confidently upheld by the Labour opposition in the 1950s and the late 1960s. When Labour seized the power in 1964, such principles were directed towards a new integrative policy, but this encountered a clear limit. It was largely because they considered the immigrants from the New Commonwealth as a problem.

The concern that a multi-racial society held the potential for social disorder, which had existed in the Labour thinking of the 1930s, continued into present in the post-war years. Thus, the Race Relations Act was concerned more with keeping social order by minimising racial disturbance than establishing racial equality and compensating the victims of racial discrimination. The new vision of Britain as a multi-racial society, in which various and different cultural elements brought by the immigrants were fostered, succumbed to the old premise that racial equality in society depends on racial exclusion at the point of entry into that society.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown how the Labour Party approached domestic race issues in the early twentieth century, and how these approaches persisted in Labour's post-1945 race politics. Unlike the presumption in much of the existing literature on the subject, this study has revealed that the attention to race issues did not begin only in face of the New Commonwealth immigration. It was part of a longer-term historical path shaped by Labour's experiences dealing with the related issues. It has also been demonstrated that Labour's race politics need to be understood in the context of its ideological attachment which underpinned its positions on certain policies, thereby highlighting the patriotic concerns that were at the root of Labour's race politics. By distancing itself from the existing historiographical tendency, in which race politics has been treated outside the general history of the ideological orientation of the Labour Party, this thesis has shown that the party's race politics was directed in large part by its political affinity to certain values and discourses. Labour's strategy for dealing with race issues spoke to several versions of Britishness held by Labour at different times.

In the following, I will further emphasize the importance of paying attention to the patriotic languages of the Labour Party in its race politics as examined in this thesis, by asking a difficult but inevitable question: Why has the Labour Party, despite its internationalism and official declaration of racial equality, let racial discrimination continue in British society? This question was the starting point of this thesis, which has been the case for many other researchers in this field, too. Furthermore, it leads to another question, why has the Labour Party, despite its record of leading integrative and counter-racial discrimination measures, also been criticized? The following short discussion is an attempt to find an explanation.

It has been shown that the party failed to apply its official opposition to racist and anti-alien measures to reality from the early twentieth century. Although Labour did recognize racist motives in the Aliens Acts of 1905 and 1919 and voiced against them, the rationale behind its position was not entirely drawn from opposition to racial hatred itself. In 1905, socialists, under the influence of radical liberalism, appealed to the British tradition that provided an open door to the oppressed. From 1918 to the mid-1920s the Labour Party, which emerged as a socialist party, argued that free movement of peoples should be advocated as a principle, in place of exclusivist nationalism and xenophobia. When it

seized power, however, the Labour government accepted the established immigration control system, and moreover tried to administer it as thoroughly as possible. It was particularly harshly applied to non-white British subjects who were mostly engaged in British merchant ships, whose domestic presence was deemed a threat to the economic and social well-being of white Britons. This positional change was upheld into the late twentieth century. Labour's volte-face, from criticizing the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act for being a racist measure to the acceptance and strengthening of the Act has been remembered as one of the most disappointing moments in the history of British race relations. To see why it was so, it is necessary to consider two factors, electoral pressure and the party's own ideology.

The influence of electoral appeal has been highlighted as being of the greatest importance in relation to post-1945 race politics. The issue of race and immigration had become one of the most controversial topics in Britain. While the public, the media and the Press, frequently engaged with the subject, Britain's major political parties were reluctant to speak, fearing that they would rapidly lose control of the situation. The different attitudes held by the public and the politicians reveal how deeply the issues had been politicized, a view widely shared by academics. The decision to curb New Commonwealth immigration by the Conservative government in 1961, was made in spite of its plain economic advantage. The following Labour government consolidated such politicisation of the issue by combining control with integration, an attempt to exclude race and immigration from party politics. Since then the major political parties have dealt with the issue by avoidance, although in the late 1990s the New Labour government expressed a more affirmative commitment to racial equality and social justice through a series of new measures.⁶⁴⁰

In the politicisation of immigration, academic disagreement was mainly focused on who took the lead. Was it racist popular pressure that drove politicians to adopt racialized and illiberal immigration restrictions and ineffective race relations acts? Or did the government play a critical role? The argument that liberal British governments and politicians surrendered to popular pressure over racist immigration policies, had already been refuted. It has been revealed that the political elite were hostile to non-white immigrants and eager to keep the UK white as much as the public was. Nevertheless, it

⁶⁴⁰ Will Somerville, *Immigration under New Labour* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2007); Sally Tomlinson, "Race, Ethnicity and Education under New Labour," *Oxford Review of Education* 31, No. 1 (2005): 153-171.

is undeniable that at the centre of the politicisation of immigration and race was the politicians' fear of the backlash of white voters – as happened at Smethwick in 1964. When Sheila Wright, later Labour MP for Handsworth from 1979 to 1983, fought in elections in Gravelly Hill in 1962 and Handsworth in 1964, she prepared a fairly aggressive question on the subject, as she had felt that education on racism should be made available for both the Labour Party and the constituency. However, she was advised not to speak publicly about racism by her party colleagues who argued that to do so would merely worsen her electoral prospects. Later she recollected how the Labour Party was “sick with fright about the effect [of immigration and race] on the electorate.”⁶⁴¹

The language of race was forced onto the centre stage of British domestic politics by non-white immigration. However, the major British parties had relatively insufficient political experience to publicly deal with *race*, as opposed to the “coherent and manageable” politics of class with which they were familiar.⁶⁴² Ironically, it was the 1965 Race Relations Act, which replaced the relevant provisions of the 1936 Public Order Act, that introduced direct reference to race⁶⁴³, albeit part of a scheme to remove the issue from the centre of party politics. Once the immigration issue was politicised and consensus created for a restrictive immigration policy, it became increasingly difficult to change the direction towards a more liberal policy. As immigration policy became familiar to the public, so any changes other than those that followed the established restrictive direction had to be debated publicly within an environment of public opinion that was almost universally hostile to immigrants. Unlike other public policies, any hint of relaxation of restriction was seen to be detrimental to any political party under any circumstances.⁶⁴⁴

In these conditions, the role of the electorate in constraining the race politics of the major parties was amplified. This is certainly the dominant view among many scholars of post-1945 race politics, and also indicates the limits of Labour as a political party in contesting state power and relying on the electorate. But can this analysis also be applied to the early twentieth century when domestic race issues were not so highly visible in the political centre? Although it is less clear whether popular demand directed Labour toward

⁶⁴¹ Joshi and Carter, “Role of Labour,” 65.

⁶⁴² Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities*, 125.

⁶⁴³ Gavin Schaffer, “Legislating against Hatred,” 251-52.

⁶⁴⁴ Anthony M. Messina, “The Impacts of Post-WWII Migration to Britain: Policy Constraints, Political Opportunism and the Alteration of Representational Politics,” *Review of Politics* 63, no. 2 (2001), 266-73.

illiberal policies in the early twentieth century, we can see the influence of this nationalistic attitude of the public. Soon after the First World War, patriotic sentiment resulted in the so-called “coupon election” of December 1918. Several leading members of the Labour Party, including Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, lost their seats due to their alleged pacifism, whereas J. R. Clynes easily retained his seat thanks to his patriotic brand of Labour socialism.⁶⁴⁵ The 1919 Aliens Act had to be annually renewed, so the immigration issue became the subject of regular discussion between the parties and provided political opportunities that could be exploited electorally. Such was the case in the 1924 general election, in which the alien immigration issue was used by the Tories. The suspicion of alien revolutionaries played an important role in that year’s election, due to the impact of the Zinoviev Letter which led to the early demise of the first Labour minority government. The Conservatives featured a deliberate anti-alien strategy in their campaign, accusing the Labour government of allowing the entry of subversive aliens into the country, and continuing to “let them all come.”⁶⁴⁶ It is probable that the Labour Party would have felt the need to prove that it was resolute as much as its opponents in regulating alien immigration and suppressing the related suspicion of revolutionary conspiracy. Labour politicians did try from time to time to dispel the notion that they cared more for aliens than Britons. For example, they used immigration statistics to show that the Labour government admitted no more aliens than their political rivals.

Again in the first half of the twentieth century, it seems that the Labour Party was unwilling to either define an issue within the frame of race, or simply to talk about race at all. In Chapter 3, we have seen how the Labour government deployed the high domestic unemployment rate in its arguments for and implementation of immigration controls. In discriminating against the right of colonial labourers to equal wages and employment opportunities, Labour defended its actions in terms of the protection of the domestic economy. As revealed in Chapter 4, the Labour Party defined the fascist inspired anti-Semitism in the East End, as more a threat to British public order, law, and democracy, than to its Jewish victims. Similarly, it is rather surprising to note how rarely the Labour Party and the TUC talked about the racial persecution of the Nazis, preferring to focus on the threats to German trade unionists and socialists. Clearly the way the matter was

⁶⁴⁵ Worley, *Foundations of British Labour Party*, 23-24.

⁶⁴⁶ David Cesarani, “An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-Alienism in British Society before 1940,” in *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*, eds. David Cesarani and Tony Kushner (London: Routledge, 1993), 40-41.

defined affected politics at a practical level. The refugee policies of the British Labour Party and the TUC were driven by concerns for the predicament of the German socialists and trade unionists to whom aid was exclusively given.

However, even these specific remedies were devoid of practical effectiveness, as economic concerns overrode international motives. Britain's Nazi refugee policy of the 1930s operated within the limits of the 1919 Aliens Act. It basically viewed the refugees as aliens who had to obtain either a work permit or prove their relocation to the UK would not be a burden to public funds, a system which the British labour movement rarely challenged. The Labour movement's contribution to helping the refugees was left to each trade union, each offering work permits according to their estimation of the employment situation within their trades. The number of offers therefore varied among different unions, and none met demand. Refugees were variously considered as aliens, immigrants, foreigners, and refugees. Sometimes they were regarded as aliens whose economic impact upon the nation and its unions had to be prudently calculated before being accepted, but at other times they were refugees who desperately needed help and appealed to the international sympathies of British labour.⁶⁴⁷

Therefore, the matter of race was an embarrassing one for the Labour Party to handle in relation to its internationalism. This leads us to consider the second element, ideology. Was there any ideological weakness inherent in the Labour Party's internationalism, preventing it from being an effective anti-racist political force? In relation to international affairs, British Labour depended more on ethical attitudes inherited from the liberal radical influence of the nineteenth century, than a coherent philosophy or theory which is directly traceable to its history or peculiar to its socialism. Internationalism underpinned the moral tone of its view of Britain in the wider world. Labour gave it greater emphasis after 1918, with its proclamation as a socialist party.⁶⁴⁸ As demonstrated in Chapter 2, immigration control which was made stricter by the 1919 Aliens Act was framed in terms of internationalism, and criticised by Labour as an example of excessive nationalism endangering international peace and co-operation. The free movement of peoples, as with free trade, was advocated as a condition for preventing international ill will. Thus, it can be said that Labour's post-war internationalism shifted the party's official stance on immigration control and anti-alienism from one based on pride in British liberal virtue to

⁶⁴⁷ Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, 61-89.

⁶⁴⁸ Stephen Howe, Ch. 4. Labour and international affairs, in *Labour's First Century*, eds., Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 119-20.

one based on socialist principles of international solidarity. The latter was more likely to promote the establishment of anti-racism as a universalist value in itself.

However, Labour's internationalism was built firmly on the advocacy of Britain as a nation. We have seen that it did not entirely replace the previous approach based on patriotic concerns for British liberty and tolerance, and perpetuated this patriotic framework. International solidarity, explained Labour, was only possible through expanding love of one's own country. Furthermore, Labour's emergence as a socialist party took place simultaneously with its transformation from a sectional movement confined only to working class concerns as it had been until 1914, into a national party. As demonstrated in its general election manifesto the party repeatedly appealed to the *nation* and the *people*. The emphasis was on the national character of its socialism, and that it was beneficial to the wider electorate, not just to manual workers. As a result, this increased the tensions between the ethical international appeal of Labour politics and the national interest demanded by Realpolitik, which had already been revealed over support for the Boer War and First World War.⁶⁴⁹ Yet the two dimensions of internationalism and nationalism, in the party's declaration to be a socialist party, were depicted to be in harmony.⁶⁵⁰ Tension also existed in the party's position on immigration restriction. Even though it blamed the 1919 Act as an example of malevolent nationalism, Labour did not advocate a categorical open-door policy. It believed that the general principle of free immigration could be halted when the needs of the nation required it, especially when that need was economic.⁶⁵¹

Britain's national interests were given priority over international principles. When it was perceived that there was a conflict between national and international concerns, most members of the Labour Party and the labour movement did not hesitate to choose the former. As shown in Chapter 3, the Labour government in the inter-war period accepted the 1919 Aliens Act and the 1925 Coloured Alien Seamen Order, because of the perceived difficulties in the country's economic situation. There were some gestures from a few Labour politicians to mitigate hardships caused by harsh immigration restrictions, but the

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁶⁵⁰ For example, in declaring its vision of a Labour government, it said that, "an opportunity may be given to prove how it is possible for Labour by good and efficient government, to bring peace, prosperity and happiness to every corner of these Islands, and also demonstrate to all nations our desire for Brotherhood, Fraternity and International Co-operation in all things affecting our common humanity." LPACR (1921), 147.

⁶⁵¹ Text of resolutions, 1919 International Labour and Socialist Conference. LPACR (1919), 196-204.

free movement of individuals was supported only “in the abstract and as an ideal.”⁶⁵² Labour members confessed that they were internationalists, but that they put “our own people first” at the same time.⁶⁵³ They were eager to dispel an impression that they were “so internationalist ... that we[they] have no love whatever for our own country.”

The Labour Party’s internationalism, when it is understood as a concrete form of co-operation with labour movements of other countries and regions, had a Eurocentric feature. British Labour has been described as one of the most isolationist social democratic parties of Europe, concentrated as it was on its British character, by both contemporary Europeans and later scholars.⁶⁵⁴ Nevertheless, British Labour was also firmly situated within the circle of European (particularly North Western European) left wing parties, actively interacting with continental counterparts, especially the German and French, since its birth.⁶⁵⁵ In the inter-war period, British Labour provided considerable support for, and role in, forming international links between them. Labour politicians such as Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson played a central role in establishing the Labour and Socialist International and International Federation of Trade Unions, the most important post-First World War institutional expressions of co-operation between social democratic parties, and many others including workers’ travel associations, Esperanto, and Matteotti Fund.⁶⁵⁶

The strong links between British Labour and the European social democratic parties, however, did not smoothly extend to their colonial counterparts. As revealed in Chapter 3, Indian trade unionists were extremely disappointed with British Labour’s exclusion of Indian seamen from equal opportunities of employment and working conditions, which was regarded as contradicting the spirit of international trade unionism. This conflict originated from the unequal colonial relationship between Britain and India, which was also reflected in the relationship between the British Labour Party and the Indian national movement. In both cases, British superiority built upon the contemporary racial hierarchy influenced the uncomfortable relationship between the two groups. However, the

⁶⁵² 170 H.C. Deb. 5s. 28 Feb 1924, cols. 712-13.

⁶⁵³ 95 H.L. Deb. 5s. 12 Feb 1935, col. 877.

⁶⁵⁴ For example, see Sasson, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 15; Walter Kendall, *Labour Movement in Europe*, 3-4.

⁶⁵⁵ Berger, “Labour in Comparative Perspective,” 310; Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900-1931: A Comparative Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁶⁵⁶ Christine Collette, *The International Faith: Labour’s Attitudes to European Socialism, 1918-39* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

expression of this superiority varied from hostility to paternalism.⁶⁵⁷

Labour's internationalism could be described as white-centred internationalism, which took a diasporic form and involved a sense of unity based on common ethnic inheritance. British Labour supported the labour movements of white settlement societies such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. In many cases trade unions were established by migrants from Britain, and branches of British trade unions were established in these regions. The workers in the British white settler colonies (later the Dominions) were deemed *us* by the British labour movement. Labour supported their causes in occasional conflicts with native or indentured colonial workers, and in some cases, an attempt to build an exclusively white labour movement as in South Africa.⁶⁵⁸

Neither electoral influence nor ideological weakness dominated, rather, they interplayed. While the character of Labour's internationalism provided flexibility, which compromised its opposition to racism, electoral pressure channelled British race politics in a direction that hardly allowed any amelioration of anti-alien immigration control. The Labour government in 1945-51 and 1964-70 did not want to admit non-white British subjects into Britain, this was not however contradictory to its white-centred internationalism. of white-centred character. However, expression of such unwillingness was initially checked, which was done also by its ideological imperatives that racist remarks must not openly be expressed. Once it involved anti-coloured immigration control in its party politics, it became difficult to alter direction. As a result, Labour has been criticised for its contribution to the racialised division of people inside and outside the UK, despite the party's lead in the Race Relations Acts and related measures for ethnic minorities.

While the context surrounding immigration has changed, domestic responses to immigration in Britain have not. Regardless of the changes in the origins and character of the immigrants, British public opinion has remained largely averse to them, whether they were permanent settlers from the New Commonwealth, or more recently asylum

⁶⁵⁷ For the relationship between the British Labour Party and the Indian nationalists, see Owen, *British Left and*; The British Labour Party and the TUC contributed to the development of labour movements in Trinidad and the British West Indies in the 1920s. They supported the Trinidad Workingmen's Association through invitations to London, to the British Labour Commonwealth Conferences and assistance to labour leaders in forming trade unions and political labour parties. However, this assistance was based upon a paternalistic view of the colonized. Sahadeo Basdeo, "The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Development of Labour Organisation in Trinidad 1919-1929," *Social and Economic Studies* 30, no. 3 (1981): 21-41.

⁶⁵⁸ Bill Schwarz, *White Man's World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 156-58.

seekers and short-stay economic migrants from the European Union (EU).⁶⁵⁹ Asylum seekers from troubled areas are deemed illegal immigrants, and EU citizens are under suspicion of taking jobs from the British. Political responses have largely concentrated upon concerns for national sovereignty, connected with border controls, access to welfare rights and public services, and a sense of belonging to the nation, even though the ability to control such concerns have become more constrained due to the interdependent nature of the immigration taking place.⁶⁶⁰ British popular discontent over the discrepancy between the desire to control and the practical limits on the ability to do so in the EU context has pressed hard upon the major political parties in recent elections, culminating in the decision to leave the EU in 2016.

In this situation, the Labour Party seems to have been more uncomfortable in speaking out about its position on immigration than the Conservatives. Its dilemma is heightened by the composition of its supporters who represent the two kinds of aforementioned pressure on the party. Despite being criticised for their illiberal record, Labour has become the party of ethnic minorities who choose Labour as a practical political alternative to the Conservative Party. On one hand, most Black British, Asian and Muslim voters and local councillors are Labour supporters, along with the progressive and professional middle-class who want the party to show more commitment to its ideology of social justice and liberal stance on race and immigration. On the other hand, the mostly white working classes, and especially those in the constituencies suffering from industrial decline, want the party to respond to their demand for greater control of immigration, and for greater care for Britons. This seems to reflect a continuation of party political dynamics that started with non-white immigration in the latter half of the twentieth century, which seemed to open the rift between Labour's ideological principles of internationalism and the racist demands of white voters.

If there is any insight that this dissertation has provided so far, it is that the race politics of the Labour Party is deeply rooted in political nationalism. This means that the examination of the party's race politics needs to be expanded into a longer-term perspective. This study, unlike others, has shown that Labour's race politics neither started with post-1945 immigration nor was it entirely directed by the party's abandonment of its international principles. Discomfort with dealing with race issues,

⁶⁵⁹ Messina, "Post-WWII Migration to Britain," 70-71.

⁶⁶⁰ Andrew Geddes, "Getting the Best of Both World? Britain, the EU and Migration Policy," *International Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2005), 729.

attaching greater importance to skin colour, and appeals to the British national character, are features that reflect a continuity that can be traced back to the early twentieth century. Their consideration requires an understanding of the party's ideological basis which underpinned its politics. Its internationalism, an ideological tool against anti-alien and racist measures, had within it certain limits. The most salient point to remember is that internationalism was subject to the needs of national politics. The Labour Party's race politics defined its internationalism as being built on national patriotism, and its race politics were carried out, and must be examined, in relationship with its understanding of national character, tradition, and interests.

Abbreviations

CAB	Cabinet
CO	Colonial Office
HO	Home Office
ILPACR	Independent Labour Party Annual Conference Report
LCC	London County Council
LHASC	The Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LPACR	Labour Party Annual Conference Report
MRC	Modern Record Centre, University of Warwick
PREM	Prime Minister's Office
TNA	The National Archives, London
TUCAR	Trades Union Congress Annual Report

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National Union of Seamen Archive (MSS. 175)

International Transport Worker's Federation Archive (MSS. 159)

Trade Union Congress Archive / Shipping Industry (MSS. 292/655)

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