

**‘Black was the colour of our
fight.’ Black Power in Britain,
1955–1976**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines in detail the rise and fall of the British Black Power movement. It is the first book-length study of Black Power in Britain and the only one of any size written by a historian.

It traces the roots of British Black Power in (1) the anti-colonialist traditions of immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, India and Pakistan, the last three categories of which came to Britain in unprecedented numbers after 1955; (2) the influence of the contemporaneous black freedom struggle in the United States; and (3) most importantly the encounter with white racism in the United Kingdom. It argues that, although politically it was short-lived, the movement had a long-term cultural impact on black protest. It created a unifying black political identity and shifted the debate about domestic race relations onto a consideration of white racism as well as black immigration.

The exaggerated violence of the Black Power movement's rhetoric, however, gave the state the opportunity to harass activists on the streets and in the courts. Police infiltrated, spied on and frequently raided Black Power groups. Internally, cultural nationalism and increasingly dogmatic Marxist-Leninist agendas created political divisions that fragmented the movement. Most Black Power activists came from the Caribbean: the movement failed to directly engage large numbers of Asians, who made up the majority of Britain's post-war immigrants.

Nonetheless, Black Power's legacy was borne unintentionally in the industrial militancy of Asian immigrants in the 1970s, and deliberately by the

Abstract

founders of numerous social welfare and educational projects in black communities. The young black men who took direct action against police harassment and intimidation on the streets of Notting Hill and Southall in 1976 reflected both Black Power's militant spirit and its failure to achieve its goal of a society built on respect and equality.

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Contents

CONTENTS

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Introduction1

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and
the American civil rights movement, 1955–196525

Chapter 2: ‘In the belly of the beast’: from black
disillusionment to Black Power65

Chapter 3: ‘A revolutionary conspiracy’? Black
Power’s strengths and weaknesses116

Chapter 4: Counter-insurgency and community
funding: the state response163

Chapter 5: ‘Here to stay, here to fight!’ Asian
militancy, Black Power and the trade
union movement211

Conclusion256

Bibliography261

INTRODUCTION

‘My biggest motivation for joining the Panthers was my experience growing up as a black youth in England.’¹ So says Linton Kwesi Johnson – poet, reggae musician, record label boss and former Black Power activist. The fact that Britain had its own Black Power movement, which ran concurrently with its more famous American namesake, is not widely known. British Black Power developed as a reaction of the post-war generation of black immigrants, who came predominantly from the Caribbean and Southern Asia, to their experience of white racism in Britain.² It was shaped by their traditions of resisting British colonial exploitation in their home countries and built on the foundations of anti-colonialism and resistance to racial discrimination laid by previous generations in Britain, most notably African students in the 1930s and 1940s. It was also heavily influenced by, and often mimetic of, American Black Power, which provided a blueprint for rebellion in the urban centres of the industrial West. In Britain, however, members of Black Power groups neither carried guns nor engaged in violence, although their fiery rhetoric suggested otherwise. By the middle of the 1970s, the state’s repressive response to the threat it perceived from Black Power had combined with the movement’s internal tensions to undermine its coherence. Although a few groups that had started life as part of the Black Power movement continued to exist into the 1980s and 1990s, after the mid-1970s they no longer found Black Power a useful concept around which to organise.

¹ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

² The term ‘black’ is used throughout the thesis to denote people from Africa, the Caribbean and southern Asia. Immigrants of Caribbean descent are referred to as ‘West Indians’ because this is how they would have described themselves at the time. The term ‘Asian’ refers to Pakistanis, Indians and, after December 1971, Bangladeshis, as well as diasporan Asians from eastern and southern Africa. The term ‘black Briton’ is used to distinguish the first generation of British-born black people from their immigrant parents.

Introduction

Because Black Power is notoriously difficult to define and its American form so dominates the public's perception, it is essential to explain what Black Power meant in the British context and what constituted the 'British Black Power movement' with which this thesis concerns itself. Black Power movements in the Caribbean, North America and Britain had different timeframes and took different forms in response to the demographic, cultural and historical specificities of their region. Caribbean academic Brian Meeks, for example, has very specifically pinpointed the start of Black Power in the Caribbean as 16 October 1968, the day that the Jamaican government refused to let radical Guyanese academic Walter Rodney into the country to attend the Black Scholars conference, and says the movement was killed, alongside Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, on 19 October 1983.³ In the United States, historians generally take the starting point of the Black Power phase of the civil rights movement to be 16 June 1966, when Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader Stokely Carmichael emerged from a Mississippi gaolhouse after his twenty-seventh arrest and proclaimed that he would no longer be asking for freedom but demanding 'Black Power'.⁴ In his history of American Black Power, Peniel Joseph argues that the movement reached the zenith of its unity and cohesion in 1972, but had begun to decline precipitously – split by the power struggle between advocates of Pan-Africanism and socialism – by the time Carmichael and others took part in the sixth Pan-African Congress in Dar-es-Salaam in 1974. And while Joseph explains that, 'For the men and women who found inspiration and courage through their acceptance of the ideal of racial

³ Speech by Brian Meeks at the Internationalising Black Power conference at the Institute for the Study of the Americas, London, on 25 October 2007.

⁴ See R. Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: a history of America's civil rights movement* (New York, 1991), p. 199.

equality, the movement never ended', his narrative concludes when the Black Panther Party ceased to function as a national organisation in 1975.⁵

In Britain, the birth of the Black Power movement can be marked by the founding of the Universal Coloured People's Association (UCPA) in June 1967. The London group's mild, slightly old-fashioned sounding name belied its clear self-identification as a Black Power organisation – the UCPA's newspaper, for example, was called the *Black Power Newsletter*. As the UCPA was formed before the July 1967 London visit of Stokely Carmichael, which did a great deal to promote the Black Power message in Britain, one must look to Britain's own heritage of anti-colonial protest, both at home and in its colonies, to explain the emergence of the group. 'Too many people here in England, and unfortunately ... people in the United States too ... see Black Power and its advocates as some sort of portent, a sudden apparition, as some racist eruption from the depths of black oppression and black backwardness', wrote Trinidadian intellectual CLR James in 1967. 'It is nothing of the kind. It represents the high peak of thought on the Negro questions which has been going on for over half a century.'⁶

Precise definitions of Black Power are elusive.⁷ When Black Power doyen Stokely Carmichael and his co-author Charles Hamilton published their 1967 movement bible, *Black Power: the Politics of Liberation in America*, it contained no clear-cut definition.⁸ During a speech dedicated to the subject, CLR James

⁵ P. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: a narrative history of Black Power in America* (New York, 2006), p. 304. The Black Panther Party formally ceased to exist in 1982.

⁶ CLR James, 'Black Power: its past, today and the way ahead', text of a speech given in London in August 1967, reprinted as a pamphlet by Frank John in 1968, p. 7. Held in the Black Documents file at the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

⁷ Historian William Lux wrote in 1972 that, 'The difficulty in defining a phenomenon like Black Power is that it has different meanings for its various adherents. It is this universality that so complicated the idea'. W. Lux, 'Black Power in the Caribbean', *Journal of Black Studies* 3:2 (December 1972), p. 207.

⁸ S. Carmichael and C. Hamilton, *Black Power: the Politics of Liberation in America* (New York, 1967).

Introduction

managed no more precise a definition of Black Power than a 'banner for people with certain political aims, needs and attitudes ... around which they can rally'.⁹ James did not intend the looseness of his definition to undermine what he perceived to be the tremendous significance of this 'banner'. For its followers it was, he said, 'the symbol of a tremendous change in life and society as they have known it'.¹⁰ Perhaps the closest one can come to a definition is to delineate a set of core themes with which all Black Power movements engaged. These are: identity (that is culture, self-definition, pride, and dignity); community control (self-determination, control of the institutions of one's community and its defence); anti-colonialism; and internationalism. In the British movement, unity between people of African and Asian descent was also a principal aim. Other political objectives were espoused by Black Power groups in different movements at different times: but such goals as the revolutionary overthrow of society, Pan-Africanism, Marxism-Leninism, geographical separatism and the need for the black community to accrue political power and financial wealth, are too specific to be included in a general definition of Black Power.

Britain was particularly fertile ground for the message of Black Power because its black subjects had been busily engaging with the movement's central themes throughout the twentieth century. Although British Black Power clearly drew inspiration from its American counterpart in many ways, there is a strong thread of continuity between the demands and actions of indigenous groups like the UCPA and the Black Panther Movement (BPM) and those colonial subjects who came to the imperial metropolis in the inter-war period with the intention of freeing themselves from British domination. To read the memoirs of Guyanese

⁹ CLR James, 'Black Power', p. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid. p 4.

student Ras Makonnen, who came to Britain in 1937, helped found the International African Service Bureau with George Padmore in the same year, and was pivotal in organising the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945, is to hear Black Power in action long before Stokely Carmichael gave it a name. 'Ours was a strictly black organisation', wrote Makonnen of the Pan-African Federation that organised the 1945 Congress, 'I was not going to take another group of white people who would want us to say later that if it had not been for them, we would never have gained our independence'.¹¹ In common with the majority of the politically active Africans in Britain alongside whom Makonnen had campaigned, he left Britain for Africa in the 1950s to continue the struggle for decolonisation there. However, in the 1950s and early 1960s a number of people and organisations in Britain provided an intellectual bridge between the struggles against imperialism and colonialism of the recent past and the struggles for racial equality of the present. People such as Amy Ashwood Garvey, CLR James, Walter Rodney (who studied in London from 1963 to 1966), Claudia Jones, and groups like the Committee of African Organisations, promoted an international focus that situated the struggle against Britain's 'colour bar' within a global struggle of the oppressed.

To understand British Black Power, one must explain what was meant by the terms identity, community control, anti-colonialism and internationalism in the British context. Of all of these, identity is the most important and Black Power's most significant and enduring achievements in Britain lay in this sphere. The first step to black liberation, according to the authors of *Black Power*, was 'to reclaim our history and our identity from what must be called cultural terrorism': this was

¹¹ R. Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within* (Oxford, 1973), p. 179.

no less true in post-imperial Britain than in post-emancipation America.¹² Self-definition – the ability to throw off the negative stereotypes of black people, black culture and black countries, historically created by white imperialists to excuse and explain their exploitative behaviour, and recognise one's own worth – would lead, it was hoped, to an empowering pride, self-respect and dignity for Britain's blacks. The adoption in Britain in the late 1960s of the word 'black', in preference to, say, West Indian, to describe oneself signified this process of self-definition, and the term implied pride and self-respect precisely because it was independently chosen. The reclamation of an independent black culture was done in myriad ways in Britain, but most strongly through a supplementary education movement for both children and adults, in which they could learn about the histories and achievements of their ancestors and contemporaries. British Black Power, like all Black Power movements, also made a point of asserting that black people were part of a global majority. In Britain this was an important part of the development of a 'black consciousness', because the recognition of a shared history of oppression under the British might help black people of Asian and African origin to unite against a common foe. This was a radical message to people who had historically been enslaved, indentured and colonised and were still being treated like second-class citizens in their home and adopted countries.

Community control comprised self-help, self-sufficiency, self-determination and self-defence. In Britain this encompassed, among other things, a refusal to accept government funding and the proliferation of community-based self-help programmes such as supplementary schools, homeless hostels and legal advocacy services. Geographical separatism and black economic independence were not

¹² S. Carmichael and C. Hamilton, *Black Power: the Politics of Liberation in America* (New York, 1967), p. 34.

Introduction

viable goals in Britain therefore self-determination and self-sufficiency took the form of creating the independent social, welfare and recreational facilities listed above. Self-determination also involved an attempt to establish public spaces like streets and markets as the domain of the local community and to repudiate the police when it was thought they were attempting to watch, control or intimidate black people in public. Self-defence did not mean that British Black Power groups armed themselves or engaged in violence, although they did seek to protect their communities by patrolling the streets, monitoring the actions of the police and trying to provide legal advice and representation wherever possible. A commitment to self-defence did not necessitate violent behaviour – as politicians, the police and the media often believed – but rather was a decision on principle not to passively endure individual racism and state repression.

If the development of a black consciousness was regarded as a process of interior decolonisation, British Black Power also explicitly promoted external decolonisation, in the form of support for anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia. This was a cause espoused by most Black Power movements, but especially British Black Power, located in the heart of the greatest imperial power in the world, peopled by former colonial subjects and drawing on a strong tradition of metropolitan anti-colonialism. British groups expressed solidarity with, publicised the struggles of, and fundraised for, African liberation movements in Mozambique, Rhodesia, Angola and Guiné-Bissau, among others, and campaigned against apartheid in South Africa. They also supported Irish Republicanism and regarded the British army's presence in Northern Ireland as a colonial occupation.

It was perhaps not surprising that a movement made up of people who had recently arrived from countries in Africa, the Caribbean and Asia should have a

Introduction

strong international focus, or that people who, until very recently, had been colonial subjects, identified with the Irish, but there was also a theoretical underpinning for Black Power's internationalism distinct from its anti-colonialism. By taking a global perspective, black people could see themselves as part of a world majority, rather than a national minority. This was particularly important in Britain, where in the late 1960s black people constituted about two per cent of the population. Paying attention to Third World liberation struggles also served to reinforce the idea that black people were as important as white westerners and boosted a sense of numerical strength and power.

The final defining characteristic of British Black Power was that in Britain, unlike in the United States, Black Power had to bridge the racial divide between Asian, West Indian and African immigrants and their differing experiences of colonialism. This meant that interracial unity was a primary objective of the British Black Power movement. 'Black Power is Black Unity', explained a leaflet produced by the UCPA. 'Black People (that is, Africans, West Indians, Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, Arabs and all non-white peoples), united together can and will gain their human rights. We, the black people, need the unity that gives us Black Power.'¹³ It is the contention of this thesis that the irrevocable establishment of blackness as a unifying political identity was one of the most important achievements of British Black Power. '[W]e have got one more chance, i.e. BLACK POWER! ... Therefore the truth is "IN UNITY LIES OUR LIBERATION"', explained the newsletter of Leicester's Black People's Liberation Front in 1971.¹⁴ The move away from this perspective to a more ethnically-defined

¹³ UCPA, 'Black power is black unity', undated leaflet held in the Black Organisations file at the IRR.

¹⁴ *Black Chat*, issue 1, 1971, p. 1. Newsletter of the Leicester-based Black People's Liberation Party.

Introduction

identity politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s is one of the reasons this thesis ends in 1976.

There are several other reasons why this study draws to a close in 1976, despite the fact that two of Britain's major Black Power groups, the Black Liberation Front (BLF) and the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP), continued to exist and produce newspapers until the 1990s. If CLR James placed Black Power at the 'high peak' of black protest politics in 1967, by 1976 it was no longer cutting edge. Single-issue politics that were rooted in the experiences and built on the strengths of black communities – for example legal defence and anti-deportation campaigns; black feminism; Asian Youth Movements; and social and welfare organisations that provided skills training and lodging for disadvantaged black youths – all owed a great debt to the Black Power movement but also superseded it politically. Finally, by 1976, the American Black Power movement, collapsing under the weight of sustained and brutal state repression, had ceased to be a useful reference point for black people looking for inspiration and a practical template for resisting state racism.

Beyond the boundaries of the Black Power movement, other factors in British society made 1976 a watershed year. In August 1976, at the Grunwick factory in north London, a strike of black workers, led by an Asian woman, managed for the first time to inspire unequivocal support across the trade union movement. It was the apex of a sustained campaign of Asian-led strikes that (unintentionally) fulfilled the vanguard role of the black worker prescribed by many Black Power groups. In Westminster, the successful passage of the 1976 Race Relations Act meant that legal sanctions against racial discrimination were finally being applied in a systematic and effective manner. At the other end of the spectrum, the street

battle between black youths and the police that broke out at the Notting Hill Carnival in August 1976 represented a new chapter in the history of black resistance to the aggressive, discriminatory behaviour of the police, that was undoubtedly informed by, but not part of, the Black Power movement.

British Black Power groups, because of their fear of police persecution, deliberately left very little in the way of written evidence, and much of what was kept has been left to rot in individual activists' cellars and attics. In the last five years a number of Heritage Lottery Fund grants have been awarded to enable the long-overdue process of locating, preserving and cataloguing some of these document collections. The London Metropolitan Archives now houses the papers of activists Eric and Jessica Huntley; the online catalogue of the George Padmore Institute lists holdings of papers from several organisations headed by John La Rose (see www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org.uk); South London's Black Cultural Archives and the Institute of Race Relations are also both in the process of archiving their collections. At the time of writing, however, only the George Padmore Institute's collection is fully open to the public and access to that is severely constrained by the capacity of its very small staff to accommodate visitors. Outside of London these problems are even more acute and it is, at the present time, virtually impossible to locate and access the meagre historical resources on provincial Black Power groups. The thesis makes London its focus, therefore, by necessity.

This does not necessarily represent an unforgivable distortion of the historical record though. Although most towns the size of Huddersfield and upwards that had a substantial non-white population were likely to have a small

Introduction

Black Power group, it was the London organisations that had the most members and by far the greatest influence and impact. According to a 1969 survey, just fewer than half the black people in Britain lived in London – therefore the predominant focus on the capital is not entirely unwarranted.¹⁵ As long as one is careful to acknowledge the existence of groups in the provincial towns and cities, it need not undermine one's claim to write about Black Power in *Britain* that the majority of the focus is on London. That said, the research for this thesis has thrown up virtually no information about whether the relatively small numbers of black people living in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland between 1955 and 1976 had their own Celtic brands of Black Power, and thus it is only fair and accurate to acknowledge that this study sheds no light on British Black Power beyond the borders of England. However, until further research uncovers evidence that there were distinctive Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Black Power movements, the term British Black Power, as opposed to English Black Power, will be used.

‘A white person who ventures to speak or write on any aspect of black history must first of all answer the question: “What has black history got to do with white people?”’, wrote white journalist and author Peter Fryer in 1993.¹⁶ The answer of this thesis is – everything. The history of black immigration to and settlement in Britain is as much ‘British history’ as that of the economy it boosted. ‘Without the black element’, Fryer concluded, ‘British history is seriously and misleadingly

¹⁵ EJB Rose et al, *Colour and Citizenship: a Report on British Race Relations* (London, 1969), pp. 101–2, estimates that 47 per cent of non-white immigrants in Britain lived in London at the time of both the 1961 and 1966 censuses. Rose also notes that in 1966 non-white people comprised more than 5 per cent of the population of only six local authorities, all of which were London boroughs.

¹⁶ P. Fryer, *Aspects of British History* (London, 1993), p. 5.

incomplete'.¹⁷ The theoretical and methodological approach of the thesis reflects this belief. It is a critical assessment of the growth of radical protest among the black immigrant communities that developed in Britain after the start of large-scale immigration from Asia and the Caribbean in 1955. That is not to say that black people did not live in Britain and contribute to its politics before the Second World War. There has been a continuous black presence in Britain since the sixteenth century, from which time black people have been important, if overlooked, agents in Britain's domestic history.¹⁸ Although the black presence in Britain before the Second World War is a relatively under-researched area of history, it is not the focus of this thesis because the story of Black Power in Britain represents an even greater lacuna. It is not just under-researched, but unresearched.

African American historian Manning Marable has described authentic black history as 'a historical narrative in which blacks themselves are the principal actors and that the story is told and explained largely from their own vantage point'.¹⁹ Although written by a white historian, this thesis aspires to 'authenticity' in that it seeks to analyse black agency in the post-war period. As broad a range of sources as possible has been consulted and, to give voice to black agency, wherever possible the thesis references independent sources from within black communities in favour of interpretative ones from the white community and the state. Hence, underground black newspapers are used more liberally than articles

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁸ See, for example, P. Fryer, *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), Gretchen Gerzina, *Black England: Life Before Emancipation* (London, 1995), F. Shyllon, *Black People in Britain: 1555-1833* (London, 1977) and J. Walvin, *Black and White: the Negro and English Society* (London, 1973).

¹⁹ M. Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (New York, 2006), p. 21.

Introduction

from the mainstream white press.²⁰ Similarly, the records of black groups like the Indian Workers' Association of Great Britain are preferred to the records of white-dominated organisations like the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), even though many black people participated in the latter. It privileges the actions of the radical grassroots groups, such as the UCPA, above organisations like the National Council of Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI), which were convened by the state and had handpicked black members. Unsurprisingly, given their unwillingness to leave written evidence that might be used against them, original documents from Black Power and other community groups are much scarcer than information produced by the state, the mainstream media and the 'race relations industry'.²¹ However, often the best sources of empirical information about Black Power groups' activities were Special Branch surveillance files, prosecution case notes and police records, which also contained within them Black Power literature confiscated during raids. To augment this primary literature, fifteen former activists have been interviewed, most of whom claimed it was the first time any historian – black or white – had asked about their involvement in Black Power. Their memories both contextualise the written sources and fill in some of the gaps that remained after a close reading of them, although as with all oral history the subjectivity of personal recollection and the distorting effect of hindsight must always be taken into account.

The thesis quite deliberately does not often engage with the intellectual pyrotechnics of black cultural studies scholars like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. This is because after two early and important works, *Policing The Crisis:*

²⁰ The exceptions to this are the articles of white journalists Colin McGlashan (*The Observer*) and Derek Humphry (*The Sunday Times*), who were respected by many black people for their perceptiveness about white racism and thus allowed unparalleled access to radical black groups.

²¹ For an explanation of the slightly pejorative term 'race relations industry' see page 16.

Mugging, the State and Law and Order and *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, Hall and his disciples' work descended into jargon-heavy, post-structuralist abstruseness that had little to say about the daily motivations of black people.²² Furthermore, its hostility to empiricism and material analysis means that cultural studies has little to tell us about the social and economic conditions that gave rise to black political radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s. This criticism has been made in various commentaries on black cultural studies.²³ To this author, cultural studies' critique of traditional historical methodology also seems a little defeatist, as if it assumes that genuinely assessing the economic, political and social activities of black people will not reveal a substantial contribution to British society.

As previously noted there is no historical account of the Black Power movement in Britain. There are also surprisingly few book-length histories of post-war British race relations. A good indicator of how much historians have neglected the area is the fact that the most comprehensive and useful book on the subject, Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain*, was written more than twenty years ago.²⁴ Fryer's book, the work of a journalist, has been justly criticised by feminist Catherine Hall for having 'almost nothing to say about women' and by academic Tariq Modood for neglecting the contribution of Asian

²² S. Hall, C. Critcher, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London, 1978) and Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London, 1982).

²³ See J. Bourne, 'Racism, Postmodernism and the Flight from Class', in D. Hill, P. McLaren, M. Cole and G. Rikowski (eds), *Postmodernism in Educational Theory: Education and the Politics of Human Resistance* (London, 1999), A. Sivanandan, 'All that melts into air is solid: the hokum of New Times', *Race & Class* 31:3 (1990) and A. Sivanandan, 'Le trahison des clercs', *Race & Class* 37:3 (1996). Coming from a very different perspective, sociologist Tariq Modood has robustly criticised Paul Gilroy's work on the black experience in Britain for excluding the experiences of Asian immigrants. See T. Modood, 'Political Blackness and British Asians', *Sociology* 28:4 (1994) and P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in The Union Jack* (London, 1992) and *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, 1993).

²⁴ Fryer, *Staying Power*.

immigrants.²⁵ Indian journalist Dilip Hiro's *Black British, White British*, strikes a more even balance between the histories of Asians, Africans and West Indians in Britain, but comes to a close in the late 1960s just as the Black Power movement was beginning.²⁶ A former Communist, who had been expelled from the British party for his critical reporting of the invasion of Hungary in 1956, Fryer remained a committed socialist. Hence *Staying Power* approaches the history of British race relations firmly from the left, and clearly shows the influence of fellow Marxist A. Sivanandan, whose polemical essay, 'From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain', has remained highly influential since its publication in 1981.²⁷ Sivanandan's personal experiences as an immigrant from Sri Lanka in the 1950s and a fellow traveller of the Black Power movement and his professional career as the head of Europe's first race relations library from 1964 and then the director of a radicalised Institute of Race Relations from 1972, gives him a unique insight into the history of race relations and black resistance in Britain. His convincingly argued thesis on the economic function of British racism in 'From Resistance to Rebellion' is a useful starting point for scholars of British race relations.

The modern academic discipline of race relations was founded in 1947 with the publication of anthropologist Kenneth Little's *Negroes in Britain: a Study of*

²⁵ C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 19. In spite of this criticism Hall also describes *Staying Power* as 'vital'. Modood's criticism is that, 'Despite the usual prefatory remarks about Asians as an integral part of black Britain [*Staying Power*] devotes less than twenty of its six hundred pages to them'. T. Modood, 'The limits of America: rethinking equality in the changing context of British race relations' in B. Ward and A. Badger (eds), *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 182.

²⁶ D. Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London, 1971).

²⁷ A. Sivanandan, 'From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain', *Race & Class*, 23:2 (1981).

Race Relations in English Society.²⁸ The idea of writing a book about the living conditions of the black community in Britain had come to Little during a field trip to measure the head sizes of black children in Cardiff. Until large-scale immigration to Britain from Asia and the Caribbean after 1955 began to make black faces more visible in British society, scholars continued to approach the study of black immigrants in the same way they would an exotic tribe in the Amazon basin. However, Little and his protégés' work was important to the future study of race relations because it helped to overturn the widely accepted theory that races were biologically different, thereby repudiating the eugenic claims of scientific racism.

The state's acknowledgement by the mid-1960s that Britain had become a multiracial society coincided with the rising popularity of the new discipline of social science. The political consensus at the time was that black immigrants were straining Britain's welfare state by occupying council housing, spreading disease, undercutting wages and, paradoxically, living off social security. These were exactly the sorts of research areas to which the burgeoning ranks of sociologists wanted to apply themselves, hence from the mid-1960s onwards the study of British race relations became their preserve. They were awarded numerous posts in universities and large, well-funded race relations bodies such as the Institute of Race Relations and, from 1968, the Runnymede Trust. The enormous volume of work they produced earned this new area of study the reputation of being a race relations 'industry'.

²⁸ K. Little, *Negroes in Britain: a Study of Race Relations in English Society* (London, 1947). For references to Little as a founder of race relations see C. Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in our midst: discourses of race and nation in Britain, 1947-1963", *Journal of British Studies*, 36:2 (1997), p. 209; M. Banton, 'Three current issues in ethnic and racial studies', *British Journal of Sociology* 56:4 (2005), p. 623 and I. Duffield, 'History and the historians', *History Today* 31 (1981), p. 34.

Although well-meaning, the majority of the output of the race relations industry was predicated on two racist assumptions: firstly, that white British society was the civilised norm to which others should both aspire and conform and secondly, that the biggest obstacle to integration was the inassimilable volume of black immigrants.²⁹ Until the publication in 1967 of the Race Relations Board-commissioned *Report on Racial Discrimination*, many academics questioned whether racial discrimination actually existed in Britain, viewing disharmony between whites and blacks as merely cultural misunderstanding (usually on the part of the latter).³⁰ As late as 1973, unwittingly racist assumptions such as, 'The puritan influence on the English outlook has meant that many English people feel more guilty about wrongdoing than many Asians', were still found in books by leading race relations sociologists.³¹ The statistical data collected in many of these books, however, can be very useful. Dubbed 'a Myrdal for Britain', the Institute of Race Relations' *Colour & Citizenship: a Report on British Race Relations* is an invaluable compendium of facts and does contain some progressive analysis.³² On the whole, however, the best approach towards the work of race relations experts in the 1960s is that of historian Chris Waters, who recommends 're-read[ing] the texts ... *within* their historical context, as texts, especially for the ways in which they

²⁹ Leading works from this period include: M. Banton, *The Coloured Quarter: Negro Immigrants in an English City* (London, 1955); S. Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A study of West Indians in London* (Harmondsworth, 1965) and C. Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain: a Social Geography* (London, 1969).

³⁰ Political and Economic Planning, *Report on Racial Discrimination* (London, 1967), published the following year as W. Daniel, *Racial Discrimination in England: Based on the P.E.P. Report* (Harmondsworth, 1968).

³¹ M. Banton, *Police Community Relations* (London, 1973), p. 122.

³² A Swedish economics professor, Gunnar Myrdal published a pathbreaking and comprehensive survey of race relations in the United States in 1944. E.J.B. Rose et al, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations* (London, 1969). G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944).

constituted the “experience” they claimed, transparently and unproblematically, to document’.³³

Finding secondary sources written from a black perspective in the 1970s is easier, not least because in 1972 the staff of the Institute of Race Relations voted out their management and refused to undertake any more research they felt did not reflect the concerns of the black community. A leaflet from June 1974 advertising the first issue of the Institute’s newly renamed academic journal *Race & Class* explained that, thenceforth, its editorial imperative would be, ‘The people we are writing for are the people we are fighting for.’³⁴ Edited by Sivanandan, *Race & Class*’s commitment to publishing politically engaged and plainly-written articles, often by non-academics and activists, has meant that it remains the pre-eminent publication for scholars seeking to learn about black history from a black perspective.³⁵

In the highly politically polarised 1980s, most academic work on race relations wore its ideology on its sleeve. Much of the discourse on racism became the preserve of postmodernists, critical theorists and culturalists, who explored themes such as ethnic identity and the transmission of culture. Hard politics drove the work of others. The flourishing anti-fascist movement, which grew in response to a resurgence of support for the National Front, inspired some academics to construct more straight-forward, political analyses of race relations. They primarily charted the history of white racism, however, and only dealt with black responses

³³ Waters, “Dark Strangers”, p. 210. Italics original.

³⁴ Advertising leaflet, June 1974, held, unfiled, at the IRR.

³⁵ ‘In considering the overall terrain of black political organization and ideology, the most fruitful source will be the material produced from within these groups themselves, such as the journals (e.g. *Race and Class* [sic]...’. G. Ben-Tovim and J. Gabriel, ‘The politics of race in Britain, 1962–79: a review of the major trends and of recent debates’, in C. Husband (ed), *Race in Britain: Continuity and Change* (London, 1982), p. 166.

to it in passing.³⁶ Feminist publishing house Virago broke new ground in 1985 by printing the first history of black women's independent political development.³⁷ As black women only began to organise *as women* in the late 1970s, however, only the seeds of black feminism are considered in this thesis. Black Marxism found its apotheosis in the work of Sivanandan and Ron Ramdin's broad, synthetic survey of the interplay of race and class in the twentieth century, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*.³⁸

Work on British race relations in the last twenty years has, perhaps understandably, tended to focus on examining the causes and consequences of the riots of 1981 and 1985. Although a discussion of the riots of the 1980s is well beyond the scope of this thesis, it does suggest that the state's successful suppression of the Black Power movement in the 1970s contributed to the intolerable frustration of the communities that revolted in the 1980s. Writing about the 1980s, Paul Gilroy described 'The protracted resistance of black youth against the lowly racial fate that had been prescribed for them', arguing that, 'A special daring, shaped above all by hopelessness, was what generated the tides of protest'.³⁹ This thesis contends that Black Power, while it failed to avert the prescription of a 'lowly racial fate', did equip future generations with the ability to recognise such a fate and rebel against it, constructively or otherwise. What Gilroy refers to as the 'reckless despair' of rioting black youth in the 1980s can

³⁶ R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* (London and New York, 1987) and C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society 1871-1971* (Basingstoke, 1988) both contain short but useful discussions of the role of the far-right in post-war British race relations.

³⁷ B. Bryan, S. Dadzie and S. Scafe, *The Heart of Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London, 1985). In 1978 Virago had published *Finding A Voice*, Amrit Wilson's equally path-breaking polemic on Asian women's dual oppression by white society and their own communities. A. Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain* (London, 1978).

³⁸ See A. Sivanandan's collection of essays, *A Different Hunger* (London, 1982) and R. Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987). Ramdin's coverage of the post-war period is largely a synthesis of the historical narratives of Fryer and Hiro and the dialectical materialist analysis of Sivanandan.

³⁹ P. Gilroy, *Black Britain: a Photographic History* (London, 2007), p. 218.

alternatively be interpreted as a targeted response against the police.⁴⁰ This is an argument for another time, but it is worth pointing out that historians who analyse the riots in terms of the policies of the Thatcher government and the pathology of the black community, would benefit from considering the history of Black Power, which a decade earlier represented a more constructive response to similar conditions of social and economic inequality and police injustice, and was quashed by the state.

This thesis traces the rise and fall of the Black Power movement and is therefore organised chronologically. However, as it is also concerned with the intellectual development of Black Power as a theory, the chapters have different, analytical, themes. The origins and evolution of the Black Power movement in Britain were inherently transnational. The British movement drew inspiration from both its American namesake and the struggles against imperialism, both in the countries from which its members had emigrated, and in Britain earlier in the twentieth century. The state's response to the movement was also influenced by events in other nations, particularly its unease about African American riots in the United States and the fear that Caribbean Black Power would stand in the way of neo-colonialism in the Commonwealth. Throughout its evolution, though, the movement was nourished by white British racism, expressed through the state in the form of racially discriminatory immigration laws and the inability of police and policy-makers to understand that militant black politics was a reactive rather than an aggressive phenomenon.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Introduction

Chapter one starts with a brief look at the intellectual roots and evolution of the British Black Power movement, focusing on the anti-colonial politics of African and West Indian students in Britain in the inter-war years. It then considers the impact of the American civil rights movement on the newly arrived black immigrants to Britain between 1955 and 1965. By examining why mimetic activities like the Bristol bus boycott of 1963 and the foundation of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination in 1965 fared so badly, it shows how different the societal and race relations contexts were in Britain and the United States during this period. The second half of the chapter traces the development of a genuine political consciousness among black immigrants after 1955, arguing that it was the experience of white British racism, particularly in the form of discriminatory immigration legislation, which both politicised and united them. Abandoning support for the Labour Party in 1965, they began to realise the necessity of independent political organisation to campaign for equal rights.

Chapter two contrasts the widespread indifference of black immigrants to the non-violent phase of the American civil rights movement with the identification of a number of British black activists with American Black Power. Showing how British society became increasingly racially polarised in the second half of the 1960s, it argues that it was the widespread press coverage surrounding the London visit of charismatic African American radical Stokely Carmichael in July 1967 that transformed the fledgling Black Power movement in the capital into a national phenomenon. The second half of the chapter uses interviews and primary evidence to elucidate the composition and activities of Britain's four most important Black Power organisations as well as Michael X's Racial Adjustment

Action Society, which pre-dated the Black Power movement by two years, but was regarded by many as part of it.

Chapter three assesses these groups' achievements and failings during the life of the Black Power movement. It argues that the influence of Black Power spread far beyond its tiny official membership, that it fundamentally changed the way black people thought of themselves, created a black political identity capable of uniting West Indians, Africans and Asians, and radicalised the study of race relations. The movement's tenets of education, self-help and community work enriched its members' lives and strengthened the communities in which they operated. However, weak leadership and a lack of ideological coherence meant that the movement was unfocused in its early years. This was rectified in the 1970s by heavy discipline and doctrinal rigidities that splintered the groups and eventually led to a divide between cultural nationalist organisations like the BLF and Marxist-Leninist groups like the BUFP and BPM, which changed their focus from race to class during the movement's declining years. Although a few Black Power organisations continued to exist after the mid-1970s, by then most politically active black people, while not hostile to Black Power, found it too blunt a conceptual tool. What had been referred to as the Black Power struggle, became simply the black struggle.

Chapter four assesses the relationship between black radicals and the British state. It looks at how black people were discriminated against by the police and the courts and examines in detail three pivotal trials of Black Power activists. It shows that the government had an unwritten policy of harassing Black Power activists and their organisations through the law and used suspended sentences as a form of social control. The British government kept a close eye on how the

Introduction

American government was dealing with radical African American dissent and borrowed from President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society initiatives. The British government's Urban Programme brought many former Black Power activists into the orbit of the state by funding their social welfare projects, divorcing them from their political objectives in the process. It also passed a wide-ranging and effective Race Relations Act in 1976 in an attempt to remove some of the black community's grievances. The government's success in destabilising the Black Power movement and its attempts to prove its good faith to the black community through funding programmes and equality legislation ultimately did not diminish black disaffection with the state because of its failure to address the crucial issue of racism in the police force.

The thesis concludes by assessing the history of Asian political activity in the 1960s and its links to Black Power, and explains why the latter held little attraction for most Indians and Pakistanis. It points out that Asians' strong sense of community and their commitment to maintaining their traditions, customs and religious practices in Britain made them cultural nationalists by default. It further argues that, in the 1970s, the remaining Black Power groups' belief in the primacy of class oppression and the vanguard role of the black worker was realised on the shop floor by Asians, who provided the backbone of black industrial militancy. Although the overthrow of capitalism was not their objective, their success in overturning entrenched trade union racism provided an important step towards uniting the black and white working classes and ensuring the more equitable treatment of black workers.

'The Black Panthers were saying the sort of things I wanted to hear and doing the sort of things I thought necessary to do', remembers Linton Kwesi Johnson.⁴¹ Within this statement lies the essence of Black Power's appeal in Britain. Far more than just a facsimile of the American movement, British Black Power was perhaps the first independent attempt to address the concerns of black people in Britain in an uncompromising way. The epicentre of British Black Power was London, but it was a national movement, however numerically small, disjointed and short-lived. Black Power developed in relation to black people's lived experiences, both under colonial rule in their home countries and as the lowest rung of the British underclass, and spoke to their domestic and international concerns. Its message of black pride was transformative, both for its members and British society. Its history needs to be told.

⁴¹ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

CHAPTER 1

Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

Introduction

Between 1955, when the main thrust of post-war immigration from the Caribbean and southern Asia began, and 1 July 1962, when the Commonwealth Immigrants Act closed the country's open door to its colonial and Commonwealth subjects, Britain gained a substantial black population. But even after the passage of its first Race Relations Act in 1965, Britain still had a long way to travel before it fully adjusted to the idea of being a multiracial society. Moreover, during this period most immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean intended only to be a migrant population who would work hard, save money and return home. Initially, therefore, they were less interested in British politics than in events back home. Having experienced British race relations as its colonial subjects, they had no idea what racism in the metropole would be like and in many cases did not immediately identify it. A 1967 survey, jointly commissioned by statutory bodies the Race Relations Board and the National Council for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI) concluded that, on the whole, black immigrants thought that racial discrimination affected their lives less than it actually did.

The politicisation of black immigrants that took place between 1955 and 1965 was primarily driven by their experiences of white British racism. The 1958 white-on-black riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham delivered a sharp message to the predominantly West Indian, but also African and Asian, immigrants living there that many white Britons were far from happy about the arrival of their fellow citizens from the New Commonwealth. The immigrants, whose colonial educations had prepared them to find Britain a benevolent, tolerant country that would make no distinction

between them and its indigenous population, began to recalibrate their expectations. Yet they continued to believe that the Labour Party, because of its egalitarian views on immigration, would represent their interests in parliament, and therefore kept faith in British electoral politics. By the mid-1960s, this faith had been severely undermined by a series of legislative measures passed under Labour, beginning with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act and culminating in a 1965 White Paper, *Immigration from the Commonwealth*, that reversed the party's commitment to unregulated Commonwealth immigration. In reaction to a growing impression that it was not just the British people but the British state that was racist, and the realisation that economic factors meant their stay in Britain was unlikely to be brief, black immigrants began to look for ways to come together to fight for their political rights. In developing a group political consciousness they drew on the various anti-colonial traditions of their home countries and the political struggles of earlier generations of black people in Britain, but also began to listen to the radical voices emerging from the United States.

Black people had been a continuous, if small, presence in Britain for over 500 years, but the level of black immigration after 1955 represented a new phenomenon. The Labour government had noted with a distinct lack of enthusiasm the arrival of 492 mainly Jamaican ex-servicemen on the *SS Empire Windrush* in June 1948 – seven years later, more than 20,000 immigrants from the Caribbean arrived in Britain.¹ Hence, in 1955 the British government decided to start collecting immigration statistics for the

¹ Although historians' estimates differ, they all show a marked increase in immigration from the Caribbean between 1952 and 1954. Dilip Hiro estimated that the number of Caribbean immigrants entering Britain increased from approximately 1,000 per year between 1948 and 1952 to just under 11,000 in 1954 and more than 22,000 in 1955. See D. Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London, 1971), pp. 8–9. Peter Fryer made higher estimates but followed the same pattern, writing that yearly immigration from the Caribbean jumped from a plateau of 2,000 in 1952 and 1953 to 24,000 in 1954. See P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), p. 372. For a discussion of the government's reaction to the arrival of the *SS Windrush*, see S. Joshi and B. Carter, 'The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain', *Race & Class* 25:3 (1984), pp. 57–61.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

countries of the New Commonwealth.² The increased immigration to Britain from the Caribbean in 1955 was partly caused by the fact that, after 1952, the United States, West Indians' preferred migration destination, no longer let them into the country. The McCarran-Walter Act ended the practice of allowing West Indians to enter the United States under the category of British citizens and set a new Caribbean immigration quota of just 800 per year.³ As saving up for a passage to Britain took considerably longer than it had for nearby America, the impact of the McCarran-Walter Act took a few years to be felt in the UK, but from the mid-1950s immigration from the Caribbean increased considerably.

Immigration from southern Asia was slight during the 1950s. This was partly because until 1960, when the Indian Supreme Court ruled the practice illegal, the Pakistani and Indian governments had a gentlemen's agreement with Britain to reduce emigration by restricting the issue of passports. From 1960 onwards the British economy's need for more workers, the encouragement and financial assistance from relatives and friends already in Britain, and the fear of pending immigration control, resulted in immigration from India and Pakistan rising dramatically.⁴ The majority of the Asian immigrants were young single men. Indians were predominantly Sikhs from the Punjab or, in far fewer numbers, Hindus from Gujarat. Pakistanis travelled from Sylhet in East Pakistan or Mirpur in West Pakistan and were Muslim. Ironically, it was the threat of controls that proved to be the biggest stimulus to immigration from

² The New Commonwealth comprised countries in the Caribbean, Asia, East and West Africa and the Mediterranean. What differentiated these nations from Old Commonwealth countries like Australia and Canada was that their populations were predominantly non-white.

³ Hiro, *Black British*, p. 8.

⁴ Hiro estimated that the combined immigration from the two countries almost quadrupled from 7,500 to 48,000 between 1960 and 1961. See *ibid.*, p. 108.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

southern Asia, which had outstripped that from the Caribbean by the time the Commonwealth Immigrants Act came into effect in 1962.⁵

Immigrants from Africa were far fewer and their stays much shorter, although, as sociologist A. T. Carey warned in 1955, 'Accurate statistics are not yet available, as no separate records of Negroes and other Coloureds are kept by the authorities'.⁶ Home Office estimates on the entry and exit of African immigrants from East and West Africa between 1955 and 1 July 1962 show a small, transient population. According to these figures, slightly more Africans (240) left Britain than entered in 1960, and most years saw a net inward migration of less than 2,500 Africans.⁷ Data from the 1951 and 1961 censuses show a fourfold increase in the number of West African immigrants living in Britain – from 5,600 to 19,800.⁸ (The census defined West Africa as Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone; the countries from which the majority of African immigrants to Britain hailed.) By way of comparison, the 1951 and 1961 censuses estimated the number of Indians living in Britain to be 30,800 and 81,400 respectively.⁹ Compared to the numbers of immigrants from the Caribbean and southern Asia, therefore, few Africans came to Britain. It was perhaps this paucity of numbers that led the authors of *Colour and Citizenship* to almost completely disregard African immigrants in their supposedly comprehensive survey of British race relations, setting a trend followed by many subsequent studies. The political contribution of Africans, if not their numbers,

⁵ By the government's own account, immigration from the New Commonwealth (including Cyprus and Malta), which had only risen above 50,000 once between 1955 and 1960 and had been as low as 21,600 in 1959, shot up to 136,400 in 1961 and 94,900 in the six months before the Commonwealth Immigrants Act became law on 1 July 1962. See *Immigration From The Commonwealth* (London: HMSO, 1965), p. 2.

⁶ A. T. Carey, *Colonial Students* (London, 1955), p. 10. Carey estimated the *total* population of non-white people in Britain in 1955 at 50,000.

⁷ R. B. Davison, *Black British Immigrants to England* (London, 1966), p. 3. Net inward migration, rather than the total number of immigrants from Africa arriving each year, has been used because a large number also emigrated each year. The same table of figures shows that this was also true of immigration from India until 1961, although the overall volume of immigration was far higher.

⁸ Census statistics quoted in E. J. B. Rose et al, *Colour and Citizenship* (London, 1969), p. 72.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72. Davison estimates the inward migration of West Africans in 1961 as 6,960. Davison, *Black British*, p. 3.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

made their presence in Britain significant, though, and studies of British race relations that do not reflect this make an important omission.

The first half of this chapter explores the British roots of the political consciousness that had begun to emerge among black immigrants by 1965, evaluating the impact of black political activity in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as in the post-war period. For the newly arrived immigrants, their first years in Britain were spent establishing themselves financially and adapting to their new, usually hostile, surroundings. Their heterogeneity militated against group political action, although cross-community campaigns, for example against fascist violence and impending immigration legislation, were sometimes organised. Occasionally, different communities also took action on issues that affected them specifically: Sikhs in Birmingham and Manchester, for example, mounted concerted campaigns for the right of Sikh bus conductors to wear their turbans at work. The chapter then traces the progress of white British racism from the streets to the statute books and explains why black people's profound disillusionment with the Labour Party was so crucial in shaping their political activity after 1965. Black people had never seen the Conservative Party as their natural ally and events in the first half of the 1960s proved them right. In 1962 a Conservative government introduced a racially-discriminatory system of immigration control in the form of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act. During the general election of 1964 the Conservative candidate for Smethwick beat his Labour rival after a campaign that cynically played on the local community's fears about black immigration and flirted with racism. In this context, when the Labour Party abandoned its pledge to oppose immigration restriction in 1964 and then actually tightened controls in 1965, black people viewed this as a betrayal that signalled the failure of their last hope for representation in mainstream politics.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

Although one might have expected the American civil rights movement to have had a major impact on British race relations, its influence was decidedly limited. The second half of the chapter examines two attempts to replicate a US-style civil rights movement on British soil – the 1963 Bristol bus boycott and the creation of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) in 1965 – in order to demonstrate why non-violent direct action tactics and strategies failed to garner significant support among black immigrants in the early 1960s. Both campaigns were ill-suited to the British context, where, in 1965, Asian, African and West Indian immigrants constituted approximately 2 per cent of the population, rather than the established, homogenous 11 per cent of African Americans in the United States. Although both the Bristol boycott and CARD were started by black people, both failed to gain grassroots black support and were mainly championed by white liberals. British journalists, politicians and race relations researchers monitored the progress of the civil rights movement in the United States and from time to time drew parallels with Britain. Their motivations for comparing British and American race relations are also briefly surveyed in the final half of the chapter.

The roots of black protest in Britain

There was a substantial pre-history of black immigrants campaigning against racial oppression in Britain in the twentieth century upon which Black Power activists could and did build. Although the African and West Indian students who led the anti-colonial struggles in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s usually came from more privileged backgrounds than the younger, working-class West Indians who campaigned against domestic racism in the 1960s and 1970s, one cannot analyse the struggles of the latter

without acknowledging the influence of the former.¹⁰ Organisations like the West African Students Union (WASU), founded by Ladipo Solanke in 1925, the International African Service Bureau (IASB), founded by George Padmore in 1937 and the Pan-African Federation (PAF), founded in 1944, represented the interests of people of African descent in Britain, although their main focus was campaigning against British colonialism in Africa. Dr Harold Moody's League of Coloured Peoples (LCP), founded in 1931 and active until the end of the 1940s, had more of a domestic focus and accepted Asian as well as African and West Indian members. In October 1945, Britain's central role in the Pan-African movement was confirmed when Manchester hosted the fifth Pan-African Congress – the previous four of which had been organised by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and held in the United States. The fifth, however, was convened by the British-based Pan-African Federation. Attended by future independent African leaders Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, as well as Du Bois, Ashwood Garvey and Padmore, among others, the Congress served as a point of crossover between international anti-colonialism and domestic anti-racism. Hence, although its aim was to coordinate the struggle to make the imperial powers honour their wartime commitments to self-determination for the colonies, its opening session was on 'The coloured problem in Britain'. Chaired by Marcus Garvey's first wife, Amy Ashwood Garvey, the session heard testimony from British groups about the employment and social discrimination facing black working class communities in the port areas of cities like Cardiff, Edinburgh and London. Speakers remarked that the more affluent black students in Britain should show more

¹⁰ In his study, *West Africans in Britain: 1900 to 1960*, historian Hakim Adi notes that, of the West African students who came to Britain before the Second World War and joined groups like WASU, 'The vast majority were... until the mid-1940s, male and from wealthy, even Royal families'. This stands in contrast to the lower middle, working and peasant class immigrants from the Caribbean and southern Asia, who constituted the bulk of the immigration in the 1950s and early 1960s. H. Adi, *West Africans in Britain: 1900 to 1960* (London, 1998), p. 3.

solidarity with the workers as imperialism affected them all.¹¹ It is worth noting that internationalism, Pan-Africanism, anti-colonialism and the importance of solidarity with the working class – all themes that would characterise the British Black Power movement – were being discussed by black organisations in Britain more than twenty years earlier.

By the end of the 1940s, however, the majority of the activists and groups that had attended the 1945 Congress had either declined or relocated to Africa to continue the fight for independence there. During the 1950s and early 1960s, though, associations like the Committee of African Organisations (CAO), founded in 1958, and individuals such as the redoubtable Ashwood Garvey provided direct crossovers between the anti-colonial and Pan-Africanist politics of the 1930s and 1940s and post-war campaigns for racial equality in Britain, including the Black Power movement. CAO was an umbrella group of thirteen African organisations, including WASU. It shared premises with future CARD leader David Pitt, who also attended its meetings, and counted among its members future British Black Power leader Obi Egbuna. CAO took a leading role in political activity after the 1959 murder of West Indian carpenter Kelso Cochrane in Notting Hill, according to a Special Branch report. Describing the organisation as ‘at first a co-ordinating body representative of all coloured student unions’, the report noted that CAO had ‘since embraced representatives of all coloured organisations in London, political and otherwise’ and become ‘the principal co-ordinating body of the coloured organisations’.¹² When Malcolm X spoke in London in February 1965, inspiring audience member Michael de Freitas to change his name to Michael X and set up

¹¹ See the reproduced report of the first session in H. Adi and M. Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited* (London and Port-of-Spain, 1995), pp. 75–7.

¹² ‘Report No. 4, 10th November 1959, Special Branch, Scotland Yard’, p. 1. Document contained in HO 325/9: ‘Racial disturbance: Notting Hill activities of extremist organisations, deputation of MPs to see the Secretary of State’, held at the National Archives (NA).

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

Britain's prototype Black Power organisation, the Racial Awareness Action Society (RAAS), it was at CAO's invitation.¹³

A remarkable woman, Amy Ashwood Garvey was a tireless political campaigner. Having lived in Africa, the United States, the Caribbean and Britain, she was a one-woman embodiment of what Paul Gilroy would later term 'the Black Atlantic'.¹⁴ Combining and cross-fertilising the politics and outlooks of three continents, Ashwood Garvey's impressive organisational experience and grounding in Pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism made her 'part of the old politics' in the words of Colin Prescod.¹⁵ But her activism in London in the 1950s and early 1960s, especially in conjunction with her good friend Claudia Jones, whose *West Indian Gazette* was the pre-eminent black newspaper in Britain between 1958 and 1965, meant that Ashwood Garvey also played an important role in shaping the new politics being forged by black immigrants in the post-war era. As well as being on the editorial board of the *Gazette*, Garvey co-founded, with Jones, the Committee of Afro-Asian Caribbean Associations (CAACO), while Jones sat on the board of Garvey's Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (AACP). The combination of Garvey's Pan-African politics and Jones' rigorous political training in the American Communist Party (CPUSA) meant that their political perspective was internationalist and emphasised the interplay of class and race. Such thinking foreshadowed the ideology of British Black Power groups like the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) in the 1970s.

The majority of the new wave of black immigrants who arrived in Britain between 1955 and 1962 were, however, simply too busy struggling to find a job, a place

¹³ Unless otherwise noted, the information about CAO in this paragraph is taken from H. Adi, 'The Committee of African Organisations', paper presented to the Post Imperial Britain conference at the Institute of Historical Research, London University, in 2002.

¹⁴ P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, 1993).

¹⁵ Colin Prescod, interviewed by the author, 23 January 2008.

to live and a way to make ends meet to devote more than a tiny fraction of their time to overt political activities. Even A. Sivanandan, who later became a radical Marxist intellectual and the director of the Institute of Race Relations, was not actively involved in politics for several years after his arrival in Britain in 1958. His experience was representative of many of the new post-war immigrants. Formerly a comfortable, middle-class bank manager in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Sivanandan did many temporary, poorly paid jobs in Britain. Finally he was given a permanent job as a tea boy in a library in Wembley and began to study librarianship at evening classes to advance his career. When his wife returned to Sri Lanka because she could not bear the privations of British life any more, Sivanandan also became a single parent of three. 'I had to work until eight o'clock in the evening and six o'clock on Saturdays', he remembers:

So did I become political? No. I had all these personal problems – evening classes, librarianship, travelling to Wembley from Finchley on two buses ... but ... the personal becomes political: that gave me a visceral experience of hardship and official racism, because those were the kinds of fights I had. I had no time to do 'political things' [until] 1964 [when] the children were growing up, I'd finished my library exams and I joined the Institute of Race Relations library.¹⁶

Sivanandan's distinction between doing 'political things' and becoming personally politicised is the key to understanding black immigrant politics in the period between 1955 and 1965. The same mundane daily struggles that prevented many recently arrived black immigrants from organising in their own interests provided the experiential basis for their later political activity. The issues that stirred Britain's ethnic minorities to sustained political activity in the 1970s – for example the stigmatisation of their children as educationally subnormal at school, their economic exploitation in the lowest-paid, most insecure jobs, and the discriminatory treatment of young black men

¹⁶ A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

by the police – were grounded in their everyday experiences from the moment of their arrival in Britain.

Asian immigrant organisations were, on the whole, defined by the nationality or religion of their members and were primarily concerned with social and welfare issues. The events that had the biggest impact on these organisations were often nothing to do with British life or politics. The Indian Workers' Association (IWA), for example, defined itself both by its members' nationality and by their status as labourers and many of its branches were closely allied to the Communist Party of India (CPI). As well as giving members a chance to socialise with other Indians, the IWA offered services like translation and advice, for example on how to join a union, fill in benefit forms or register with a doctor. In 1962 the organisation faced a major crisis when China invaded India and the CPI sided with Mao rather than its own country. The repercussions were felt very strongly in the IWA in Britain, which split into pro-Mao and anti-CPI factions and lost a substantial number of members from its most pro-CPI branches.¹⁷ Further divisions in the IWA were caused by the split of the CPI into two opposing factions in 1964.

Attempts at unified action by Asian and West Indian immigrants were undermined by the heterogeneity and competing nationalisms in their communities. Although most Asian migrants came from India or Pakistan (which was divided into East and West territories, over a thousand miles apart), both countries contained a variety of competing languages, religions and cultures. Indians had more in common with Pakistanis than with Christian, Anglophone West Indians, but a history of violent territorial and religious disputes in the Indian subcontinent, long predating the partition of India in 1947, meant that Indians and Pakistanis were by no means allies. West

¹⁷ See D. John, *Indian Workers' Associations in Britain* (London, 1969), pp. 67–89.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

Indian immigrants, hailing from a large number of islands with very different characters, were also a diverse group. They were divided by strong traditions of island nationalism accompanied by a colonially-imposed identification with and loyalty to the interests of Britain. This meant that they defined their identity as, for example, Jamaican and then British, rather than West Indian. Colin Prescod, who moved from Trinidad to London as a schoolboy in 1958 to join his mother Pearl, identified the lack of a shared identity as a major obstacle for first generation immigrants. ‘There is a sense’, he writes, ‘in which the newly arrived Caribbean/West Indian migrants had first to forge a cultural group consciousness in the face of the colonially instilled island and colour consciousness that they arrived with and which separated them’.¹⁸ Experiencing racial discrimination in the metropolis was the process through which this happened in Britain, as Guyanan immigrant Eric Huntley explains. ‘There was, of course, racism’, he remembers. ‘Living in Guiana in the 1950s, the fact that you were black was not a very significant part of your consciousness – but coming here that was brought home to you very clearly’.¹⁹

The Notting Hill and Nottingham riots of August–September 1958 were a turning point in the New Commonwealth immigrants’ developing consciousness of being black in a country that did not welcome black people. Over the August bank holiday weekend of 1958 groups of young white men took to the streets of Notting Hill and the poor St Ann’s district of Nottingham, to indiscriminately attack the two areas’ black residents. The trouble began in Nottingham on Saturday 23 August. A rumour that a West Indian man had attacked a white woman outside a local pub resulted in several hundred angry white people converging on St Ann’s, where the majority of Nottingham’s black population lived. Many local West Indian, African and Indian

¹⁸ Colin Prescod, e-mail to the author, 30 July 2004.

¹⁹ Eric and Jessica Huntley, interviewed by the author, 19 November 2004.

residents were attacked before the police could disperse the crowd. A report in the *Daily Express* painted a horrifying picture. Under the headline 'Race riots terrorise a city' the newspaper reported that 'Hundreds of Englishmen, West Indians, Pakistanis and Africans fought a bloody, 90-minute pitched battle ... Dozens of ... men and women were injured by bottles, knives, razors and sticks'.²⁰ Even larger crowds of young white men returned to the area on Monday 25 and Saturday 30 August, armed with knives, bottles and coshes and looking for black people to attack. Having been forewarned by the police, the majority of the local black residents stayed indoors and most of the fighting took place between the frustrated whites and the police. On Saturday 6 September, around 200 young white men again returned to St Ann's but were dispersed before any more assaults took place.²¹

The violence in Notting Hill, which involved more people and engulfed a larger area, took place between 30 August and 3 September. Recounting the first night of rioting, a *Daily Express* news article titled 'New Riot Terror' reported that 'A Negro-baiting mob of 5,000 stormed through London streets shouting for lynchings and blood'.²² The London riots were partly fomented by the local activities of Oswald Mosley's Union Movement and other neo-fascist groups.²³ The immediate cause of the disturbances was a group of nine armed white youths who had been trawling the streets in a car looking for black people to beat up. After they had dispatched five black men to hospital, street battles developed between other gangs of young white men and local West Indian residents who were quick to defend themselves with force. Arguing that the scenes which followed were 'race riots and cannot properly be described otherwise',

²⁰ 'Race riots terrorise a city', *Daily Express*, 25 August 1958.

²¹ 'Race war flares again in Nottingham', *The Sunday Express*, 7 September 1958.

²² 'New Riot Terror', *The Daily Herald*, 1 September 1958.

²³ See 'Riot mobs out again. Now the Yard asks: is it a plot', *News Chronicle*, 2 September 1958, and 'Mosley's Man Opens Fire', *The Observer*, 7 September 1958.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement,
1955–1965

eye-witness Edward Scobie described ‘an uninterrupted, chaotic, senseless, repetitive sequence of rioting and arson, day and night. [A]lthough most of the more realistic black people remained indoors’, he continued, ‘the more militant and indignant ... collected empty milk bottles, rocks, and some hand-made bombs and ... shelled the baying, jeering white mobs in the streets’.²⁴

Scobie’s account makes it clear that even during the early stages of post-war black migration to Britain, West Indians were willing to use violence in self-defence, reflecting their own feisty Caribbean traditions of protest and resistance. Although the various community groups founded in the riots’ wake disavowed violence in favour of good neighbourliness and inter-racial understanding, the instinctual response of West Indians during the riot had been to fight back. No stranger to violence himself, Michael de Freitas, commenting on the Notting Hill riots in his autobiography, wrote that, ‘It was a sad scene but inevitable. We were finally standing up for ourselves against a hostile white world.’²⁵ Black immigrants to Britain in the 1950s did not live under the same kind of apartheid-like racial oppression that operated in the southern United States and thus could express their resistance more openly, with less fear of reprisal, and with some faith that they might receive a sympathetic hearing in court if their actions resulted in police charges. Although local blacks seriously criticised the Metropolitan Police’s behaviour during the riots, claiming that they only intervened in the fighting once black people started retaliating, the nine white youths whose self-professed ‘nigger hunting’ trips precipitated the riots received substantial custodial sentences, as had several of the white aggressors in Nottingham.²⁶ Their actions had ‘filled the whole nation with horror, indignation and disgust’, declared Justice Salmon in his pre-

²⁴ Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: a History of Blacks in Britain* (Chicago, 1972), p. 219.

²⁵ M. Malik, *From Michael de Freitas to Michael X* (London, 1968), p. 75.

²⁶ See ‘Faces of Six Young Thugs’, *News Chronicle*, 16 September 1958, and ‘Prison sentences for five Nottingham “rowdies”’, *The Times*, 2 September 1958.

sentencing summation, a conclusion supported by the media coverage.²⁷ Calling his verdict a ‘Declaration of liberty’, the *Daily Express* described Justice Salmon as ‘The man whose judgment yesterday ... reaffirms the rights of us all’.²⁸

The Notting Hill riots had a profound effect on black people in Britain and provided an important catalyst to their political activity. Six months after the riots, a Special Branch report on ‘racial tension’ noted that, ‘As far as the coloured population was concerned there was no political organisation or activity in the Notting Hill area until September, 1958, when towards the end of the racial disturbances, many mushroom organisations sprang up’.²⁹ These organisations were intended to unite the local immigrant communities and promote better relations between them and their white neighbours. They included: CAACO; the AACP; the Coloured Peoples’ Progressive Association (CPPA); the Defence Committee, of which Michael de Freitas was a leading member; the Inter-Racial Friendship Coordinating Council; and the West Indian Standing Conference (WISC), which was set up on the recommendation of Jamaican Chief Minister Norman Manley after he visited Notting Hill in the immediate aftermath of the riots.

In Nottingham, the fact that the white mob had not differentiated between West Indians and Sikhs as targets led to the rapid foundation of a branch of the IWA in the city. On the whole, however, the attitude of Asians to the 1958 riots was ambivalent. The violence was directed mainly at West Indians, who constituted the overwhelming majority of Britain’s non-white population in 1958, and most Asian immigrants felt that it had nothing to do with them. Even Ajoy Ghose, who in the 1960s became a founding

²⁷ Justice Salmon is quoted in Scobie, *Black Britannia*, p. 228.

²⁸ ‘A Declaration of Liberty’, *The Daily Express*, 16 September 1958.

²⁹ ‘Metropolitan Police, Special Branch Report on Racial Tension’, 28 May 1959, p. 5. Document contained in HO 325/9: ‘Racial disturbance: Notting Hill activities of extremist organisations’, held in the NA.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement,
1955–1965

member of Britain's first Black Power group, recalled that in 1958 his political consciousness had not yet evolved. 'I was in London but Notting Hill was a foreign country for me', he says. 'Those days I didn't think of myself as black'.³⁰ Sivanandan, who was living in Notting Hill in 1958, had a slightly more thoughtful attitude to the riots. 'I was having drinks in a pub with some Sri Lankan friends and somebody said "there's trouble in Notting Hill Gate"', he remembers, 'and my Sri Lankan friends said "It's nothing to do with us, it's to do with the blacks."' That was another moment of truth. I had to ask myself: what am I? What does black mean? Is it the colour of one's complexion or is it the colour of one's affiliations?³¹

The 1958 Notting Hill riot was a watershed moment because it awakened many black immigrants to the fact that at least some white people did not welcome them and would never consider them to be British. They had also been shocked by the partiality of the Metropolitan Police towards the white aggressors during the riot. When Antiguan carpenter Kelso Cochrane was stabbed to death on a Notting Hill street by a gang of white youths in May 1959, some local black residents blamed his death on the Metropolitan Police's lack of interest in complaints about fascist activity in the area.³² Cochrane's funeral was attended by at least six hundred black people who came to show their solidarity against the white fascists they believed had killed him and that his murder had not been forgotten by the black community.³³ For many immigrants from the Caribbean the cumulative impact of the 1958 riots and Cochrane's murder was to extinguish their belief in a benevolent mother country or that they were British in any

³⁰ Ajoy Ghose, interviewed by the author, 20 August 2004.

³¹ A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

³² See the Special Branch report on Cochrane's funeral in HO 325/9: 'Racial disturbance: Notting Hill activities of extremist organisations', held in the NA.

³³ The police estimate, in *ibid.*, is 600, but Marika Sherwood puts the number at more than 1,000 in *Claudia Jones: a Life in Exile* (London, 1999), p.97.

meaningful way. Some decided to return to the Caribbean. Others began to evolve a new political identification with each other as black people in a racist white society.

In doing this they could draw on a variety of indigenous traditions of radical dissent. Although most of Britain's black immigrants came from poor rural areas there were many precedents for political mobilisation in the histories of their home countries. For all West Indians' oft-invoked identification with and loyalty to the mother country, anti-colonialism, self-determination and labour militancy were central themes of Caribbean history, as well as current political concerns for several of the newly independent Caribbean states. Eric and Jessica Huntley, for example, who arrived from British Guiana in 1956 and 1957 respectively, had been heavily involved in the anti-colonial struggles of their homeland. Eric Huntley had spent time in prison for his anti-colonial activism and had come to Britain to avoid further political persecution. Although he and Jessica did not intend to stay in Britain for long, they immediately threw themselves into political organising. The Huntleys' anti-colonialism evolved into a broader anti-racist politics in reaction to their experiences in Britain. 'We came with a certain perception of the world: we were part of the anti-colonial struggle and we were fighting for independence', Eric Huntley remembers. It was their self-imposed exile in 'the belly of the beast', as he describes living in London in the 1950s and 1960s, which gave the Huntleys a new political perspective. 'We were isolated from the rest of the Caribbean', explains Eric 'and one thing that helped to inform our consciousness and broaden it was mixing with other Caribbean people here'.³⁴

If the 1958 riots had convinced many black immigrants that Britain was full of racist people, the legislation passed by both Conservative and Labour governments

³⁴ Eric and Jessica Huntley, interviewed by the author, 19 November 2004. In 1969 the Huntleys joined a long British tradition of political dissent through radical publishing by setting up the Bogle L'Ouverture publishing company, named after Caribbean slave revolt leaders Paul Bogle and Toussaint L'Ouverture.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

between 1962 and 1965 convinced them that racism was not just a problem of individuals but something that was being knitted into the structure of the state.³⁵ Although successive governments had been privately discussing how to control black immigration since before the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*, after the 1958 riots it became publicly acceptable to discuss immigration restriction. In 1961 Conservative Party members attending their annual conference, voted overwhelmingly in favour of introducing immigration controls. The subsequent Commonwealth Immigrants Act, introduced by the Conservative government in October 1961 and passed in June 1962, overturned the equal citizenship rights conferred by the 1948 Nationality Act and introduced a strict quota system on immigration from New Commonwealth countries like India, Pakistan and Jamaica, but not on old Commonwealth nations like Canada and Australia, or Ireland, a foreign country that consistently provided the greatest number of immigrants to Britain.³⁶ It was clearly designed to shut black immigrants out, while leaving the door open to whites.

Immigration restriction was the issue that inspired the most organised political activity among black immigrants before 1965. The rumoured introduction of a bill restricting immigration in 1961 was the inspiration for the first campaign of the newly created Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD) in Birmingham, while in London CAACO and WISC organised marches and petitioned the high commissioners of various Caribbean islands to pressure the government to withdraw the bill. Despite constituting a notable upsurge in black immigrant political activity, these were piecemeal protests that also showed, in the words of historian Paul

³⁵ For two convincing monographs on this transformation see A. Sivanandan, 'Race, class and the state: the black experience in Britain', *Race & Class* 17:4 (1976) and S. Joshi and B. Carter, 'The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain', *Race & Class* 15:3 (1984).

³⁶ See C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871–1971* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 216.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

Rich, that 'black political thinking was still governed more by the idea of asserting rights as citizens of the Commonwealth than as permanent members of British society. No overall black organisation existed politically at this stage to mount a strong opposition to the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Bill', he concludes.³⁷ The Committee of African Organisations, having taken a leading role in the political organising around Kelso Cochrane's murder in 1959, seems to have refocused its attention abroad in 1961, particularly on Nkrumah's Ghana. That said, it contributed to CAACO's campaign against the 1961 bill by making available for meetings its new West London premises, Africa Unity House, a gift from Nkrumah the previous year.³⁸

It was hardly surprising that Asian immigrants, most of whom had been in Britain for less than two years when the immigration bill was introduced, did not think of themselves as settlers. Ironically, it was the introduction of immigration restriction that forced many of them to make the decision to stay in Britain. 'The Asian communities in Britain were much more heavily mobilised in fighting the plans to introduce restrictions to immigration than we were', remembers West Indian activist Trevor Carter.³⁹ This was because it was Asian immigrants whose futures were likely to be most affected by the immigration act. While the overwhelming majority of Asian immigrants were young single men in the early 1960s, West Indians, who had emigrated earlier, had already had time to bring their partners and children to Britain. Asian immigrants worried that the proposed restrictions would mean they had to settle in Britain permanently or risk not being allowed back into the country if they went home to visit their families. It was this that provoked the rush to move their relatives to Britain before the act came into force on 1 July 1962.

³⁷ P. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 199.

³⁸ See H. Adi, 'The Committee of African Organisations', pp. 18–19.

³⁹ T. Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics* (London, 1986), p. 67.

Even after the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was passed, black immigrants were still prepared to give British democracy the benefit of the doubt, in part because they believed that the Labour Party would fight their corner. It had, after all, vigorously opposed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act and up until the publication of its 1964 election manifesto, promised to repeal it once elected. 'For a while it was possible to construct an alternative theory of benevolence in the host community based on the Labour Party's resistance to the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill', noted the authors of *Colour and Citizenship*.⁴⁰ Black immigrants continued to remain loyal to the Labour Party throughout 1963 and 1964, when supporting the Conservative Party became an even less attractive option for them. During the run-up to the general election of October 1964, Peter Griffiths, the Conservative candidate for the West Midlands town of Smethwick, which had a black population of 6.7 per cent, ran a virulently anti-immigration campaign.⁴¹ Griffiths played upon the fears of local residents about black immigrants in order to win votes and tacitly encouraged his supporters' use of the slogan, 'If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour', telling *The Times* newspaper that 'I would not condemn anyone who said that, I regard it as a manifestation of popular feeling'.⁴² He was rewarded with a surprise victory over the incumbent Labour MP Patrick Gordon Walker, the Conservatives' first electoral win in Smethwick since the Second World War. After visiting the town on 12 February 1965, the African American radical Malcolm X was reported to have advised the local black community to start organising before the local fascists began building gas ovens.⁴³

⁴⁰ E. J. B. Rose et al, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations* (London, 1969), p. 501.

⁴¹ See J. Street, 'Malcolm X, Smethwick, and the Influence of the African American Freedom Struggle on British Race Relations in the 1960s' unpublished paper, School of History, University of Kent, 2006, p. 4.

⁴² Griffiths' comments in *The Times* reproduced in Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Harmondsworth, 1965) p. 44.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

The Labour Party took quite a different lesson from the Conservatives' success in Smethwick. Realising that Griffiths' negative emphasis on immigration had been a significant factor in his victory, it quickly decided that the benefits of being seen as tough on immigration outweighed its former objections to control. Having already reneged on its promise to repeal the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, in August 1965 the Labour government published a White Paper on immigration which further reduced the quotas from New Commonwealth countries, intensifying the 1962 act's bias against black immigrants. Commenting on the repercussions of Labour's U-turn on immigration policy, black journalist Edward Scobie wrote that 'Blacks have, in consequence ... lost their faith in Labour and, in fact, blacks in Britain are losing trust in whites'.⁴⁴ Not even the fact that the same Labour government was concurrently shepherding Britain's first Race Relations Act through parliament tempered black people's disillusion.⁴⁵ A March 1966 editorial in the moderate, respectable *British-Caribbean Association Newsletter* reviewed the events of the previous year that had had the most impact on its members. It failed to even mention the Race Relations Act, but highlighted the White Paper 'and its effects on race relations in the United Kingdom', commenting that, 'there has been widespread and serious frustration and bitter disappointment ... especially from immigrant communities, that the Government have appeared to make some concession to racial prejudice by their introduction of the White Paper'.⁴⁶

Anxious to offset the tightening of immigration restriction with a measure that would promote integration, the White Paper's drafters included a provision to create a larger, better-funded version of the extant National Council for Commonwealth

⁴⁴ Scobie, *Black Britannia*, p. 265.

⁴⁵ The Race Relations Act was passed in November 1965.

⁴⁶ Felicity Bolton, 'Editorial', *British-Caribbean Association Newsletter* 9 (March 1966), p. 2.

Immigrants. Although the beefed-up NCCI remained independent of government in theory, in practice it very rarely criticised government actions and pursued a moderate, integrationist line that served the interests of the state far better than it did Britain's black immigrants. Moreover, its strategy of co-opting onto its national committee the leaders of existing immigrant organisations often caused bitter divisions in the groups from which they came. By setting up a network of local liaison committees, it also undermined black people's attempts to organise independent local equality campaign groups. CARD member Michael Dummett believed it was not coincidence that the creation of a new NCCI had had a negative impact on CARD. 'The government's fundamental aim is to keep the black minority under control', he wrote in 1968, 'In pursuing this policy, the N.C.C.I., with its hand-picked black members and its concentration on local liaison committees, has been an essential instrument'.⁴⁷

According to Sivanandan, Labour's conversion to immigration control had a significant ripple effect in the race relations industry. He says that it was only after the Labour government published its White Paper that the IRR came out publicly in favour of immigration control. 'At first it said nothing', he explains, 'but when the [1962] act was endorsed by the Labour government in the White Paper of 1965, the Institute's director declared that there had to be immigration controls because the newcomers couldn't be easily assimilated. "We have to take them a mouthful at a time", was essentially how he put it in a *Guardian* article'.⁴⁸ On 1 July 1962 the National Socialists of Great Britain held a rally in Trafalgar Square to celebrate the enforcement of the new Commonwealth Immigrants Act.⁴⁹ By the end of 1965, many black immigrants felt that

⁴⁷ M. Dummett, 'The travails of a British civil right movement', *Patterns of Prejudice* 2:5 (1968), p. 10.

⁴⁸ L. Kushnick and P. Grant, 'Catching History on the Wing: A. Sivanandan as Activist, Teacher and Rebel', in B. Bowser, L. Kushnick (eds) with P. Grant, *Against The Odds: Scholars Who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst and Boston, 2002), p. 230.

⁴⁹ Hiro, *Black British*, p. 51.

the Labour Party had metaphorically joined their platform. Believing that they had been abandoned by both mainstream political parties and that formerly sympathetic white liberal opinion had hardened against immigration, they became more receptive to voices proposing militant, independent black action.

The impact of the American civil rights movement on Britain

The civil rights movement was an obvious protest model for non-white people in Britain: it provided a potent example of the power of non-violent, direct action to affect positive change for black people oppressed by a racist state. Campaigns such as that in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, which saw hundreds of African American protestors, many of them children, withstand water cannons and police dogs and endure mass arrests to protest their right to vote, led to the destruction of the racial caste system in the southern states. By 1965 African Americans' right to vote and receive equal treatment was enshrined in federal law. In spite of this, and politicians' and the media's predilection for portraying race riots in the United States as a warning vision of Britain's future, in the early 1960s the civil rights movement had a very limited impact on black people organising in Britain, Historian Mike Sewell has argued that 'British responses to the African American freedom struggle could not be viewed apart from the issues of race relations [in Britain] that were demanding more and more attention', but his essay on those responses contains more than one caveat that 'we should not overestimate the impact of the civil rights movement in Britain'.⁵⁰ It was only in the late 1960s, when the civil rights movement moved into its Black Power phase that it began to exert a strong influence. Nevertheless, there were attempts to emulate the events and tactics of the African American freedom struggle, most notably the Bristol bus boycott

⁵⁰ M. Sewell, 'British responses to Martin Luther King Jr and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968', in Ward and Badger (eds), *The Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (London, 1996), p. 207.

of 1963 and the creation of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination in 1965, both of which are discussed in detail below. Despite the efforts of the organisers of both, however, non-violent direct action, the most important and effective tactic of the civil rights movement, failed to attract significant support from black people in Britain. This was because Britain did not have a strong network of independent black organisations in the 1960s, nor a large established, homogenous black population. Also, the state's attempts to combat racial discrimination, although not initially very effective, had the side-effect of inhibiting or disrupting independent black protest or redirecting its focus away from direct action towards lobbying parliament (for example, to influence the drafting of the 1965 Race Relations Act).

Commenting on the March on Washington in August 1963, when a quarter of a million black and white Americans congregated on the capital to show their support for civil rights legislation and hear leaders like Martin Luther King speak, the editor of *The Times* declared that 'No country, in fact, can wholly afford to ignore the events in Washington. The colour problem is virtually universal in one form or another, even behind the Iron Curtain'.⁵¹ This sentiment would have found favour with Birmingham IWA (GB) and CCARD leader Jagmohan Joshi, who kept a close eye on the African American the civil rights movement, especially when it concerned his adopted city's Alabama namesake. A handbill advertising a CCARD fund-raising concert on 5 February 1964 declared, for example, that it was, 'in honour of the people of Birmingham, Alabama ... [whose] courageous struggle against racialism has been an example to people throughout the world'.⁵² Joshi also wrote letters of solidarity to

⁵¹ 'The Light in the Darkness', *The Times*, 30 August 1963, p. 9.

⁵² Unnamed document held in the CCARD file at the IRR.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King on behalf of the people of Birmingham praising advances in the civil rights movement.⁵³

Africans in Britain, although more likely to be influenced by the political struggles in their native continent, regarded African American civil rights campaigners as part of the same struggle. They reserved their greatest enthusiasm, however, for activists who had a strong Pan-Africanist perspective, such as WEB Du Bois and Malcolm X, irrespective of their position in the civil rights movement. The Committee of African Organisations hosted visits from both Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. ‘Undoubtedly’ the ‘most important speaker’ at the first congress of the renamed Council of African Organisations in February 1965, in the opinion of historian Hakim Adi, Malcolm X gave a speech linking the American civil rights movement with the national liberation struggles in Africa and emphasised, ‘the importance of the African revolution as an inspiration for all African Americans’.⁵⁴ When he was assassinated just days later, CAO ‘staged a protest march from Hyde Park to the US embassy ... and denounced the United States for the “racialist murder” of Malcolm X’.⁵⁵

In his essay on the British response to the American civil rights movement, historian Mike Sewell contends that ‘Little British commentary treated the race issue in the United States as a uniquely American concern’.⁵⁶ News articles, however, usually reported the American civil rights movement as the domestic affairs of a foreign country. Even the IRR’s monthly in-house journal, *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter*, did not judge the United States important enough to merit its own dedicated

⁵³ Drafts of these letters are held in the CCARD file at the IRR.

⁵⁴ H. Adi, ‘The Committee of African Organisations’, pp. 25–6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ M. Sewell, ‘British responses to Martin Luther King Jr and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968’, in Ward and Badger (eds), *The Making* (1996), p. 195. Sewell’s essay deals exclusively with print journalism. Although television ownership in Britain had almost caught up with the United States by 1961, until 1962 most sets could only receive one channel and broadcasting hours were limited, therefore most people still got their news in print.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement,
1955–1965

section until 1964. Britain's most important black newspaper *The West Indian Gazette*, published monthly between 1958 and 1965, devoted roughly the same proportion of column inches to the American civil rights movement as the mainstream white press, giving the majority of space on its news pages to events in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Britain. This was in spite of the fact that its founding editor, Claudia Jones, had spent most of her life in the United States.

The episodes from the civil rights movement that attracted the most mainstream press coverage were those which had an impact on the Cold War or foreign policy implications for Britain. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's decision in September 1957 to send federal troops to protect African American schoolchildren trying to attend a segregated school in Little Rock, Arkansas, for example, elicited a great deal of newspaper coverage in Britain because in the depths of the Cold War the Little Rock crisis was considered to play into the hands of Communist propagandists.⁵⁷ Both the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror* reported that Arkansas governor Orval Faubus had compared Eisenhower's use of the National Guard to enforce a federal court order in Arkansas with the brutal Soviet repression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956. By way of comparison, neither the start of the student sit-in movement in February 1960, nor the Freedom Rides of May 1961, received anything like as much coverage in *The Times* or the *Daily Mirror*.

Despite the lack of popular interest, British politicians regularly found it expedient to compare race relations in Britain and the United States. When rioting broke out in Nottingham and Notting Hill in August 1958, far-right Conservative MP Cyril Osborne was quick to compare the disturbances with the Little Rock crisis, even though

⁵⁷ See *The Times*, 24 September 1957, p. 8; 25 September 1957, p. 8; 26 September 1957, p. 10 (with picture); 27 September 1957, p. 10 and 28 September 1957, p. 9.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

the two did not have much in common.⁵⁸ In the parliamentary context, the United States was most often used as a dystopian vision of what might happen in Britain if the government either did not heed the grievances of black people or repatriate them immediately, depending on one's political hue.⁵⁹ The 'could it happen here?' approach became more common as the 1960s progressed, with earlier complacency giving way to more nervous appraisals, as race relations in both Britain and the United States worsened. The outbreak of rioting in Watts, a very poor, predominantly African American district of Los Angeles, in August 1965, was reported widely in the British press and served as a timely reminder for British MPs, then in the process of debating the government's race relations bill, of the potential dangers of letting racial discrimination in Britain fester. 'It was the sudden awareness of the danger that the Second Generation might become a coloured underclass, given heightened consciousness by the racial crisis in the northern cities of the United States, which strengthened the case for new legislation', noted lawyers Anthony Lester and Geoffrey Bindman.⁶⁰

In the late 1950s and early 1960s a small but politically significant community of African Americans and West Indians who had been brought up in the United States congregated regularly at places like Africa House in north London to exchange views

⁵⁸ Osborne's comments were reported in *The Times* on 28 August 1958. See E. Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country* (London, 1988), p. 128.

⁵⁹ MPs who regularly raised the issue of immigrants' rights included Reg Sorenson, Labour MP for Leyton, Anthony Wedgewood Benn, Labour MP for Bristol South-East, Tom Driberg, Labour MP for Barking and Fenner Brockway, Labour MP for Eton and Slough. Brockway, who was made a peer in 1964, introduced nine anti-discrimination private members bills between 1954 and 1965. On the other side of the house, Cyril Osborne, Conservative MP for Louth, Norman Pannell, Conservative MP for Kirkdale, Harold Gurden, Conservative MP for Selly Oak and Enoch Powell, Conservative MP for Wolverhampton South West, regularly argued that black immigrants were putting an unbearable strain on Britain's housing, employment and health services and urged stricter immigration control and assistance for voluntary repatriation.

⁶⁰ A. Lester and G. Bindman, *Race and Law* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 17.

and talk politics.⁶¹ Most of this group, which included Claudia Jones, Amy Ashwood Garvey and Paul and Eslanda Robeson, had been deported from the United States, or had chosen to leave, because of their left-wing beliefs. Claudia Jones, for example, a Trinidadian raised in Harlem, had been deported from the United States to Britain in December 1955, after spending 366 days in a federal penitentiary under the Smith Act because of her membership of the CPUSA.⁶² The Robesons moved to London in 1958, after eight years of wrangling with the United States government to return Paul Robeson's confiscated passport. They stayed for five years and were active members of CAACO. Although Jones's political focus took in Africa and her native Caribbean just as much as the country in which she grew up, it was clear that her organisation CAACO drew inspiration and encouragement from the American civil rights movement. The same could be said for Jamaican Pan-Africanist Amy Ashwood Garvey's AACP, which was clearly patterned after the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the United States. On 31 August 1963, CAACO organised a march to the American embassy in London, to show solidarity with the March on Washington and protest against domestic discrimination, during which the marchers sang the civil rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome'. In July 1964, CAACO hosted a forum on the tactics of the Mississippi Freedom Summer, addressed by Eslanda Robeson.⁶³ The Robesons, Jones, Ashwood Garvey and other black political emigrés also had close links with American civil rights leaders, activists and intellectuals like Bayard Rustin, WEB Du Bois, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Pictures from the December 1961

⁶¹ Africa House in Camden was a hostel, restaurant and meeting space run by the West African Students Union.

⁶² A document concerning Claudia Jones in the archives of the Communist Party of Great Britain, CP/CENT/ORG/01/10, held at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, reports that she was deported straight to London rather than Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, at the request of the British Consulate because of her serious ill health. Upon arrival she immediately applied for a British passport so that she could leave to convalesce somewhere warmer, but was not granted one until 1962.

⁶³ See 'London Solidarity March', *The West Indian Gazette*, September 1963, p. 1.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

edition of the *West Indian Gazette* show King at a social function at Africa House with Jones and Eslanda Robeson, as well as other prominent politically active black immigrants like David Pitt, Communist Party member and *West Indian Gazette* deputy editor Abhimanyu Manchanda and the West Indian novelist George Lamming.

It was not just American expatriates who took an interest in the civil rights movement in the United States though. In May 1963, Paul Stephenson, a youth worker of African and white British parentage, called a boycott against the Bristol Omnibus Company (BOC) that deliberately mimicked the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–1956. In December 1964, moreover, a hastily organised meeting between Martin Luther King and black community leaders resulted in the creation of Britain's most serious attempt at a 'civil rights' organisation, the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination. CARD saw itself as a British version of the NAACP and was also influenced by King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). CARD and the Bristol bus boycott generated a great deal of media attention, despite their significant failings, because they gave the impression that Britain was developing its own civil rights movement and tapped into the sympathy Britons felt for the African American struggle before the emergence of Black Power.

The Bristol bus boycott of 1963 was conceived as a protest against the Bristol Omnibus Company's refusal to hire non-white conductors and drivers. By deliberately evoking the Montgomery bus boycott – at the start of his campaign Stephenson posed for local newspaper photographers at the back of a bus, even though black passengers in Bristol could sit wherever they liked – Stephenson framed his protest as an extension of the American civil rights movement. This was a successful way of attracting media attention – the boycott received plenty of coverage in the pages of the local, national and even foreign press. Stephenson's failure to recognise the fundamental differences

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement,
1955–1965

between 1950s Montgomery and 1960s Bristol, however, meant that the boycott itself was poorly supported by black or white Bristolians and was, tactically, a failure.

Bristol's demographics were completely different from Montgomery's: the majority of bus passengers in Bristol were white and its black population was diverse and divided, with newly arrived Indian, Pakistani and West Indian immigrants joining established West Indian communities from before the Second World War. The Bristol colour bar had been imposed on hiring bus staff, not seating passengers, and it was the result of a union ballot by the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), rather than a legal ordinance that could be challenged in court. As Britain had neither a written constitution against which to test its laws, nor legislation prohibiting racial discrimination prior to 1965, the Bristol colour bar could not have been overturned in court, as Montgomery's had been by the NAACP's successful legal challenge to the constitutionality of Alabama's transport segregation laws in the 1956 test case *Browder v Gayle*. Furthermore, the Bristol boycott had very little grassroots support, a defining feature of the Montgomery boycott. The demise of the Bristol colour bar was the cumulative result of negative publicity and pressure from journalists, MPs and Commonwealth diplomats and left Bristol's black community groups squabbling over whether a gradualist approach would have worked better.

The Bristol Omnibus Company had operated a colour bar against employing non-white bus drivers and conductors for several years, mainly to appease the white conductors and drivers (passenger staff), who, through the TGWU, had balloted in 1955 not to work alongside blacks. The BOC had acquiesced and no black people had been employed on Bristol's buses since. (In contrast, the BOC's garage staff, members of a different section of the TGWU, had voted against a colour bar and so Asians and West Indians were employed as mechanics by the company.) The fact that the BOC was

operating a colour bar had been noted with disapproval on several occasions: by a Church Mission in the mid-1950s; by the *Bristol Evening Post*, which ran a series of articles alleging colour discrimination in 1961; and by a newly formed local organisation, the West Indian Development Council (WIDC), set up in the same year. When pressed on the matter, however, the bus company had said that its hands were tied by the union and the TGWU claimed that the (entirely legal) colour bar was the policy of the bus company.

Stephenson had joined the WIDC in 1962 and, under its auspices, called a boycott of the BOC the following year. Local historian Madge Dresser noted that ‘Stephenson was very much inspired by the example of Martin Luther King’.⁶⁴ Stephenson’s admiration for King meant that he tried to emulate his tactics without enough consideration of whether they were appropriate to Bristol. One example of this was Stephenson’s attempt to canvas black churches as a source of support for the Bristol boycott. ‘I knew it was the black churches that had ... given Luther King in the South that power’, he told one interviewer, ‘and so I was working on the black churches’.⁶⁵ Britain, however, had no tradition of West Indians organising through church networks. Many West Indians were devout Christians, but their faith was otherwordly and they were struggling to set up their own churches, having discovered that they were not welcome in white congregations. In 1963, most Asians also had not yet established their own places of worship and so prayed at home or in each others’ houses. ‘It wasn’t that they weren’t in sympathy with what I was doing’, Stephenson

⁶⁴ M. Dresser, *Black and White on the Buses: the 1963 Colour Bar Dispute in Bristol* (Bristol, 1986), p. 15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

later conceded, 'but they weren't ready to get that involved on that ... social and political level'.⁶⁶

By choosing to call an economic boycott, Stephenson had made his protest's success dependent on the support and participation of white Bristolians, who made up the great majority of bus passengers. This reliance on whites was compounded by Stephenson's miscalculation of how willing black people in Bristol would be to confront racism head on. The reticence of many black Bristolians to risk a white backlash by making too many demands was encapsulated by the local West Indian Association when it asserted that, 'Negotiations got coloured men into the garages and would have got them onto the buses'.⁶⁷ Bristol's pre-war black communities had established a niche for themselves in the city and were reluctant to rock the boat by demanding equality. The post-war immigrants from Asia and the Caribbean were too fragmented and too preoccupied with establishing themselves to raise much enthusiasm for civil rights campaigning. 'In truth there were no groups or leaders who could claim the loyalty, trust and allegiance of what was a politically unorganised migrant population', concluded Dresser.⁶⁸

The local whites who supported the boycott did not usually participate in it either. A May Day march past the main bus station and the headquarters of the TGWU, organised by Stephenson, attracted about a hundred participants, most of whom were students. Local white religious organisations that had previously campaigned against the colour bar thought the boycott was unnecessarily antagonistic. 'The Bishop of Bristol issued a statement today with the Church Council', noted the MP for Bristol South-East, Tony Benn, in his diary for 5 May 1963, 'It blamed the trouble on "an unrepresentative"

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

⁶⁷ 'Bus bar – Bristol fashion', *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (June 1963), p. 6.

⁶⁸ Dresser, *Black and White*, p. 32.

group of West Indians, then deplored the attitude of the [white] busmen and called for a Christian approach. But nowhere did it say explicitly that the bus colour bar was wrong and should go'.⁶⁹ Benn and fellow Bristol MP Stan Awberry supported the boycott, with Benn particularly active, a further illustration of the fact that the campaign was being fought *for* black people, rather than *by* them.

The high media profile of the boycott and its occurrence at a time of shifting relationships between Britain and its 'New Commonwealth' former colonies meant that Stephenson was significantly more successful in attracting support from influential national figures, both black and white. Movement for Colonial Freedom-founder, Labour MP and civil rights campaigner Fenner Brockway showed his support by asking a question in parliament about why there was not a law to make such colour bars illegal. Prime Minister Harold Wilson compared the colour bar in Bristol to apartheid South Africa during a public speech, attracting 'good publicity in the local papers', according to Benn's diary.⁷⁰ The offices of the High Commissioners of Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica also joined in the fray, couching their objections in terms of Britain's obligation to treat its Commonwealth citizens with equality and dignity. In fact, so involved was the High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago, Sir Learie Constantine, that shortly after the boycott's end he resigned his post, having been censured by his government for creating diplomatic disharmony by publicly intervening in a domestic British matter.⁷¹ It was, therefore, at the level of national politics and international diplomatic relations, as well as local and national news coverage, that the campaign to revoke the colour bar was won.

⁶⁹ T. Benn, *Out of The Wilderness: Diaries 1963–67* (London, 1987), p. 14.

⁷⁰ Wilson's speech is reported in 'Bus bar – Bristol fashion', *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (June 1963), pp. 4–7. Benn, *Wilderness*, p. 13.

⁷¹ See 'Sir Learie Constantine makes it plain in that Bristol colour bar', *West Indian Gazette*, June 1963, p. 1 and 'Did migrants issue lead Sir Learie to quit?', *West Indian Gazette*, October 1963, p. 1.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

After much wrangling between the BOC and the TGWU, the end of the colour bar was finally announced on 23 August 1963. By the middle of 1965, however, only four bus drivers and thirty-nine conductors had been hired.⁷² Although black Bristolians were glad to see the back of the colour bar, because there had been so little grassroots support for the boycott the local black communities were neither more politicised nor united as a result of the campaign. Given the limited impact of the boycott and slow pace of progress after the colour bar's end, it is possible that the West Indian Association's gradualist approach may have achieved the same results, as it angrily claimed. But Paul Stephenson, born and raised in Britain, was less inclined to negotiate for something he thought should have been his automatic right as an Englishman. It was a difference in outlook between non-white immigrants and British-born blacks that would become more marked over the following decade.

According to founding member Marion Glean, the idea for CARD was hatched at a meeting between Martin Luther King and a group of immigrant leaders during King's December 1964 visit to London.⁷³ Started as a temporary organisation on 10 January 1965, CARD became a permanent body at a two-day founding convention in London on 24–25 July 1965.⁷⁴ Initially conceived as an umbrella organisation, it began by soliciting the membership of existing immigrant groups but later set up a network of local branches that individuals could join directly. A genuinely multiracial organisation from the beginning, CARD borrowed many of its tactics from the American civil rights movement, although it appears to have discounted the SCLC's main activity, direct action. It did, however, hold voter registration drives, lobbied the government for anti-

⁷² Dresser, *Black and White*, p. 48.

⁷³ M. Glean, 'Whatever happened to CARD?', *Race Today* 5:1 (January 1973), p. 14.

⁷⁴ The founding date of CARD is often disputed. This date is taken from the 'CARD National Committee Secretary's Report' of 23 July 1965 contained in the CARD file at the IRR.

discrimination legislation and even sent students into immigrant areas during their summer holidays to collect evidence of discrimination.

By far the most successful attempt thus far to form a national ‘civil rights’ organisation in Britain, CARD sought initially to influence the shape of the Race Relations Bill that was passing through parliament in early 1965. Its success in doing this was limited, but by the autumn of 1965 CARD had established itself as an organisation that had the ear, at least, of the ruling Labour government.⁷⁵ This was demonstrated when two members of CARD’s executive committee were asked to join NCCI in September 1965. By the time of its third annual convention in July 1967, however, CARD was bitterly divided. In the tense and hostile atmosphere of a November 1967 extraordinary general meeting, full of new delegates, virtually all the existing executive and national committee members were voted out and replaced by radical West Indian officials. Although the chairman, David Pitt, remained in his post and continued to describe himself as the leader of CARD until at least the end of the decade, it was a discredited and powerless organisation after 1967. A full-time volunteer in CARD’s central London office, Diane Langford had helped to organise the 1967 coup but left the organisation shortly afterwards. ‘[I]n the end I just dropped out because there was nothing happening and it wasn’t developing’, she remembers.⁷⁶

In his 1972 study of the rise and fall of CARD, sociologist Benjamin Heineman made the bold statement that, ‘CARD was founded ... to speak for a social and political movement that did not exist’.⁷⁷ Heineman’s assessment was correct, but it was a challenge of which the leaders of CARD were aware. Their goal in founding the

⁷⁵ This was no doubt helped by the fact that much of CARD’s leadership had close ties with the Labour Party. Leading CARD members David Pitt, Jocelyn Barrow and Anthony Lester all later became Labour peers.

⁷⁶ Diane Langford, interviewed by the author, 1 September 2004.

⁷⁷ Dummett, ‘CARD Reconsidered’, p. 42.

organisation was to create a national network of support that would strengthen their lobbying attempts in the corridors of Westminster. By the end of 1965, however, the idea of basing a campaign around lobbying the government seemed far less credible to black people, both because the new immigration legislation suggested that the government was turning against them and the new race relations legislation suggested that its goodwill did not translate into meaningful protection. In fact, it was precisely the government's attempts to create an anti-discrimination framework that thwarted development of the independent network CARD activists were trying to create. Writing about the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants' impact on CARD, Michael Dummett concluded that, 'Merely by coming into existence, the NCCI had delivered one of the most damaging blows to the embryo civil rights movement'.⁷⁸

Dummett believed it was the decision of CARD's chairman David Pitt and its vice-chairman Hamza Alavi to accept the invitation, at the end of 1965, to be co-opted onto the NCCI which started the decline in CARD's fortunes. The invitation was highly controversial, but neither Pitt nor Alavi discussed their decision to join the NCCI with anyone before announcing it as a *fait accompli*. The depth of the anger this caused was clearly shown in a letter from the Secretary of WISC to David Pitt. 'We are at a loss to understand how CARD is on record as being militantly opposed to that nauseating document called "The White Paper on Immigration from the Commonwealth" and at the same time serve [sic] on a committee, which has been set up to implement the so-called Integration proposals laid down in the White Paper', wrote the Secretary. 'It is also obvious, even to a blind man, that the National Committee is unsuited to do the job it is supposed to do and will likely do more harm than good. Indeed there is a growing feeling that some prominent members of this Committee are directly responsible for the

⁷⁸ Dummett, 'Travails', p. 11.

present climate of hostile racial feelings'.⁷⁹ When several of CARD's key member groups, most notably WISC and the National Federation of Pakistani Associations (NFPA), disaffiliated in protest, Pitt and Alavi still refused to resign from NCCI saying that they had been asked to join as private individuals, not representatives of CARD, and therefore there was no conflict of interest. In Michael Dummett's opinion, 'This helped greatly to bring about the reduction of the National Council [of CARD] to complete ineffectiveness. ... CARD never again looked like obtaining the support *en masse* of the immigrant organisations'.⁸⁰

At the end of 1965, CARD's leadership could point to the Race Relations Act to justify its methods of political lobbying and sitting on government committees. But the Race Relations Act, passed in November 1965 was only a faltering first step to curb racial discrimination. It banned pubs, restaurants, hotels and other places of public resort from refusing service on grounds of colour, while leaving the crucial areas of housing and employment untouched. This did not belie the genuine desire of some sections within the Labour Party to tackle what they saw as the moral wrong of racism, but the contrast between the Party's ability to legislate strongly and swiftly against immigration and their softly-softly approach to curbing racial discrimination was difficult to ignore. It was of little use to most black people to have the right to stay in a hotel when they could not afford to do so. Furthermore, the enforcement provisions of the act were so weak that it was virtually unworkable. Researcher Bob Hepple neatly summed up the flaws in the act, describing it as 'unnecessarily complicated while, at the same time, being toothless'.⁸¹ Complaints had to be reported by the aggrieved party within a limited period to the newly created Race Relations Board, which then

⁷⁹ Letter from the Secretary of WISC to David Pitt, 22 October 1965, held in the CARD file at the IRR.

⁸⁰ Dummett, 'CARD Reconsidered', p. 43.

⁸¹ B. Hepple, *Race, Jobs and the Law* (London, 1968), p. 136.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement,
1955–1965

investigated very slowly, had no powers of subpoena, and could neither compel the offending party to stop their discriminatory practices nor seek reparations for the injured party. Prosecutions could only be brought with the permission of the Attorney-General, hence very few were instigated. From the moment the Race Relations Act entered the statute books it was widely criticised, not only by black people but also by journalists and even members of the Labour Party.⁸² In June 1966, the Home Secretary received a letter signed by eighty-seven clergymen urging him to extend the act to cover employment, housing and financial services.⁸³ CARD's association with the Race Relations Act, therefore, did little to enhance its reputation in the eyes of many of its lay members.

The reason that CARD's leaders differed so greatly in perspective from the general membership was because they were largely well-meaning, middle-class white people like Julia Gaitskell and Anthony Lester or middle-class Asians and West Indians, like David Pitt, Hamza Alavi, Ranjana Ash and Jocelyn Barrow. 'The leadership, the chair, they never came [to the CARD office] and they were people who were living completely different kinds of lives', remembers former volunteer Diane Langford. 'It was basically run by posh white people and they had David Pitt there as a sort of a figurehead'.⁸⁴ The leaders believed that the best approach to race relations was to 'open the door from within', according to Langford, a strategy that had the convenient side effect of enhancing their own personal prestige and political power. By 1966 white people like Michael Dummett were as over-represented in the lower echelons of CARD as in the leadership: 'Many of the representatives of the local CARD branches on the National Council were white', he wrote in 1973. 'West Indian members of CARD quite

⁸² Sections from *Hansard* and articles in the *Times* and *Sunday Times* criticising the act were reprinted in CARD's own journal *Campaign*. See *Campaign*, 1 (undated), p. 5, held in the CARD file at the IRR.

⁸³ See Lester and Bindman, *Race and Law*, p. 123.

⁸⁴ Diane Langford, interviewed by the author, 1 September 2004.

rightly thought that CARD no longer represented them'.⁸⁵ Although the American civil rights groups that were inspirational to CARD, such as the NAACP and the Congress of Racial Equality, had white members, neither organisation would have dreamt of allowing its leadership to be dominated by white people. Certainly it was not what Marion Glean had envisioned when she described CARD as an organisation that would 'ensure that immigrants, West Indians, Pakistanis, Indians and Africans could themselves decide their own strategies, decide on their own priorities, build their own organisation and in doing those things break the circle of dependency'.⁸⁶ She felt that on those terms it had already failed by the time of the founding convention in July 1965.

Conclusion

A turning point in the British political approach to immigration, 1965 also represented a watershed in black immigrants' perception of the state. The period between 1955 and 1965 had been a time of settlement and orientation for black immigrants to Britain. Their unavoidable encounters with white racism, however, forced them to start engaging with each other to find ways to defend their personal safety and political interests. The continuing individual racism, expressed daily in subtle ways and during crises like the 1958 Nottingham and Notting Hill riots, divested them of any romantic notions about the benevolence of the mother country. The political consensus on the need for immigration control that first emerged in the run up to the general election of October 1964, showed them that individual prejudice was just the surface manifestation of an underlying racism that inhered in the structures of the state. Political representation would therefore have to be created independently, as it had by African

⁸⁵ Dummett, 'CARD Reconsidered', p. 44.

⁸⁶ Glean, 'CARD?', p. 14.

Chapter 1: Immigration, British race relations and the American civil rights movement, 1955–1965

and West Indian students campaigning against British imperialism in the 1930s and 1940s.

In spite of interest from politicians, journalists and the race relations industry, most black immigrants did not look to the United States for inspiration. Mimetic initiatives such as the Bristol bus boycott of 1963 and the creation of CARD floundered and non-violent direct action was not widely adopted as a protest tactic in black communities. The mainstream political discourse on race relations before 1965 was bound up with a specifically British debate on immigration. Britain's first Race Relations Act was not the result of an American-style civil rights campaign, but the positive element of the formula, by 1965 agreed on both by politicians and the race relations industry, that less immigration plus more integration would equal good race relations. By the time black immigrants to Britain realised that they could not rely on mainstream political processes to represent their interests, the American civil rights movement had already started its transition from non-violent direct action to Black Power militancy.

CHAPTER 2

'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

Introduction

Between February 1965, when Malcolm X's visit to Britain attracted a moderate amount of media attention, and July 1967, when the arrival of Black Power's pre-eminent spokesperson, Stokely Carmichael, prompted a slew of hysterical articles and a government ban on him returning, British society became increasingly polarised around the issue of race. The Labour Party competed with the Conservatives to be seen as toughest on immigration, alienating its black supporters in the process. At the same time, immigrants from Asia and the Caribbean, having realised that their original intention to work in Britain for a few years before returning home with a nest-egg was unrealistic, and that they had, in fact, become settled in Britain, began to pay more attention to domestic events. Immigration as a political issue was less prominent in the election year of 1966 because the 'increasing consensus of stringency between the two major parties' made it a poor campaign topic.¹ By mid-1967, however, the possibility that several thousand British passport-holding Asians from Kenya might exercise their right to live in Britain had made it an urgent concern once again. The Labour government's hasty legislative response, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1 March 1968, which took just a week to be debated and approved by parliament, became popularly known as the Kenyan Asians Act. The most racially discriminatory piece of legislation to enter the statute books thus far, it was later ruled unlawful by the European Court of Human Rights.

¹ *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (January 1967), p. 2.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

The government had announced in July 1967 that it planned to fortify the 1965 Race Relations Act, but had not yet done so by the time the Kenyan Asians Act was passed. Britain's second Race Relations Act was drafted in response to a major study of racial discrimination in Britain, jointly commissioned by the Race Relations Board and National Council for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI), which had revealed that in virtually all areas of British society racial discrimination was thriving.² But although the Political and Economic Planning (PEP) report *Racial Discrimination in Britain* was published in April 1967, it took several months of debate before the 1968 Race Relations Act entered the statute books the following November. The 1968 act was an improvement on its predecessor in as far as it extended its anti-discrimination provisions to cover the vital areas of employment and housing. Compared with the swift decisiveness with which MPs had deprived the Kenyan Asians of their legal rights as British citizens earlier in the year, however, it appeared a half-hearted and ineffectual sop.

The hard line taken by the Labour government over the Kenyan Asians did not, as might have been expected, steal the thunder of the political far right, but actually encouraged its demands. Enoch Powell's notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech, delivered in Birmingham on 20 April 1968, was but the first of many apocalyptic perorations, full of apocryphal stories of outrageous immigrant behaviour, which journalists reported as fact. Despite being sacked from the Conservative shadow cabinet and censured by party leader Edward Heath, Powell set the pace and tone of political discussion on immigration for the next decade. Applauded or deplored, but never overlooked, the media reported Powell's every word: 'For the mass media Powell *was* race relations', remembered one

² Political and Economic Planning (PEP), *Racial Discrimination in Britain* (London, 1967).

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power contemporary observer.³ Most importantly, the extremism of Powell's views dragged the discourse on immigration to the right and made liberalism an untenable political position. 'The tone of his [Rivers of Blood] speech', explained historian Richard Thurlow, 'brought the language and arguments of the neo-fascist political fringe into the heart of the establishment'.⁴ Evidence of this was inadvertently acknowledged by Powell himself in 1971, when he commented that the Conservative government's recently introduced immigration bill, which proposed to allow only patrilial citizens (that is, British passport holders with a UK-born parent or grandparent) the automatic right to live in Britain, reminded him of Nazi Germany's categorisation as Jewish anyone with a Jewish grandmother.⁵ The 1971 Immigration Act did not go far enough, however, for the National Front, founded in February 1967. Finding itself suddenly sharing respectable political ground with the extreme right wing of the Conservative Party and encouraged by public displays of support for Enoch Powell, such as the marches of hundreds of dock workers and Smithfield meat porters to the Houses of Parliament in the week after his 'Rivers of Blood' speech, it redoubled its campaign to rid Britain of black people by constitutional or other means and printed the slogan 'Enoch was right' on badges, flyers and placards.⁶ Richard Thurlow believes that 'There can be little

³ J. Bourne, 'The Powell Effect', *Race & Class*, 39:4 (1998), p. 60.

⁴ R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* (New York, 1987), p. 246.

⁵ Powell's comments were reported in P. Evans, 'Immigration: British-Style', *Transition*, 40 (December 1971), p. 40.

⁶ Over a thousand dock workers from the East End of London marched to the House of Commons on 23 April 1968, bearing placards reading 'Don't Knock Enoch'. The following day, around 400 porters from London's Smithfield meat market also marched to parliament, bearing a petition with over 2,000 signatures urging Heath to reinstate Powell. A Gallup poll at the end of April 1968 purported to show that 74 per cent of respondents agreed with Powell's views on immigration, while a write-in poll undertaken by the *Wolverhampton Express and Star* produced 35,000 postcards expressing support for Powell and hardly any against him. For more details on all of these events see D. Sandbrook, *White Heat: a History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London, 2006), pp. 642-5.

doubt that the National Front would not have survived if Enoch Powell had not unwittingly given it such a helping hand in its infancy'.⁷

In such a racially polarised and hostile atmosphere, the American Black Power movement gained credibility as an organisational blueprint for black resistance in Britain. In June 1967, a small group of British activists who had been regularly meeting at Speaker's Corner on Sundays to discuss racism in Britain, set up Britain's first Black Power group, the Universal Coloured People's Association (UCPA). When radical African American leader Stokely Carmichael, head of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and co-author of *Black Power: the Politics of Liberation in America*, visited Britain the following month, he was introduced to the UCPA, along with other immigrant groups in London and activists including Michael X.⁸ Carmichael's short visit gave Britain's nascent Black Power movement a tremendous boost. A sensationalising media broadcast his words to black people around the country, but also provoked fear in many politicians, policemen, journalists and judges, who worried that the new spirit of black militancy in Britain might lead to American-style race riots.

The phrase 'Black Power' had been first popularised as a rallying call for African Americans by Carmichael in the summer of 1966. A highly flexible term that could be used as a justification for both black capitalism and revolutionary pan-African socialism, Black Power's appeal among disillusioned African Americans stemmed from its militant assertion of pride in being black. Groups such as Ron Karenga's US, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale's Black Panther Party and Carmichael's all-black SNCC often disagreed vehemently, even

⁷ Thurlow, *Fascism*, p. 249.

⁸ S. Carmichael and C. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York, 1967).

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

violently, on the correct path to black liberation, but none would have disagreed with the dictum 'Black is beautiful' or the need for black people to unite and lead their own organisations. Having evolved from the southern-based, non-violent phase of the civil rights movement, which was in terminal decline by the end of 1966, Black Power spoke to the disillusioned African American residents of the ghettos. These people had seen no improvement in their dire economic and social circumstances during the 'King years' and perceived no benefit in voting for a white-dominated political system that seemed determined to keep them down. Although not a movement born of desperation, Black Power did speak to the desperately poor and disillusioned and, by 1967, black immigrants in Britain were beginning to identify with them.

The overwhelming majority of Black Power activists in Britain came from the Caribbean, although there were also African and southern Asian members, some of whom, for example Nigerian Obi Egbuna, president of the UCPA and founder of the Black Panther Movement (BPM), and Indian Ajoy Ghose, UCPA member, founder of the Malcolm X Montessori School and editor of Black Power newspaper the *Tricontinental Outpost*, held significant leadership positions. Black sociology student Susan Craig, who infiltrated several London Black Power groups in 1969 to research her final year thesis, found that 'For the purposes of the Black Power organisations, the two significant immigrant groups in Britain are the Asians and the West Indians', although qualified the remark with the observation that, 'the number of Asians in most groups that I have seen is negligible'.⁹ A UCPA membership list from 1967, though, contained seventeen immediately recognisable Asian surnames (for example Krishna, Mohamed, Khan and

⁹ S. Craig, 'Black Power groups in London, 1967-1969', unpublished BSc thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1970, pp. 15, 71.

Chowdhury) out of a total of seventy-six.¹⁰ Anecdotal evidence the former Black Power activists interviewed by the author indicates that Africans represented a very small minority of the overall membership of the London groups surveyed, and as the highest concentration of Africans in Britain was in London, it is unlikely that Black Power groups outside the capital had a higher percentage of African members. Black Power groups were not interested in racially classifying their members, however, as long as they were not white. A UCPA leaflet made no distinction between Africans, West Indians and Indians, seeing the only opposition as between oppressors and the oppressed: 'The history of the oppressed peoples of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas over the last four hundred years has demonstrated that the world has been divided into two irreconcilable camps.'¹¹ The idea of blackness as a political colour crystallised and was most clearly articulated during the Black Power movement, but it had deep historical roots in three continents.

Black Britain between 1965 and 1967: disillusionment with liberalism

After 1965, being associated with the Labour Party became increasingly problematic for anyone claiming to represent the interests of the black community. The Labour government's authorship of the 1965 Race Relations Act did little to change this position. Criticised from its inception by MPs, the press, liberal whites and most black people, the act began to display its inadequacies immediately. At the end of 1965 the Birmingham branch of the Indian Workers' Association (GB) published a booklet, 'The Victims Speak', which quietly condemned the act. 'The Race Relations Act was in many ways a disappointment to us', it declared, 'as we

¹⁰ UCPA membership list from Tony Soares' private collection.

¹¹ UCPA, 'U. C. P. A. Black Power', undated two page leaflet, held uncatalogued at the IRR.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power had hoped to see it as an effective weapon against racial discrimination'.¹² In more radical quarters the act's ineffectiveness was interpreted as quite deliberate. '[T]he Labour government passed the Race Relations Act in 1965, and set up the Race Relations Board in 1966, to frustrate black people and prevent us from taking effective organised action', contended a Black Panther Movement (BPM) leaflet. 'Under the Race Relations Act, several black people have been prosecuted and sent to prison for speaking up for the rights of black people, but white fascists are allowed to refuse black people jobs, homes and insult and humiliate us, and are not prosecuted under this so-called Act'.¹³ One of several black orators at Speaker's Corner to feel the sharp end of the 1965 act, when he was prosecuted for inciting racial hatred in 1967, Ajoy Ghose echoed the BPM's cynicism. 'The "race relations act" was a careful scheme which was well engineered by the white liberal racists and their sympathisers, which will continue to show its vicious and subtle oppression of the Black people in the U.K.', he predicted.¹⁴

By November 1966, a full year after the act's passage, only three of the new Race Relations Board's regional conciliation committees had been set up. The London, Manchester and Birmingham committees had few opportunities to try out their conciliatory powers because most of the complaints they received concerned discrimination by employers, landlords or estate agents, none of whom fell within the act's purview. In January 1967, the editor of *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* noted that, 'of the two hundred or so complaints sent in' to the Birmingham office, 'about three-quarters were outside the committee's field of

¹² IWA (GB), 'The Victims Speak', November 1965, p. 9, held uncatalogued at the IRR.

¹³ BPM, 'Black People Don't Vote', June 1970, p. 3. Leaflet held in Black groups file at the IRR.

¹⁴ 'Attacks on Black Activists', *Tri-Continental Outpost* 19 (January 1972), p. 2.

reference'.¹⁵ The Attorney-General also seemed reticent to use the new powers of prosecution vested in him by section six of the Race Relations Act, that made incitement to racial hatred illegal. In May 1966, six MPs were so frustrated by the Attorney-General's repeated refusals to initiate proceedings against various far-right groups that they tabled an all-party motion amending the act to allow the police to instigate prosecutions.¹⁶ The first trial under section six of the Race Relations Act eventually took place in October 1966, but although British National Socialist Christopher Britton was found guilty (for pinning racist material to his local MP's door and throwing a bottle wrapped in racist propaganda through his window), his conviction was promptly quashed on appeal, as it was decided the MP's family did not constitute a section of the public.¹⁷

In 1966 the most visible body campaigning for racial equality was the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) and its demise, seemingly at the hands of a Black Power cabal, the following year was the subject of many newspaper headlines. CARD spent most of 1966 collecting evidence of discrimination in order both to test the effectiveness of the previous year's Race Relations Act and to persuade the government of the need to extend its provisions. Having damaged its reputation in some black communities by getting involved in the process of drawing up the less-than-comprehensive 1965 act, CARD needed to prove that it was having a beneficial impact to avoid losing even more credibility.¹⁸ In April 1967, however, the inadequacy of the Race Relations Act was unequivocally confirmed by the hard-hitting PEP report, *Racial Discrimination in*

¹⁵ S. Patterson, 'Review of 1966', *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (January 1967), p.1.

¹⁶ This was reported in *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (June 1966), p. 9.

¹⁷ See A. Lester and G. Bindman, *Race and Law* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 367-8.

¹⁸ See previous chapter for an account of the disaffiliation of the National Federation of Pakistani Associations and the West Indian Standing Conference from CARD following leaders David Pitt's and Hamza Alavi's decision to accept positions on the government-created and funded NCCI.

England. Reprinted as a best-selling paperback the following year, the report made the damning finding that '[A]ll but those with totally closed minds must accept the fact that in Britain today discrimination against coloured members of the population operates in fields not covered by the existing legislation and that it operates on a substantial scale'.¹⁹ There had always been competing views on the political course CARD should steer, and many black CARD members became increasingly suspicious of those white liberal members who continued advocate using the machinery of the state to secure racial equality after it had been shown to be ineffective.

The previous chapter outlined how the chair and vice-chair of CARD alienated a considerable section of the organisation's black membership at the end of 1965 by agreeing to sit on the statutory body, the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants. Other black groups, such as the IWA (GB), had refused even to join CARD because of its tactical focus on lobbying the government. The inability of progressive white CARD members like the organisation's legal adviser, Anthony Lester, to empathise with the frustration and impatience for equality of black members, was exemplified in a December 1967 newspaper article giving reasons for Lester and others' resignation from CARD. 'Those moving in, [Lester] said, were losing sight of the true purposes of the organisation and trying to turn it into a political movement instead of a social and democratic one'.²⁰

The politics of many of those who had joined CARD in anticipation of its annual general meeting in 1967 was Black Power, but this was not the reason for

¹⁹ W. Daniel, *Racial Discrimination in England: Based on the P.E.P. Report* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 13.

²⁰ 'Six quit executive of anti-racialist body', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 December 1967.

the organisation's demise. Benjamin Heineman, an American sociology postgraduate in London during the mid to late-1960s, wrote that 'Because there were no clear guideposts for British activists promoting the immigrants' cause, the American experience had a distorting effect since it was often assumed that British race relations would go through similar stages'.²¹ Heineman's 1972 book on CARD also fell foul of trying to fit the organisation's history to an American script, however, blaming its disintegration on the black nationalism of a West Indian faction heavily influenced by American Black Power.²² His conclusions chimed with those of the contemporary British press, which noted with disapproval the presence of the newly formed UCPA at CARD's 1967 annual convention. In a *Times* article headlined, 'Threat to Card [sic] From Extremists', American Black Power was blamed implicitly. '[T]here are always heavy dangers in riding tigers', concluded the journalist, 'and these dangers are not reduced when the animal changes to a black panther'.²³

Some CARD members clearly were influenced by the burgeoning Black Power movement in the United States after 1966. A press statement issued in November 1967 by Johnny James, one of the organisation's newly-elected militant black leaders, had all the hallmarks of a Black Power perspective. 'Let it be quite clear that I do not like speaking to the white imperialist press reporters', James began, 'because by nature they have to lie and distort everything one says to carry out the orders and wishes of their masters'.²⁴ The rest of James's statement paid homage to Mao and the various anti-colonial movements in Africa which, although

²¹ B. Heineman. *The Politics of the Powerless: a Study of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination* (London, 1972), p. xi.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²³ *The Times*, 7 November 1967, p. 11.

²⁴ J. James, 'Press interview statement', 9 November 1967, p. 1. Document held in CARD file at Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

common Black Power themes, were also independent political causes in Britain. Former CARD member Diane Langford attests to this. 'I think [the 1967 CARD coup] was an effect of the American situation', she says, 'but the political climate was also very exciting in the sense of anti-colonial struggles. There were some people who were Maoists and China was standing up to the West – they were tremendous role models'.²⁵ CARD disintegrated in 1967, therefore, not because of a Black Power-inspired split between black nationalist and white and Asian members, although that certainly helped. The goal of the angry black members who packed CARD's annual conference in July 1967 and the extraordinary general meetings that followed it in November and December, was not necessarily to reorient CARD to Black Power, but to stop it from continuing as a white-dominated, reformist, lobbying organisation whose policy was decided at the top and imposed on the lower ranks and in which the chair and vice-chairman were viewed by the lay membership as lackeys of the state.

By the summer of 1967 the British press had developed a keen interest in Black Power and the pathology of American race relations. The reports, from the summer of 1965 onwards, of rioting by economically and socially disadvantaged African Americans in the major northern cities of the United States had a greater impact on British politicians' views of race relations in Britain than previous non-violent civil rights protests. The riots in the United States convinced many white Britons in positions of power that British race relations were on a potentially disastrous course. A further outbreak of rioting in Detroit in July 1967 was reported extensively in the pages of British newspapers and on its television screens, accompanied by debates on whether such scenes would ever be seen in

²⁵ Diane Langford, interviewed by the author, 1 September 2004.

Britain. 'Dark prophecies and warnings of American-style riots continued to be uttered in the late summer – or at least appear in the headlines', noted the IRR's news cuttings round-up in September 1967.²⁶ By 1967 most British homes contained a television set and advances in technology had made transatlantic broadcasting much easier. A team of *Times* journalists described the impact this had in 1968. . 'For on the TV screens of those who can afford them,' they wrote, 'America's race riots are brought as a hideous example into our own homes. It is no longer possible to view Britain in isolation.'²⁷

The rioting in the United States was seen as particularly relevant to British society in the mid-1960s because it was believed that the children of the first generation of black immigrants, who had either been born in Britain or brought over as children, were approaching school and home-leaving age and were, therefore, about to have their first experiences of Britain's (entirely legal) racially discriminatory employment and housing markets. Most MPs and race relations researchers believed that although a colour bar might have been tolerated by first generation immigrants, their British-born or raised children would expect a much greater degree of equality. The potential fall-out from the gap between black teenagers' hopes and expectations and the reality of their adult lives in Britain was therefore considered to be a pressing social problem. In two separate 1966 speeches, Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins indicated that this was one of the reasons the government was considering extending the 1965 Race Relations Act to cover housing and employment.²⁸ 'The next generation, who will not be immigrants but coloured Britons,' Jenkins explained, 'will expect full opportunities

²⁶ *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (September 1967), p. 334.

²⁷ S. Clarke, P. Evans, M. Knipe, G. Lloyd, D. van der Vat and W. Norris, *The Black Man in Search of Power* (London, 1968), p. 171.

²⁸ The speeches were at the NCCI on 23 May 1966 and the IRR on 10 October 1966.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

to deploy their skills. If we frustrate those expectations ... we shall irreparably damage the quality of life in our society by creating an American-type situation.'²⁹

On 26 July 1967 Jenkins finally announced the government's intention to introduce legislation that would significantly extend the scope of the 1965 Race Relations Act. The flip side of this legislative coin was that the government was also determined to clamp down on signs of militant agitation in the black community. It was no coincidence that on the same day as he announced the government's proposed extension of anti-discrimination legislation, Jenkins also announced that Stokely Carmichael had been barred from Britain. It was not Black Power *per se*, though, that the British government was worried about. Carmichael was banned because American-style race riots were considered a real and present danger by mid-1967, not because the British government saw him as the harbinger of a Black Power revolution.

Between 1965 and 1967, however, the domestic conditions that black people would one day riot over – police brutality, the differential treatment of their children at school and discrimination in housing and employment – continued to worsen. Abroad, the British government's refusal to send troops to Rhodesia to overturn white supremacist leader Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence in November 1965, and its opposition to sanctions against apartheid South Africa, convinced many black people in Britain that the state had no real commitment to racial equality. Reviewing the events of 1965, the *Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* commented that 'The hardening of national and local opinion on the immigration issue, and the continued (and highly publicised) activity of white racist guerilla-groups, evoked a corresponding mood of hurt, bitterness,

²⁹ R. Jenkins, 'Address by the Home Secretary to the Institute', *Race* 8:3 (1967), p. 216.

and recoil among many'.³⁰ Later commentaries from Black Power newspapers show how the feelings described by the *IRR Newsletter* fuelled the disillusionment upon which the Black Power movement fed. 'That Britain would eventually settle its "differences" with the Pigs in Salisbury, we all knew', commented a Black Power newspaper in 1972, 'We knew it when Britain failed to take any action against that racist pig Smith and his gang'.³¹ By the time Stokely Carmichael arrived in London on 18 July 1967 to speak at a counter-cultural gathering, the Dialectics of Liberation conference, many black people in Britain were ready for a new voice and a new, militant, direction.

Stokely Carmichael and the birth of a British Black Power movement

Born in Trinidad, Stokely Carmichael was brought up in New York and Washington D.C., where he graduated from Howard University, a prestigious African American college. A member of SNCC from its birth, he was its chairman by 1966. A middle-class intellectual radicalised by his experiences in the civil rights movement, Carmichael advocated black unity, socialism, Pan-Africanism and armed resistance to white racism. His book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, written with political scientist Charles Hamilton, had just been published in the United States when he came to London in July as part of a tour of Europe and Africa. Those who actually read the book would have found it surprisingly measured in tone, but the power of the title alone to inspire or intimidate should not be underestimated, and in July 1967 that was the only part of the book of which anyone in Britain was likely to be aware. It is hard to overstate

³⁰ *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (January 1966), p. 2.

³¹ 'Zimbabwe (Rhodesia – as they call it)', *Resistance* 1:2 (November 1972), p. 1. *Resistance*, held at the IRR, was the newspaper of the Coventry-based Black Power organisation, the Afro-Asian Peoples Liberation Movement.

the impact of Carmichael's eleven-day visit to Britain in July 1967. Trinidadian intellectual CLR James gave a lengthy analysis of Carmichael's importance in a speech on Black Power he wrote a month after attending the Dialectics conference. 'It is undoubtedly his presence here, and the impact that he has made in his speeches and his conversations', said James, 'that have made the slogan Black Power reverberate in the way that it is doing in political Britain'.³² Declaring Carmichael to be the latest West Indian intellectual in a succession that included Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, James praised both Carmichael's message and his mode of delivery. 'I was so struck by what he was saying and the way he was saying it', remarked James. 'He speaks with a scope and depth of range of political understanding that astonishes me'.³³

Angela Davis, who also attended the Dialectics of Liberation conference, described the personal impact of Carmichael's speech in her autobiography. 'As I listened to Stokely's words, cutting like a switchblade, accusing the enemy as I had never heard him accused before', she wrote, 'I admit I felt the cathartic power of his speech'.³⁴ Obi Egbuna described Carmichael's arrival in Britain as being 'like manna from heaven' and argued that, 'It was not until Stokely Carmichael's historic visit in the Summer of 1967 ... that Black Power got a foothold in Britain'.³⁵ His visit was still being talked about in Britain's black communities a year later. John La Rose, a Trinidadian writer and political activist who, in 1966, had set up both independent black publishing house New Beacon Books and West Indian cultural association the Caribbean Artists' Movement (CAM) in London,

³² C.L.R. James, 'Black Power: Its Past, Today and The Way Ahead', 1968. p. 1. The pamphlet does not list a publisher and is held in the Black Documents file at the IRR.

³³ Ibid., pp. 2, 4.

³⁴ A. Davis, *Angela Davis: an Autobiography* (New York, 1974), p. 150.

³⁵ O. Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple: the Voice of Black Power in Britain* (London, 1971), pp. 18, 16.

noticed the impact of Carmichael's visit on both of his organisations. 'I feel that the effect of Stokely Carmichael's presence ... last year was a catalyst in a way that nothing before had been', La Rose told fellow CAM members at the organisation's second annual conference in August 1968, 'and you can see within that one year's experience, a fantastic development has occurred'.³⁶ Carmichael's visit did not just make an impact on black Britain though. The editorial team of the *Anti-Apartheid News* were so impressed with Carmichael's linking of domestic racism with neo-colonialism and imperialism in the Third World, and particularly southern Africa, that they adorned the front cover of the September issue with a drawing of his face.³⁷ The British government's reaction to Carmichael stood in contrast to its toleration of militant African American leader Malcolm X who had been allowed to return to Britain in February 1965 despite making public statements during his December 1964 visit that could not possibly have been regarded as less inflammatory than Carmichael's words.

Carmichael's speech at the Dialectics of Liberation conference fell far short of the blood-curdling tocsin call to race revolution it was portrayed as in the press.³⁸ It attempted to link domestic racism and the economic exploitation of black minorities with imperialist and neo-colonialist exploitation of the Third World, explaining that 'The proletariat has become the Third World, and the bourgeoisie is white Western society'.³⁹ Carmichael further argued that racial equality was not possible under capitalism because 'Capitalism by its very nature,

³⁶ John La Rose's comments from the second CAM conference at Kent University in August 1968 are recorded on p. 36 of uncatalogued transcripts held at the George Padmore Institute (GPI).

³⁷ *Anti-Apartheid News*, September 1967, p. 1.

³⁸ For example the preamble to an interview with Carmichael published in *The Observer Review* described him as a 'man to hate and fear'. C. McGlashan, 'Mainspring of Black Power: Colin McGlashan Talks to Stokely Carmichael', *The Observer Review*, 23 July 1967, p. 1.

³⁹ S. Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (New York, 1971), p. 91.

cannot create structures free from oppression'.⁴⁰ He also urged black people to create an independent self-image, saying, 'The people of the Third World are going to have to stop accepting the definitions imposed on them by the West'.⁴¹ Rejecting white people of all political hues as unable to see or dispense with the inherent advantages their skin colour bestowed, Carmichael placed his call for black people to use violence in defence of their rights within a historical context of social, economic and physical violence inflicted on them by white capitalist societies. 'Wherever you go in Africa today, the Africans are suffering from violence inflicted on them by the white West', he argued, 'be it that they are stripped of their culture, of their human dignity, or of the resources of their very land'.⁴² Unwittingly condemning the activities of CARD chairman David Pitt and his organisation, Carmichael made it clear that in his opinion conciliation and collaboration with a white power structure was pointless. 'Because of the integration movement's middle-class orientation, because of its subconscious racism, and because of its non-violent approach, it has never been able to involve the black proletariat', he lectured.⁴³ 'The only thing a white liberal can do for me is to help civilise other whites, because they need to be civilised.'⁴⁴

Although persuasively argued and elegantly interspersed with literary references to Camus, Sartre, Kipling and even Lewis Carroll, Carmichael's speech was not groundbreaking in its originality. His themes of Pan-Africanism, black unity, the inherent corruption of capitalism and the need for black people to use violence to resist violent oppression had been articulated in Britain more than two years earlier by Carmichael's hero Malcolm X. In July 1967, however, black

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴² Ibid., p. 92.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 85-6.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

Britain seemed particularly ready to receive the message of Black Power and white Britons seemed far more disturbed by it than they had been at the start of 1965. Malcolm X's visit had inspired the creation of one militant organisation, the Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS), which garnered far more press attention than it did members. Carmichael's visit, on the other hand, heralded a paradigm shift in black protest.

This could not be explained simply by the brilliance of Carmichael's fiery oratory. By July 1967, British and American race relations had reached a stage of comparative synchronicity that made black people in Britain look to African Americans for guidance far more than before. Discussing this change in 1968, John La Rose told his fellow CAM members that, 'The reason why I think the Afro-West Indian in Britain looks to the United States is because you have the same kind of urban experience which he is now forced up against.'⁴⁵ The inspirational value of the non-violent phase of the American civil rights movement had been negated by the very different context of the southern movement in the United States, the inapplicability of its aims to Britain and the relative unity and homogeneity of its followers. But the racial polarisation of British society after 1965, an increasing disillusionment with white liberals and reformism and the coming of age of a new generation of black Britons combined to persuade black people, particularly West Indians, that there were real parallels between their situation and that of African Americans in the United States.

Such similarities were not only perceived by black people in Britain. Recalling a visit to London in July 1967, Angela Davis wrote in her autobiography that she was struck 'by the degree to which West Indian communities in Britain

⁴⁵ La Rose is quoted on p. 39 of uncatalogued transcripts of the second CAM conference, held in the GPI.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

were mirror images of Black communities at home. These warm, receptive, fiery, enthusiastic people were also searching for some way to avenge themselves'.⁴⁶

Richard Small, a founding member of CARD and an active participant in the West Indian Standing Conference (WISC) and CAM, concluded that it was African Americans' success that particularly attracted black immigrants' attention. 'We are looking to America simply because black people in America are finding a way of dealing with their situation', he declared in 1968. 'If black people in South Africa were finding a way to deal with their situation we would look there too.'⁴⁷

The anti-colonialism and class-based analysis that underpinned Black Power philosophy made it particularly well-suited to the British context. Whereas invoking Marxism and aspiring to socialism were politically beyond the pale to the majority of African Americans, in Britain it placed Black Power within a long tradition of radical intellectual dissent. Africans in Britain had already created an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist movement in Britain earlier in the twentieth century, that complemented and collaborated with home-grown white organisations. As well as setting a precedent for black protest, there was a direct crossover between groups like the Committee of African Organisations, (CAO) and the later Black Power movement. As previously mentioned, UCPA president and BPM founder Obi Egbuna had been (and possibly still was) a member of CAO and Malcolm X's final visit to Britain in February 1965 had been at CAO's behest. Intellectually, there was a clear line of descent from pan-African, anti-colonial activists like Ras Makonnen, who was both preaching and practising 'Black Power' in his adopted cities of London and Manchester long before the 1960s. Makonnen, a pan-

⁴⁶ Davis, *Angela*, p. 150.

⁴⁷ Small is quoted on p. 40 of uncatalogued transcripts of the second CAM conference, held in the GPI.

Africanist who thought that anti-colonial organisations should only have black members, wrote that 'this [self-]defence business was almost a daily concern' and refused to pay taxes because he 'felt that in this colonial struggle paying income tax would be a crime'.⁴⁸ He did not believe in working with black middle-class organisations like Harold Moody's League of Coloured Peoples, whose activities he dismissed as 'mild protest, or if you like, harassing the goody-goody elements in Britain'.⁴⁹ Makonnen also wrote eloquently about the liberating experience of mounting a soapbox at Speaker's Corner in London. 'Imagine what it meant to us to go to Hyde Park to speak to a race of people who considering themselves our masters,' he wrote, 'and tell them right out what we felt about their empire and about them'.⁵⁰ It was precisely this practice that led to the formation of Britain's first Black Power group, the UCPA, just under a decade after Makonnen had left the country to work for Nkrumah in Ghana.

Anti-colonialism was a concrete and contentious political issue across the Commonwealth, where struggles for independence had either recently been fought and won, as in the case of recently-liberated African nations like Ghana and Kenya, or were ongoing. In Mozambique, Angola and Guiné-Bissau struggling against the yoke of Portuguese colonialism, and in Southern Africa, where the acquiescence of western European countries resulted in its continued subjugation by white supremacist regimes, high profile guerrilla resistance movements were active and actively supported by black people and radical whites in Britain. In the Caribbean, anti-imperialist movements in Guyana, Trinidad, Anguilla and Bermuda, among others, campaigned for the end of British rule or sought to

⁴⁸ R. Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 143, 141.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

destabilise their post-independence, pro-British governments. Many first generation black immigrants to Britain had been involved in anti-colonialist movements in their home countries. Some, like Guyanese husband and wife Eric and Jessica Huntley and Tony Soares, who grew up in Mozambique, had come to Britain specifically to escape persecution for their anti-colonial activities at home. Thus, Carmichael's explicit linking of domestic racism with foreign imperialism and his exhortation to oppose oppression on a global scale resonated with the global, anti-colonial perspective which already had an intellectual and practical heritage in Britain. His speech resonated so profoundly because he addressed contemporary racial discrimination in Britain and analysed it in a global framework that incorporated immigrants' anti-imperialist struggles, past and present.

Finally, the need for a Black Power response to racism had already been recognised by some black people in Britain by the time Carmichael visited in July 1967. Britain was already home to two militant black political organisations before Carmichael's visit – RAAS, founded in February 1965, and, from June 1967, the UCPA. Tony Soares, a founding member of the latter, believed that Carmichael's visit coincided almost exactly with the point at which black people in Britain had decided to take militant action. 'By 1967 there was a certain amount of consciousness among the non-white people in London, and in other parts', he remembers, 'we were ... just starting to get organised'.⁵¹ Before solidifying into a formal organisation, the future members of the UCPA had congregated at Speaker's Corner where RAAS and UCPA co-founder Roy Sawh built his reputation on the witty put-downs he delivered to white people there. A team of

⁵¹ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

investigative journalists from *The Times* reported that, by the time of Carmichael's visit, there was a harder edge to what was being said in this leafy corner of London. 'The speeches by the coloured men at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park were already violent', they noted.⁵² Carmichael was also aware of the rumblings of discontent among Britain's ethnic minorities. "Black Power" formations had begun to emerge in the African/Caribbean immigrant communities in Britain', he later wrote about his 1967 trip to London, 'This seemed the perfect opportunity to establish contact and exchange ideas with these emerging forces'.⁵³ Carmichael had accepted the invitation to speak at the Dialectics of Liberation conference because he wanted to make connections with a Black Power movement in Britain that he had been told already existed.

Black Power groups in Britain

The largest and most important Black Power groups were, like the largest communities of black people, based in London. They were the UCPA, which reconstituted itself as the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) in 1970, the Black Panther Movement (BPM) and its offshoot the Black Liberation Front (BLF). As well as their headquarters in London, the UCPA and BUFP had sister branches in Manchester and the BPM had Birmingham and Hull branches as well as an offshoot organisation, the Black People's Action Collective with branches in

⁵² Clarke et al, *Black Man*, p. 145.

⁵³ S. Carmichael with E. M. Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: the Life Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York, 2003), p. 572.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds and London.⁵⁴ Another group, the Fasimbas, was set up in South London by George Campbell at the end of the 1960s and had around 500 members, according to Tony Soares. Fasimbas was a non-hierarchical organisation and worked closely with the BLF, eventually merging with the latter at the end of 1972, but as it was an underground organisation with no official membership and did not keep written records, it is very hard to trace its activities.⁵⁵ An article in the *Sunday Telegraph* on Black Power reported the existence of another group, the Black Eagles, in August 1970. Based in Notting Hill, the Eagles had approximately 150 members, the newspaper claimed, and were non-violent, their motto being 'Get a brick and build'.⁵⁶

Most regional towns and cities with significant black populations also had a self-proclaimed Black Power group. We know of their existence mainly because of their newsletters and journals, which were passed around between activists and therefore ended up being circulated beyond their immediate localities, finding their way into a number of larger repositories. Thus, the librarian at the Institute of Race Relations in London, friendly to Black Power, managed to collect not only the journals of London-based groups like the UCPA (*Black Power Speaks*), BUFP, (*Black Power Speaks and Black Voice*), Black Eagles (*Black Dimension*), Black Liberation Front (*Grass Roots*), Black Regional Action Movement (*Black Ram*) and the Black Panther Movement (*Black Life, Black People's News Service* and *Freedom News*) but also *Black Chat*, newsletter of the Leicester-based Black

⁵⁴ The IRR holds UCPA letterheads and copies of *Black Power Speaks* with a branch address in Manchester. When the UCPA split and its rump became the BUFP, the same address was given as the branch address for the Manchester BUFP. Linton Kwesi Johnson remembers travelling to Birmingham to meet up with another branch of the Black Panther Movement. Colin Prescod, who studied at Hull University remembers the existence of a group called the Black People's Action Collective.

⁵⁵ The 1972 merger of Fasimbas and the BLF is reported in a potted history of the BLF in *Grass Roots*, 4:4 (January 1976), p. 2.

⁵⁶ 'Black Power and Michael X', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2 August 1970.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

People's Liberation Party, *BPFM Weekly* and *Uhuru*, organs of Nottingham's Black People's Freedom Movement, *Resistance*, the paper of the Afro-Asian Peoples Liberation Movement in Coventry and the Manchester edition of the BUFP's *Black Voice*, covering the group's activities in the city. Documents in the Indian Workers' Association archive in Birmingham and the Institute of Race Relations in London refer to the existence of a Black Defence Organisation in Bristol, a United Black People's Organisation and a West Indian Association in Sheffield, a United Caribbean Association in Cardiff and an Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement in Manchester, but tell us little more.⁵⁷

The official membership of even the largest London Black Power groups never reached more than about three hundred, although greater numbers could be mobilised for demonstrations. This was perhaps because membership of a Black Power group required a great deal of commitment, especially of time, as members were expected to take part in almost daily book, politics and philosophy discussion groups, self-defence training, newspaper-selling and door-to-door recruiting and fundraising. Membership, as opposed to active support, was therefore not for everyone. The groups were also highly prone to splintering over differences in ideology and tactics. The UCPA, for example, split twice in its first year of existence. The regular name changes of the organisations to reflect their new ideological positions, the fluidity of membership and the lack of written records kept by groups in constant fear of being raided by the police makes establishing the basic facts of the Black Power movement in Britain difficult. The rest of this chapter is therefore devoted to delineating, as far as possible, the membership, aims and activities of the four largest Black Power organisations in London to

⁵⁷ See MS 2141/8, IWA archive, Birmingham Central Library for all groups except the Afro-Caribbean Liberation movement, correspondence with which is held, unfiled at the IRR.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

provide an empirical basis for the next chapter's analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Black Power movement. It also includes a short history of Michael X's RAAS which, although it predated the Black Power movement in Britain by two years and was not a serious, grassroots Black Power organisation, was treated as significant by both the media and the police.

The Universal Coloured People's Association

The UCPA was founded on 5 June 1967 at a meeting in Notting Hill, although many of those who would become its members had been meeting regularly at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park for several months beforehand. The seventy-six (mostly) men at the founding meeting agreed to pay membership dues and elected Nigerian playwright Obi Egbuna as their president and Roy Sawh as his second in command.⁵⁸ Sawh and Egbuna did not work well together though, perhaps because, as Ajoy Ghose remembers, 'there was quite a group who didn't like all [Sawh's] comical way of making it light-hearted. He was a funny man and used to pull a crowd in and when the crowd was in he wouldn't let anybody else have their say'.⁵⁹ By September 1967 Sawh and his supporters had left to form a tiny splinter group, the Universal Coloured People and Arab Association (UCPAAA). This did not stop the vicious in-fighting, as Egbuna recalled in his 1971 biography: 'Our first shock was to discover that we were too much of a mixed bag to constitute one political movement', he wrote. 'The new recruits who attended our meetings for the first time were so horrified by the snarling and bickering that went on they

⁵⁸ Information taken from the document 'Names and addresses of financial members of UCPA', held in Tony Soares' private collection.

⁵⁹ Ajoy Ghose, interviewed by the author, 20 August 2004.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

never showed up again'.⁶⁰ Egbuna himself left the UCPA in April 1968 to start the more ideologically rigid and hierarchical Black Panther Movement. In May 1970 the UCPA's Manchester branch leader, Ron Phillips, was acrimoniously expelled for 'conduct prejudicial and injurious to the U.C.P.A. and to Black people in general'.⁶¹ Two months later the entire organisation split and the bulk of the membership reformed as the BUFP.

In September 1967 the UCPA set out its philosophy in a fifteen-page pamphlet called *Black Power in Britain: a Special Statement by the Universal Coloured People's Association*.⁶² Featuring a drawing of a black panther on the front and a photo of Stokely Carmichael on the inside back cover, the pamphlet borrowed heavily from both the style and content of American Black Power. Its critique of white, capitalist society was derived, however, from a disillusioned analysis of contemporary British politics. 'We know that the only difference between the Ian Smiths and the Harold Wilsons of the white world is not a difference in principle but only a difference in tactics,' the pamphlet proclaimed, 'it is not a quarrel between fascism and anti-fascism, but a quarrel between frankness and hypocrisy within a fascist framework.'⁶³ Given the UCPA's diverse membership and self-confessed lack of ideological coherence, the strict adherence of the rest of the pamphlet to the American Black Power orthodoxies of unity, self-help, cultural self-determination, the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and defensive violence, points to the authorship of Egbuna. He had spent time in the United States on an academic exchange programme in 1966 and was by far the

⁶⁰ Egbuna, *Destroy*, pp. 19, 20.

⁶¹ UCPA, 'The exposure and expulsion of a con (Ron Phillips) by U.C.P.A.', May 1970. Document held in the Black documents file at the IRR.

⁶² UCPA, 'Black Power in Britain: a Special Statement by the Universal Coloured People's Association', 10 September 1967. Held in the Black groups file at the IRR.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

UCPA's most knowledgeable and enthusiastic advocate of American-style Black Power. The pamphlet's concluding list of 'aims and objects' fell short of the strident rhetoric of the middle section, though, reflecting a more pragmatic side to the organisation and a strong focus on social and welfare issues. Using the same format as the original demands of the Black Panther Party, the UCPA's ten stated aims included setting up nurseries, advice bureaux, cooperatives and study groups for black people and the vague goal of 'propagat[ing] solutions of our problems on an international level'.⁶⁴ Violence, revolution and the overthrow of capitalism were not mentioned in the UCPA's aims and objectives at all – unless one regarded as threatening the aim 'to provide protection ... to our people who suffer because of their colour, faith or unwarranted racial disturbances'.⁶⁵ Later statements by the UCPA did call for 'revolutionary socialism' in the 'Third World' but its domestic programme remained essentially reformist.⁶⁶

Although it was started in London, the UCPA aspired to create a national network of loosely federated branches. 'The UCPA was a community movement', remembers Ghose, 'We said don't be top heavy, don't be centralised, use our name, do something where you are'.⁶⁷ Its biggest branch outside London was in Moss Side, Manchester, which produced its own edition of the *Black Power Newsletter*. In keeping with its Black Power philosophy, white people were not allowed to join the UCPA, but Tony Soares was one of several Asian men who signed up. 'From the beginning', Soares recalls, 'it was very much an Afro-Asian

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁶ '[T]he basis of BLACK POWER of the Third World, therefore, must be ... REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM', UCPA, 'U.C.P.A. Black Power', undated, uncatalogued leaflet held at the IRR. Original typography.

⁶⁷ Ajoy Ghose, interviewed by the author, 20 August 2004.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power organisation'.⁶⁸ The front-page headline of the first edition of the *Black Power Newsletter* read, 'Indian Lynched in Wolverhampton' and included a notice asking, 'Africans, Asians, Caribbeans' to join a forthcoming protest.⁶⁹ A later leaflet entitled 'Black Power is Black Unity' defined black people as 'Africans, West Indian, Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, Arabs and all non-white peoples' and drew members' attention to a spate of attacks on Pakistani people in London as evidence of the need for unity.⁷⁰ Members also came from diverse economic backgrounds. '[T]hey were from all walks of life as far as UCPA was concerned', says Soares. 'There wasn't any particular class distinction or class consciousness.'⁷¹ It was eventually this lack of emphasis on class struggle that led the organisation's more Marxist-leaning elements, led by George Joseph and Communist Party member and former *West Indian Gazette* journalist Alrick (Ricky) Cambridge, to campaign to restructure and rename the organisation in the summer of 1970.

The UCPA's activities consisted of weekly discussion groups, 'work sessions' in which members were taught skills such as 'canvassing, duplicating, poster-making, anti-thug patrols etc.', film screenings, public meetings, demonstrations, door-to-door and street-corner canvassing and, from late 1969, the production of a newspaper, the *Black Power Newsletter*.⁷² Cultural activities included events such as 'Black Is Beautiful', a free night of 'soul music, poetry, films and recordings on black culture', held at Lambeth Town Hall, while the

⁶⁸ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

⁶⁹ *Black Power Newsletter*, 1969, p. 1. The story concerned the trial of eight white youths for the murder of an Indian man in Wolverhampton on 20 October 1968.

⁷⁰ UCPA, 'Black Power in Black Unity', undated, uncatalogued leaflet held at the IRR.

⁷¹ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

⁷² This followed on from the short-lived *Black Power Speaks*, which came out monthly between May and July 1968 and was edited by Egbuna. *Black Power Speaks* claimed to be the work of 'the UCPA editorial team' despite the fact that Egbuna had left to start the Black Panther Movement in April 1968. The details of the UCPA's 'work sessions' were advertised on back page of the first edition of *Black Power Speaks*.

Newsletter featured inspirational poems and satirical cartoons.⁷³ UCPA flyers show that the group mobilised its members to demonstrate in support of a wide variety of causes, from the republican movement in Northern Ireland to the Black Panther Party in California, and its newspaper charted the events of the Vietnam war and the progress of the African liberation movements, alongside reports on British and American Black Power activity.⁷⁴ It also involved itself in domestic politics in a more direct way by urging its members to vote tactically against Conservative candidates during the 1970 general election, on the basis that 'Labour is the lesser of two evils'.⁷⁵ The UCPA had not been in existence long when it achieved notoriety in the white press and firmly established its Black Power credentials by helping to create a majority of new members at a CARD meeting in November 1967 that subsequently voted out all the white committee members. *The Daily Telegraph* name-checked the UCPA in an article headlined 'Six quit executive of anti-racialist body: "Maoist take-over" fear' and *The Times* reported that the UCPA, 'an organisation standing openly for Black Power', had helped bring CARD to 'crisis point'.⁷⁶

The Black Unity and Freedom Party

The BUFP was formed from the remains of the UCPA at a conference on 26 July 1970 and former UCPA member George Joseph was elected its general secretary. Its two branch headquarters in London and Manchester remained at the same addresses as the former UCPA offices. Joseph explained the reasons why the

⁷³ UCPA flyer, February 1967, held in the Black Documents box at the IRR.

⁷⁴ See flyers, 'U.S. Fascism – "Law and Order"' and 'U.C.P.A. fully support the Irish people in their just struggle for self determination!', both undated, held in the Black Groups file at the IRR.

⁷⁵ See undated UCPA flyer, 'A message to black voters', held in the Black Groups file at the IRR.

⁷⁶ *The Sunday Telegraph*, 'Six quit executive of anti-racialist body: Maoist take-over fear', 4 December 1967, p. 9 and *The Times*, 'Threat to CARD from extremists', 7 November 1967, p. 11.

UCPA had become the BUFP in an August 1970 letter. 'We have decided that it is absolutely necessary to draw a line between ourselves and all the bourgeois and petit bourgeois elements floating around', he wrote. 'Our party takes Marxism-Leninism as the basis of its thinking. As black people we believe the people and the people alone make history'.⁷⁷ Like many Black Power organisations, the BUFP was particularly inspired by Chinese Communism and Chairman Mao. It was this that attracted Sivanandan to the organisation. 'I became a sort of unofficial member of the BUFP because, although my politics as a university student might have been Trotskyite, by the time I left I was more leaning towards the Chinese revolution', he recalls.⁷⁸ 'In the 1970s, BUFP described its ideology as Marxist-Leninist with Mao Tse Tung thought', explains former member Lester Lewis, 'The 6th Pan-African Congress was held in Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania in 1974 and the BUFP could have participated but it did not because it was not Pan-Africanist, it espoused Marxist-Leninist, Mao Tse Tung thought'.⁷⁹ Distancing itself from what it viewed as reactionary black nationalism, therefore, the BUFP placed class above racism as the primary source of oppression in society. The first two points of its manifesto made this explicitly clear. 'We recognise the class nature of this society', stated the first clause. 'We recognise the necessity for class struggle and the absolute necessity for the seizure of state power by the working-class and the bringing about of socialism' added the second.⁸⁰

There is no evidence that the BUFP accepted white members, however, despite the implicit acceptance in its manifesto that the black and white working classes would eventually have to unite to overthrow capitalist oppression. The

⁷⁷ Letter from BUFP general secretary George Joseph to IRR assistant librarian Hazel Waters, dated 17 August 1970. Contained in the Black Documents file at the IRR.

⁷⁸ A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

⁷⁹ Lester Lewis, interviewed by the author, 14 September 2004.

⁸⁰ 'Manifesto: long term programme' reprinted in *Black Voice*, August 1970, p. 4.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

UCPA had actively supported Irish Catholics in what it viewed as an anti-colonial struggle, so most members must, on some level, have already accepted that white people could also be oppressed by capitalist imperialism. The BUFP manifesto argued, however, that the white working classes had been duped by capitalism into seeing black people as their enemy, which made it difficult to work with them, even though they were black workers' natural allies. 'While we recognise the necessity to struggle against racism in general, it is essential to treat the contradiction between ourselves and the working-class as a contradiction among the people', explained the manifesto, 'whilst the contradiction between ourselves and the ruling class is a contradiction between the people and the enemy'.⁸¹ Nonetheless, in practice BUFP members only worked with white people at one remove. The BUFP's definition of black included Asians and it actively sought solidarity with groups like the Indian Workers' Association of Great Britain. 'The B. U. F. P. feels that at this moment in time of the Black presence in Britain', BUFP leader Roger Loftus explained in a letter to IWA (GB) general secretary Jagmohan Joshi, 'that groups such as ours should develop and maintain links with each other on the question of "Black Survival in Britain"'.⁸² That the BUFP felt it needed to formally propose a collaborative effort, however, could be interpreted as evidence of a growing gulf between West Indian and Asian activists at the start of the 1970s.

Despite its explicitly revolutionary Marxist-Leninist-Maoist outlook, the second half of the BUFP's manifesto was a list of eleven demands for government reforms. Eight dealt with issues specific to black people, among them a public

⁸¹ 'Manifesto: long term programme' reprinted in *Black Voice*, August 1970, p. 4.

⁸² Undated two-page letter from BUFP member Roger Loftus held in the IWA archive at Birmingham Central Library.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

enquiry into racism in the police, better treatment of black people by immigration officers, repeal of the 1968 Race Relations Act and scrapping the Race Relations Board, refunding national insurance contributions to black immigrants who moved back to their home countries, trial of black defendants by black juries and judges, the release of all black prisoners who had not been tried by their ethnic peers and more black history on the school curriculum. The other three demands were for full employment (specified, possibly mistakenly, for black people only), decent housing and 'bread, peace and social justice for all men'.⁸³

The BUFP's short-term aims, therefore, did not represent a radical break from those of the UCPA. Nor did its methods. Former UCPA members would have been quite familiar with the BUFP's discussion groups, demonstrations and pamphlet-producing activities and comfortable with new initiatives like summer schools for black children. 'We met regularly and we did a lot of campaigning. For example we did a campaign on the [1971] Immigration Act and we did various things with children – we used to have an annual Christmas party', recalls Lewis, 'We were also always involved in solidarity work with the African liberation movements at the time because Angola and Guiné were Portuguese colonies, Ian Smith had declared UDI and there was an armed struggle for national liberation there. South Africa was under apartheid, so we were active participants in the South African liberation movements'.⁸⁴ From August 1970, the BUFP also began publishing a newspaper, *Black Voice*, which replaced the *Black People's Newsletter*, and continued to be printed until at least the end of the 1980s.⁸⁵

⁸³ 'Black Unity and Freedom Party Manifesto', 26 July 1970, contained in the Black Groups file at the IRR.

⁸⁴ Lester Lewis, interviewed by the author, 14 September 2004.

⁸⁵ The IRR has issues of *Black Voice* stretching from 1970 to 1989.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

As befitted a revolutionary organisation, the BUFP strove to become more disciplined and implemented a strict hierarchy and rules of membership. 'The BUFP is an organisation of revolutionaries', stated a 1974 internal paper, 'which adheres to discipline and ... sees conclusively the necessity for various levels of leadership within its structure for the mere reasons of proficiency and efficiency'.⁸⁶ It also made an effort, at least on the surface, to pay more attention to the issue of sexism and the role of women in the movement. A Black Women's Action Committee was set up within the BUFP by female member Gerlin Bean and in 1971 it published a pamphlet called 'Black Women Speak Out', which gave a female perspective on racism and the workers' struggle.⁸⁷ *Black Voice* also regularly carried articles with titles like, 'Male Chauvinism is Counter Revolutionary' and 'The Role of Women in the Vietnamese People's Resistance'.⁸⁸ Although it afforded women space to express themselves politically, the BUFP's extremely strict ideological discipline made other members feel very constricted. 'I began to realise that the kind of Marxism that they had ... was another kind of religion, with the same strictures', Harry Goulbourne explains, 'They were extremely authoritarian, extremely intolerant and if, since then, I've described myself as a liberal it's something I say not lightly'.⁸⁹ Having helped set up the BUFP's South East Summer School in 1971, Goulbourne left the BUFP and embarked on a highly successful career in academia.

The BUFP continued to exist and publish an impressively professional-looking *Black Voice* well into the 1990s, but it had long stopped identifying itself with Black Power. *Black Voice* dropped the phrase 'Power To The People' from its

⁸⁶ BUFP, 'What is the B.U.F.P. [sic]', 3 May 1974, p. 40. Document held, unfiled, at the IRR.

⁸⁷ Black Women's Action Committee, 'Black Women Speak Out', 1971, p.11. Document held in the Black groups file at the IRR.

⁸⁸ See *Black Voice*, September 1971, p. 10 and August 1970, p. 6.

⁸⁹ Harry Goulbourne, interviewed by the author, 6 September 2004.

masthead at the start of 1973 and its reporting on the Spaghetti House Siege in 1975 referred only to the 'Black movement' or 'Black struggle' and described the BLF, BUFP, Fasimbas and various other groups simply as 'Black organisations and black community workers'.⁹⁰ Even an article commemorating the death of American Black Panther Party leader Huey P. Newton, published in 1989, made no reference to Black Power, framing the BPP's work in terms of the anti-imperialist struggle and describing Newton as the leader of a 'revolutionary Black Movement'.⁹¹ From the early 1970s onwards, therefore, Black Power became a banner the BUFP no longer wished to wave. Following its own identification, from 1973 onwards the BUFP should be considered as a radical black workers and community organisation.

The Black Panther Movement

The Black Panther Movement was founded by Obi Egbuna in Notting Hill in April 1968. Inspired by the American Black Panther Party, with which it corresponded, the British Black Panther Movement was an independent organisation. Unlike its American namesake, the British Black Panthers were extremely publicity-shy: of the four major Black Power organisations in London they kept the fewest written records and were the most suspicious of outsiders. The BPM's origins were humble. 'We began the Panthers with only three or four members', Egbuna wrote in 1971.⁹² Although responsible for its creation, Egbuna was not active in the BPM for long. In July 1968 he was arrested for publishing a pamphlet titled, 'What

⁹⁰ The last time 'Power to the People' appeared on a *Black Voice* masthead was volume 4, number 1, which one can deduce from the subjects of the articles, was published at the start of 1973. See also, 'The truth about the Spaghetti House Siege', *Black Voice* 5:3 (1975), back page.

⁹¹ 'We Pay Tribute to Huey P. Newton', *Black Voice* 20:3 (1989), pp. 1, 8.

⁹² Egbuna, *Destroy*, p. 21.

to do if cops lay their hands on a Black man at the Speaker's Corner'.⁹³ Held on remand for five months, Egbuna was convicted on 10 December under the Offences Against The Person Act of 1861 and sentenced to a year in gaol, suspended for three years. Cowed by the conditions of his sentence, which prevented him from engaging in radical political activity, Egbuna curtailed his career as a Black Power activist at the end of 1968. Althea Lecointe, a Trinidadian postgraduate student, became the Panthers' new leader. After Egbuna's departure the organisational centre of the BPM moved from Portobello Road in Notting Hill to Shakespeare Road in Brixton and separate branches were started in Acton and Finsbury Park. Being rooted in the middle of a poor black community like Brixton was an important source of strength and inspiration to an organisation that had a high number of middle-class, well-educated members, but prided itself on being of the people.

To join the BPM one had first to prove one's commitment to the organisation and its aims, as Brixton teenager Linton Kwesi Johnson discovered. 'In those days you couldn't become a Black Panther just like that', he recalls. 'You had to join the youth league and show that you were serious and be involved in the organisational activities and then someone would nominate you for membership'.⁹⁴ The youth league was the bottom tier of a rigidly hierarchical structure, which rose upward through members and senior members to the central committee, which formulated policy and kept ideological and behavioural discipline. The dedication required to become a Black Panther meant that the actual membership remained small. Tony Soares estimates that in 1970 the Finsbury Park branch had just twenty

⁹³ See Metropolitan Police file MEPO/11409: 'Benedict Obi Egbuna, Peter Martin and Gideon Ketueni T. Dolo charged with uttering and writing threats to kill police officers at Hyde Park, W2', held at the National Archive (NA).

⁹⁴ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

members.⁹⁵ Johnson's estimate of the size of the Brixton branch's membership is similarly conservative. 'We weren't a large organisation,' he recalls. 'I'd say that at our peak we'd probably be about fifty people in the South London branch, but we could mobilise hundreds.'⁹⁶ An outsider could, therefore, misjudge the Panthers' numerical strength. A 1968 Metropolitan Police report that estimated the number of British Black Panthers at more than 800 cannot have differentiated between members and supporters.⁹⁷

Although the BPM was predominantly West Indian, it also had African and several prominent Asian members. Cambridge University graduate Faroukh Dhondy was a member of the Brixton branch and Tony Soares joined the North London branch in 1970. Brixton branch member Darcus Howe, CLR James's nephew from Trinidad, thought that the BPM's Asian members came from a higher social class than most of the West Indian teenagers who signed up. 'The Asians who came in were young intellectuals,' he said. '[W]hereas one had rank and file West Indians in it, one did not have rank and file Asians.'⁹⁸ (Howe was equally far from being a 'rank and file West Indian', however, having been educated at Trinidad's most prestigious school.) Linton Kwesi Johnson remembers several African students being members of the Brixton branch of the BPM until they were deported following an altercation with the police. The BPM was prepared to accept support from radical white organisations and publicly proclaimed solidarity with the struggle of Irish republicans against British occupation and striking British miners, but white people were not allowed to join, or come to meetings, as BUFP member Harry Goulbourne inadvertently found out. 'I recall ... going to a Black

⁹⁵ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

⁹⁶ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

⁹⁷ See MEPO2/11409, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Transcript of an unpublished interview with Anne Walmsley, 16 January 1986, p. 4. The document is part of the CAM papers held at the GPI.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

Panther meeting at Shakespeare Road in Brixton with a girlfriend at the time who was Persian', he says, 'and after a while I was beckoned to a dark room and asked what did I think I was doing bringing this white woman to a meeting? I said this person is from Persia and she might look white but I don't think she sees herself as that'.⁹⁹

Women were only a small minority of the membership, but the BPM was the only Black Power organisation to have a female leader. Sexism was regarded as equivalent to racism and not treating black sisters with the requisite respect was an offence the central committee took very seriously. 'Althea [Lecointe] wasn't backward in coming forward in ... opening a discussion on what she felt was disrespectful behaviour on your part', remembers Brixton branch member Tony Sinclair.¹⁰⁰ The BPM's militant stance against sexism was typical of an organisation that took a holistic approach to activism. Being a Black Panther was a way of life rather than a political affiliation. Members underwent rigorous ideological training and were supposed to adhere to a strict moral code. According to former member Tony Sinclair, Panthers were not supposed to take drugs or be unfaithful. They probably didn't have time to anyway: the back page of each *Black People's News Service* featured a column, 'What we do in practice', that made for exhausting reading:

1. Working among black people in the community, going from door to door, on the streets and in the market as a means of exchanging information ...
2. Holding weekly studies and discussion on the history of black people.
3. Holding weekly classes on political education in order to have a better understanding of the racist capitalist system that oppresses us...
4. Cultural activities
- 5 (a) attending courts in order to identify ourselves with any black person appearing for trial ... (b) providing any possible assistance needed in the

⁹⁹ Harry Goulbourne, interviewed by the author, 6 September 2004.

¹⁰⁰ Tony Sinclair, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

legal defence of black people (c) Keeping contact with black people in prison¹⁰¹

...
Another five headings went on to describe the Panthers' work with children, public meetings, production of the *Black People's News Service* (and later *Black Life* and *Freedom News*), book groups and library services.

During its early years the BPM was the most active of the Black Power groups in promoting black culture. 'The Black Panther Movement believes that it is only by getting to know ourselves and our history that we will be able to effectively fight to liberate ourselves', proclaimed a BPM leaflet in September 1969.¹⁰² Linton Kwesi Johnson agreed. 'Culture was important' he explains. 'It was part of our ideology that culture and politics worked together hand in glove in a culture of resistance'.¹⁰³ The BPM hosted regular plays, poetry readings, concerts and other cultural events that often attracted audiences of several hundred people. Police notes on a raid of a Black Panther carnival at the Oval House in South London on 31 August 1970, for example, record that 400 people were present.¹⁰⁴ Cultural events were also held at the BPM's two Black People's Information Centres at 38 Shakespeare Road, Brixton and (until 1971) 54 Wightman Road, Finsbury Park. Black Panthers toured youth clubs and arts centres lecturing black teenagers about their history and Linton Kwesi Johnson ran cultural workshops for the Black Panther youth league.¹⁰⁵ Female Panthers wore their hair in a natural, Afro style which, even in the late 1960s, was a bold and unusual statement of black cultural pride. In spite of all this, the BPM was never a cultural nationalist organisation. 'We were very much opposed to the ideology of cultural nationalism

¹⁰¹ 'What we do in practice', *Black People's News Service*, March 1970, p. 8.

¹⁰² BPM, 'Black People Get To Know Yourself!! [sic]', September 1969. Contained in the Black Documents file at the IRR.

¹⁰³ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

¹⁰⁴ See DPP2/4890: 'Rupert James Frank, Leonard Anderson, Edmund Lecointe and Keith Spencer (Black Panther Movement members) riot and incitement on August 31, 1970 in SE11. Convicted'.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson went on to become a successful poet, reggae musician and record company owner.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

that was being expounded by certain sections of the black movement in America', Linton Kwesi Johnson recalls. 'We were opposed to Ron Karenga and Kwanzaa and all of that.'¹⁰⁶

The BPM's political ideology became increasingly rigid during the organisation's lifespan. The BPM had always believed that racial equality was not possible under a capitalist imperialist system and instructed its members not to bother participating in electoral politics.¹⁰⁷ This conclusion was initially justified on the grounds of the British government's failure to protect black people from police harassment and discrimination in education, housing, employment and immigration. The BPM's original statement of aims, 'What We Want', noted these failings and concluded, almost reluctantly, that '[W]e have no alternative but to reject the entire capitalist establishment of Britain'.¹⁰⁸ By the 1970s, the same conclusion no longer needed to be justified because it was a theoretical imperative of the Marxism-Leninist line to which the group adhered. For the Panthers, class revolution became the only accepted solution to the problem of racial discrimination, bringing it closer to the position of the BUFP.

The internal organisation and discipline of the BPM, always strict, became intolerable in the opinion of many members, as Trotskyite politics took hold and the movement became ideologically inflexible. Darcus Howe described the central committee as 'Stalinist type. It was built on the same structure as the Bolshevik Party, it was a kind of vanguard party organisation'.¹⁰⁹ Tony Soares believes the organisation had been completely taken over by the far left by 1970. '[T]he BPM

¹⁰⁶ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interview with the author, 17 September 2004. Kwanzaa is an invented African American festival celebrated between 26 December and January 1.

¹⁰⁷ See BPM flyer 'Black People Don't Vote: organise against exploitation and British institutional racism', June 1970, held in the Black Groups file at the IRR.

¹⁰⁸ BPM, 'What We Want', undated document held in the Black Groups file at the IRR.

¹⁰⁹ Transcript of an unpublished interview with Anne Walmsley on 16 January 1986, p. 4. The transcript is part of the CAM papers held at the GPI.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

was ... being increasingly controlled by the Marxist elements: black Trotskyites, Socialist Labour League, the International Marxist Group', he remembers. 'They had come in and were basically running the show and the people were not comfortable with that'.¹¹⁰ Soares, along with all the other members of the North and West London branches, left the BPM in protest in 1970 after the central committee suspended four members of the North London branch because of an ideological disagreement. In June 1973, the BPM changed its name to the Black Workers' Movement to reflect its changed ideological position, but the defection of so many members and the accusation of being in thrall to white Marxist organisations had taken the Movement far from its Black Power roots. Arrested on a Sus charge in November 1972, Linton Kwesi Johnson looked to former Panther Darcus Howe and the charity Release for help defending his case because, as he recalls, 'The Black Panthers had more or less ceased around the same time'.

I think like all movements, historically, there is a need; an organisation comes along to fulfil that need and, once certain things have been put in place, that organisation ceases to function, it has done its work and it is time to move on to another stage ... And we'd moved on from the ideology of Black Power to a more black working class ideology.¹¹¹

The Black Liberation Front

The Black Liberation Front was founded at the start of 1971 by the former members of the North and West London branches of the Black Panther Movement. Its headquarters were at 54 Wightman Road, formerly the BPM's North London branch address. The BLF maintained close links with the Black Panther Party in the United States and was organised on the same lines, with separate divisions for areas such as self-defence, propaganda and youth. Having split from the BPM

¹¹⁰ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

¹¹¹ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

because of its increasingly rigid Marxism-Leninism, the BLF took its political lead from Mao Tse Tung and Chinese Communism. Eschewing hierarchy and dismissing 'Orthodox Marxism' as 'irrelevant to the Black struggle', because it was 'drawn exclusively from Western proletarian experience', the BLF argued that 'Real communism represents a way of life that was already in existence in parts of Africa and Asia before the coming of the white man'.¹¹² Identifying closely with Africa, BLF members attended the 6th Pan African Congress in Dar-es-Salaam in 1974 and a 1975 issue of *Grass Roots* announced that the BLF was a member of the Pan African Committee (U.K.) and that it 'work[ed] closely with the liberation movements of Southern Africa'.¹¹³

The BLF represented the more cultural-nationalist vein of Black Power thought. Tony Soares remembers that 'There was a great deal of sympathy with Ron Karenga's type of cultural nationalism, though no great links'.¹¹⁴ The BLF's cultural nationalism also sprang from a grave disillusionment with white society at all levels. This was a result of the widening racial polarisation in British society, exacerbated at the time of the BLF's foundation by the passage of the 1971 Immigration Act, which convinced many black people in Britain, not just BLF members, that they were being victimised by a racist state. Therefore, although the BLF continued to make similar demands for domestic reform as the UCPA, BUFP and BPM, its tone was more urgent, confrontational and occasionally even apocalyptic. Describing Britain as a 'fascist lunatic asylum', one BLF leaflet explained that white Britons '[D]on't mince words any more. They are giving it to

¹¹² BLF, 'Revolutionary Black Nationalism: a paper for discussion', 1971, p. 7.

¹¹³ 'B. L. F. Projects', *Grass Roots* 4:1 (1975), p. 15.

¹¹⁴ Tony Soares, e-mail to author, 26 March 2005.

us straight. They hate us because we are black and they are gunning for us'.¹¹⁵ The BLF welcomed Asian members but, unlike the BPM and BUFP, saw no benefit in collaborating with radical white groups. Neither did it count among its goals a socialist revolution in Britain. 'As a small minority in Britain, we cannot claim we will liberate the country or change its system. That is something the native working class must do for itself', announced an editorial in *Grass Roots*, '[Our] sole concern is survival for Black people in Britain and socialism in their homelands'.¹¹⁶

This separatist perspective meant that the BLF focused entirely on organising within the black community and withdrew from activities, such as demonstrations, that were intended to provoke a response from the white community. It also attracted a different demographic. 'The BLF at the time attracted the younger, more black nationalist, more black conscious youths', remembers Soares, 'The Marxist organisations, like the BPM, were into heavy Marxism and that had very little appeal to ordinary young black people – they didn't want to know about Trotsky or whatever'.¹¹⁷ Youth work was given particular prominence by the organisation. Boosting black children's knowledge of their own culture and history was the major focus of the BLF's youth wing, the Black Berets, which was non-political and had approximately 300 members by mid-1971, according to Tony Soares. The Black Berets, and later also the Makonde Youth Club, met as many as three times a week to play sports, do drama, watch films, learn karate and even go to discos. On Sunday mornings, until the end of

¹¹⁵ Undated BLF leaflet from Tony Soares' private collection.

¹¹⁶ 'Editorial', *Grass Roots* 1:2 (7 July 1971), p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

1972, the BLF's North London headquarters was also home to the independently-run Headstart supplementary school.

Discussions for adult BLF members were held on Sunday evenings, where the perennial issues of black identity, culture versus politics, and race struggle versus class struggle were hotly debated. On Friday nights a two-hour drop-in advice service for local black people was provided. Three community bookshops were also started by the BLF – two Grass Roots Storefronts, at 54 Wightman Road and from December 1972 on Golborne Road in Notting Hill, and a Headstart Bookshop in West London.¹¹⁸ A list of BLF activities from a 1974 *Grass Roots* also lists the 'Ujima Housing Association', providing affordable housing to black families and a 'Prisoner's Welfare Committee' which corresponded with and visited black prisoners.¹¹⁹

Outside of the black community the BLF was best known for its newspaper *Grass Roots*, which was edited by a variety of different people including Tony Soares and Ansel Wong. Started in mid-1971, by its third issue, *Grass Roots* was being distributed in Bristol, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Bradford, Liverpool, Hull, Sheffield and London.¹²⁰ Its fourth issue, circulated in September 1971, contained a reproduction of a page from the American Black Panther Party newspaper, which featured instructions on how to make a Molotov cocktail. Although *The Black Panther*, from which the 'recipe' was taken, was legally available in radical book shops and even some libraries, in March 1972 the BLF's Tony Soares was charged with attempted incitement to arson; bomb-making; possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life and murder of persons

¹¹⁸ Information from interviews and email correspondence with Tony Soares.

¹¹⁹ See 'BLF activities', *Grass Roots* 3:3 (May 1974), p. 2. Ujima was still in existence in the 21st century.

¹²⁰ Information on the national distribution of *Grass Roots* provided by Tony Soares.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

unknown – all of which were potentially punishable by life imprisonment. In response to what looked suspiciously like victimisation of their organisation, the BLF set up a Grass Roots Defence Campaign which brought it a great deal of publicity and sympathy both within the black community and from outside. The BLF was seriously disrupted, however, by the loss of one of its most active members. Tony Soares had already spent over a year in prison in the 1960s because of his anti-Vietnam war protest activities. Fearing a further spell in gaol, he left Britain in early 1972 and spent several weeks in Algeria as a guest of American Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver, before boredom compelled him to return. Arrested while signing on in West London, shortly after his return, Soares spent four months on remand in Brixton prison, before being granted bail in July 1972. He devoted the rest of the year to preparing the defence for his trial at the Old Bailey, which started on 20 February 1973 and is discussed in detail in chapter four.

The Black Liberation Front hit the headlines again, in October 1975, when three young black men claiming to be part of the Black Liberation Army, a supposed adjunct of the BLF, attempted to rob the Spaghetti House restaurant in Knightsbridge and ended up taking eight members of its staff hostage for five days. As the BLF had no official membership procedure it was impossible to prove or disprove their claim, but the organisation issued a statement of support.¹²¹ The BLF continued to champion the cause of Black Power in *Grass Roots*, and the organisation's black self-confessed black nationalism and emphasis on African culture meant that it continued to promote a Black Power cultural agenda. Issues of *Grass Roots* from 1976, however, reveal an organisation which, although still true

¹²¹ The untitled, undated BLF press release is held in the Spaghetti House siege file at the IRR. The Spaghetti House siege is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

to Black Power, was increasingly paranoid and shrill. The September/October edition carried the front page banner, 'Death camps for blacks', referring to government camps in South Africa, while inside lurid stories such as 'Holloway lesbians assault 15 Year old', and 'TINS OF Baby KILLER' made headlines such as 'Cricklewood to Leeds: the Cross-Country legal conspiracy', seem positively sensible by comparison.¹²² Content to run with the Black Power baton long after other organisations had dropped it, the BLF found itself preaching to an increasingly circumscribed coterie of the converted.

Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS)

RAAS was accorded a significance during its six-year lifespan that was out of all proportion to its tiny membership and limited organisational achievements. It was founded in 1965 by Trinidadian immigrant Michael de Freitas, who was inspired to start his own organisation after hearing Malcolm X speak at the London School of Economics on 11 February 1965.¹²³ A charismatic and intelligent but menacing and unpredictable man, who had worked as an enforcer for slum landlord Peter Rachman, de Freitas had been present during the Notting Hill riots of 1958 and had joined various of the short-lived campaigning immigrant organisations set up in its wake, before starting RAAS. In May 1965, RAAS launched its first campaign, supporting the striking Asian and West Indian workers at the Courtaulds Red Scar mill near Preston. The strike lasted from 24 May to 12 June and Michael X (as de

¹²² *Grass Roots*, September/October 1976, pp. 1, 2, 4.

¹²³ Michael X claims in his autobiography to have spent four days with Malcolm X in February 1965. See M. Malik, *From Michael de Freitas to Michael X* (London, 1968), p. 148. Investigative reporters Derek Humphry and David Tindall wrote in their biography of de Freitas that he met Malcolm X at Africa House the day before the LSE speech and that Malcolm visited him at home the following evening. See *False Messiah: The Story of Michael X* (London, 1977), p. 48. Both accounts are contested, however, by Jan Carew in *Ghosts In Our Blood: With Malcolm X in Africa, England and the Caribbean* (Chicago, 1994), p. 106, who maintains that Malcolm X and Michael de Freitas did not meet at all.

Freitas was by then known), Roy Sawh and fellow founding member Abdullah Patel spent two weeks in Preston speaking at strikers' meetings and raising funds. RAAS gained a great deal of publicity in the process, but Michael X's firebrand speeches about racial exploitation played into the hands of a management that was trying to dismiss its workers' economic grievances as racially-motivated. 'Both [Sawh and Michael X] spoke consistently in racial terms about the black man's burden and the white exploiter', noted a report for *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter*. 'They were respected by strikers for their interest and wish to help but their views, in general, did not impress'.¹²⁴ Michael X remembered the incident somewhat differently in his autobiography, claiming that RAAS's support of the strike had resulted in it receiving 400 new membership applications per week.¹²⁵ Both Patel and Sawh left the organisation shortly after the Courtaulds strike, however, the former referring pejoratively to Michael X as 'a myth' in a subsequent newspaper article.¹²⁶

Michael X explicitly cultivated comparisons with Malcolm X, but the two shared very few qualities. 'The only thing that Michael had in common with Malcolm', wrote Jan Carew, a former associate of both, 'was that they had both begun as outlaws in their respective societies, but here the comparison has to end abruptly'.¹²⁷ Certainly, if Michael X was a disciple of Malcolm X, he was not a very good one. Michael made no distinction, for example, between Malcolm's independent pan-African, multiracial political programme and his earlier black nationalist, politically conservative views while in the Nation of Islam. Michael X was more interested in the image of Malcolm X than the substance of his politics,

¹²⁴ P. Foot, 'The strike at Courtauld's, Preston', *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* supplement (July 1965), p. 1.

¹²⁵ Malik, *Michael*, p. 153.

¹²⁶ D. Knox, 'Britain's Black Powerhouse: Michael X', *Life*, 16 October 1967, p. 17.

¹²⁷ Carew, *Ghosts*, p. 99.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

though, because his own political commitment was skin deep. 'Michael never believed in any of the things he was saying', asserts another former contemporary.¹²⁸ In spite of Malcolm X's profound criticisms of the Nation of Islam, as well as his belief that the organisation was trying to have him killed, Michael X wrote to the Nation's leader Elijah Muhammad after Malcolm's death in February 1965 asking to join the organisation. Michael X may well have become a member of the Nation of Islam, and was often described in the press as the leader of the British Black Muslims (the colloquial name for the Nation of Islam), but there is no evidence that there were any other British members for him to lead. He did, however, meet Nation of Islam members Herbert X and Muhammad Ali in Stockholm at the request of Elijah Muhammad and chaperoned Muhammad Ali when he came to Britain to fight Henry Cooper in May 1966.¹²⁹

By the time of Stokely Carmichael's visit in July 1967, RAAS had long been little more than a media vehicle for Michael X and he was regarded by many of his non-white contemporaries as, in Linton Kwesi Johnson's words, 'a charlatan'.¹³⁰ Michael X's reputation in the black community was significantly resuscitated in September 1967, however, when he became the first non-white person to be tried for inciting racial hatred because of a fiery speech he had given in Reading on 24 July 1967.¹³¹ Convicted on 9 November 1967, he served eight months of a one-year prison sentence and was released in July 1968 to a martyr's welcome. For a year after his release Michael X held the position of Minister of Defence for a small London-based cadre of Black Panther-style activists called The

¹²⁸ A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

¹²⁹ Information on Malik's relationship with the Nation of Islam taken from Humphry and Tindall, *False Messiah*, pp. 54–6.

¹³⁰ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

¹³¹ Michael X's Reading speech and the trial that followed are discussed in detail in chapter four.

Black Eagles, led by 'Prime Minister' Darcus Awusu.¹³² At the start of 1969, with the financial backing of white publishing heir Nigel Samuel, RAAS bought the buildings at 95–101 Holloway Road in order to turn them into a cultural centre, shopping complex and hostel called The Black House.

Conceptualised as a project run by and for the black community, The Black House attracted many committed people who took its principles of self-help and self-determination to heart. It also served a useful function as a meeting place and organising space for local black groups. Even providing the most basic place to stay was an essential service for many black youths and a stream of people lived at The Black House, swapping their labour for food and a place to sleep. Brother Herman (Edwards), an Antiguan builder who lived, worked and taught at The Black House for two years, saw its value not only in terms of the practical help it offered to the hundreds of homeless black teenagers he said stayed there, but also in psychological terms as, 'One of the first times we built something for black people in England'.¹³³ Former Black House Information Officer Vince Hines agreed. 'The Black House was the pioneer to Black self-help in social and welfare work in Britain', he wrote in 1997.¹³⁴ Although the Black House project and particularly Michael X's leadership of it was, at best, deeply flawed, it provided an important source of inspiration to other, more committed people. After leaving the Black House, Brother Herman started Harambee in Islington, which attempted to provide accommodation, training and employment for wayward black youths. Vince Hines founded a homeless refuge and rehabilitation centre called The

¹³² Darcus Awusu is now better known as Darcus Howe.

¹³³ Brother Herman quoted in W. Wood, 'Brother Herman: tribute to a founder of black self-help in Britain', *Race & Class* 37:4 (1996), p. 73.

¹³⁴ V. Hines, *How Black People Overcame Fifty Years of Repression in Britain, 1945–1995 (Volume one: 1945–1975)* (London, 1997), p. 187.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

Dashiki Council and Ashton Gibson, The Black House's 'Industrial Officer', started a cultural centre called The Melting Pot Foundation.¹³⁵

The Black House's work with disaffected youth brought it praise and donations from people and organisations that would otherwise have avoided association with a Black Power organisation. CND founder Cannon Collins, anti-apartheid campaigner Bishop Trevor Huddleston and the World Council of Churches all donated funds to the project and praised its work.¹³⁶ It soon became clear, however, that The Black House's public profile and financial backing were not being reflected in its progress. The project had received a great deal of funding from rich, sympathetic donors like Sammy Davis Jr, Muhammad Ali and John Lennon, but photographs contained in the report of a police investigation into a fire at the building in January 1970 showed that it was nowhere near ready to be used as a supermarket and provided only the most rudimentary accommodation. The report concluded that the fire had been the result of arson, possibly to cover up the lack of building progress.¹³⁷ The project was further derailed when Michael X and seven other RAAS members were arrested during a police raid on The Black House on 17 April 1970, following allegations of robbery and assault by businessman Mervin Brown.¹³⁸ At the end of November 1970 Michael X resigned from RAAS and on 2 February 1971 moved to Trinidad to avoid facing trial for the charges relating to his April 1970 arrest. A letter from the Foreign and

¹³⁵ A newspaper cutting on the foundation of the Melting Pot foundation and the annual reports of the Dashiki Council are held in the Black Groups file at the IRR.

¹³⁶ Tindall and Humphry, *False Messiah*, p. 85.

¹³⁷ See MEPO 28/4: 'The "Black House", headquarters of the Racial Adjustment Awareness Society, at 95-101 Holloway Road, N7: damage caused by fire on 15 January 1970. Unsubstantiated allegations made by Malik, MA, alias Michael X, against the police and fire brigade', held at the NA.

¹³⁸ See MEPO 31/4: 'Malik, MA, alias Michael X, of the Racial Adjustment Action Society: complaints of intimidation, victimisation and harassment by police following a raid on the Society's headquarters, the "Black House", 95-101 Holloway Road, N7 on 17 April 1970. Malik and others arrested for robbery and blackmail 1970-1971', held at the NA.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

Commonwealth Office to the British High Commissioner in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, dated 30 July 1971, explained that the British government was more than happy not to seek an extradition order for his return.¹³⁹ Trinidad did not prove to be a safe haven for Michael X for long though. In 1972 he was convicted of the murders of two of his followers, Gale Benson and Joseph Skerritt, crimes for which he was hanged in May 1975.

Conclusion

British society polarised sharply over the issue of race during the second half of the 1960s. Racial discrimination became enshrined in law in the form of the Commonwealth Immigrants (Kenyan Asians) Act, which created a second class of (non-white) British citizens, while Enoch Powell's inflammatory populist racism dominated the media's coverage of British race relations. Powell's speeches gave succour to far-right organisations such as the newly formed National Front, and brought the views of the far right into the frame of respectable debate on immigration. During the same period, the British media and politicians were uneasily observing events in Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Detroit, and other major cities in the United States that were being set aflame by their African American residents in retaliation for years of discrimination and neglect. The question on both the Home Secretary and the editor of *The Times's* lips was could it happen here?

The disillusionment black people felt after the Labour Party abandoned its opposition to immigration control in 1964 gave a militant minority the impetus to organise their own radical political organisations. The ineffectiveness of the 1965

¹³⁹ See FCO 63/613: 'Black Power movement in Caribbean', held at the NA.

Chapter 2: 'In the belly of the beast': from black disillusionment to Black Power

Race Relations Act discredited the liberal politics and lobbyist methods of Britain's only national civil rights organisation, the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), as well as statutory bodies like the National Council for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI). Inspired and encouraged by the advent of the black nationalist phase of the African American freedom struggle, Britain's Black Power activists also built on previous generations of black immigrants' struggles against colonialism and for an inclusive political unity among non-white people in Britain. As CLR James enthusiastically noted, Black Power was just the cutting edge of over a hundred years of black political and intellectual insurgency.

Britain's first Black Power group was founded in London in June 1967, but it was the visit of American Black Power doyen Stokely Carmichael to London the following month which gave the fledgling movement a great boost. This was partly because of his inspirational speaking and partly because of the media and government's attention-generating reactions to his words. The intense media coverage of Carmichael's controversial speeches carried his message to a much wider, national audience. An inspirational speaker, Carmichael was venerated by Britain's Black Power advocates and by the end of the decade most cities with substantial black populations had their own Black Power organisation. By far the largest and most important groups were based in London, however, just as were the largest communities of black immigrants. These London groups – the Universal Coloured People's Association, the Black Panther Movement, the Black Unity and Freedom Party and the Black Liberation Front – could probably claim no more than a thousand members between them and were riven by political disagreements, but nevertheless had a substantial impact on race relations in Britain. This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

Introduction

Black Power passed over Britain like a comet: an intense burst of fiery energy followed by a diminishing trail of fragments and activity. Of the four self-professed Black Power groups in London used as case studies in the previous chapter, all were set up between 1967 and 1971. Although two of the four continued to exist in some form into the 1990s, of the others, one had dissolved in 1970 and the other had moved away from Black Power by mid-1973.¹ It would be misleading, however, to assess the importance of Black Power solely in terms of the size and longevity of its political organisations. 'Actual membership of the whole movement may be small', commented a journalist from *The Times* in 1968, 'but the appeal of what these black politicians preach is astonishingly wide'.² A movement can be politically marginal but still have an important impact on the wider society. This was the case with the Black Power movement in Britain.

In the nine years between 1967 and 1976 Black Power went through three roughly distinct phases. The first of these, which stretched from the foundation of the Universal Coloured People's Association (UCPA) in June 1967 to about the end of 1968, was the period of the greatest polarisation in British race relations. Black Power was interpreted by the white press, but also by many black people, as a political and psychological counterbalance to the dramatic anti-immigration speeches of Enoch Powell and the increased activity of the National Front. The

¹ Harry Goulbourne reports that the BUFP was still meeting in the early 1990s – H. Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience* (London, 2002), p. 80. The IRR holds copies of the BLF's journal *Grass Roots* dating up to 1988.

² S. Clarke, P. Evans, M. Knipe, G. Lloyd, D. Van der Vat and W. Norris, *The Black Man in Search of Power* (London, 1968), p. 147.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

second phase, which lasted until about 1972, represented a period of greater political sophistication, activity and support. This was the period during which Black Power reached its critical mass and achieved its greatest successes: its high water mark was, perhaps, the Mangrove Nine trial of October to December 1971. Thereafter, the movement began to fragment and decline in political influence and public profile, although groups continued to exist and undertake valuable work in their communities. A victim of its own success, as well as of myriad failures, and the actions of a hostile state, Black Power became a political slogan that still had resonance but also an increasing air of belonging to a bygone era. 'In 1976 ... after a two year absence from Britain, I came back to London and the whole black scene appeared to be in turmoil', wrote Roy Sawh, 'The impact "Black Power" had made on British society appeared to have been curtailed, if not manipulated by the establishment'.³ However, Black Power's message that 'Black is beautiful' had soaked into the collective psyche of, at least, African and West Indian people in Britain: culturally Black Power had achieved what it had set out to. Politically, it was divided by an acrimonious debate between, on the one hand, 'heavy socialism' (to use Colin Prescod's phrase), which subsumed the black struggle under the class struggle, and, on the other, cultural nationalism, which rallied black people in terms of their relationship to the Third World, especially Africa, and rejected white society.

The Black Power movement achieved a number of things during all three phases and beyond. Politically, it did not engage many ordinary black people directly, but the challenge it made to the liberal orthodoxies of integration and moderation led many of them to re-examine the aims and tactics of the

³ R. Sawh, *From Where I Stand* (London, 1987), p. 13.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

organisations of which they were members, or even to start new, militant ones of their own. Groups like the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) and the West Indian Standing Conference (WISC) were either taken over, as in the former case, or significantly influenced, as in the latter, by advocates of Black Power. By April 1968, for example, WISC, which had been set up as a social and welfare organisation by the High Commission of the West Indian Federation ten years earlier, was one of the founding organisations of the militant, socialist Black Peoples' Alliance (BPA). Black Power's political influence did not stop at the black community. Its propagation of a culture where black was beautiful and its contention that the problem affecting British race relations was white racism rather than black immigration contributed significantly to the radicalisation of the race relations industry. Its threats of revolt and vociferous highlighting of the injustices and inequalities facing black people in Britain combined with other factors to persuade the government to introduce a programme of urban aid for inner city areas with high concentrations of black immigrants in 1968 and to pass its first effective Race Relations Act in 1976.

The need for militant black community organising was a central plank of Black Power philosophy and the practice of community self-help proliferated long after the political groups had folded or retreated into the background. Black Power groups set up nurseries, youth centres, law centres, advice bureaux, hostels for the homeless and numerous educational projects. Supplementary education was one of the highest priorities for Black Power groups, reflecting the importance placed on it by the wider black community. Furthermore, the supplementary education movement, which continues to thrive today, was the main area where the Black Power tenets of cultural self-determination and self-education could be practically

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

applied to benefit the whole black community. Direct participation in Black Power groups had an enormously beneficial personal impact on members, as former activists readily attest. Black Power organisations tended to attract highly motivated, creative, intelligent, public-spirited people and imbued in them a great self-discipline and a thirst for knowledge. Many of them later used their experiences in the movement to fuel successful careers in both the private sector and public service.

The years in which the Black Power movement developed also witnessed a growing militancy in Britain's black communities. It would be misleading to suggest that Black Power was the main cause of this radicalisation, but it served to dramatise and publicise the most important issues affecting Britain's black communities. In inner-city areas like Notting Hill and Brixton in London, where the relationship between young black men and the police was most intense and volatile, local Black Power groups helped give black people the confidence to stand as a community against police harassment and also provided individuals with legal advice and practical support when they were arrested and put on trial. Immigration, education and policing were the three major areas that mobilised widespread black political activity between 1967 and 1976. In 1971, an Immigration Act was passed that introduced the concept of patriality – that the right to live in Britain was only available to British passport holders with a British-born parent or grandparent. Those, mostly black people, who could not trace an immediate bloodline back to the country were treated as second class citizens, subject to immigration control. In the same year, the publication of a book called *How The West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain* brought

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

national attention to the structural racism in the British education system.⁴ Also, by 1971, Britain's newspapers were full of alarmist reports of the crime-wave of 'muggings' in London, responsibility for which was laid at the door of the West Indian community, giving the Metropolitan Police an excuse to increase its use of the 'Sus' law to harass and arrest young black males simply for looking as if they might be about to commit a crime.⁵ Furthermore, the increasing activity and boldness of far right groups like the National Front and the continued public prominence of the intemperate pronouncements of MP Enoch Powell persuaded many formerly reticent black people that if they did not stand up soon for their right to live in Britain without fear of physical attack, discrimination or deportation, they might lose it in the future. In this context, by making an extreme critique of British society, Black Power activists enabled other black people to get involved in more moderate political organisations without feeling that they were standing on the frontline.

Numerous external pressures militated against the survival of Black Power, not least the state's highly effective campaign of surveillance, arrest and prosecution of Black Power activists.⁶ Black Power groups were quite capable of imploding on their own, however, and the second half of this chapter looks at the internal factors that contributed to the demise of organised Black Power politics. The problems that beset the movement changed significantly between 1967 and 1976. Initially, the lack of ideological coherence and the leadership of men more interested in seeking personal publicity than building a movement hampered Black

⁴ B. Coard, *How The West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain* (London, 1971).

⁵ The treatment of young West Indian males by the police is discussed in the following chapter. See also S. Hall, C. Critcher, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London, 1978).

⁶ This is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

Power organisations like the UCPA and the Black Panther Movement (BPM). Later, the influence of revolutionary socialism on the Black Power movement led to a serious cleavage over whether race or class was the true source of the oppression of black people. Bitter debates over whether it was possible and desirable to show solidarity with white working class organisations or whether having a cultural focus on Africa was a bourgeois invention designed to divide the black working class into ethnic enclaves, turned the movement in on itself and discouraged Asian members from continuing to participate in the Black Power movement.

Furthermore, the inherent contradictions in Black Power groups that claimed to be socialist and revolutionary, but whose members were solicited on a racial basis and who did not have access to guns or the inclination to use armed violence, caused damaging confusion and misunderstandings both within and outside the movement. British Black Power groups relied heavily on American Black Power for inspiration and too easily glossed over the important differences between the two movements. Black Power groups in the United States were armed, racially homogenous, publicity-seeking and under siege from a coordinated and deadly state attack in the form of the FBI's COINTELPRO programme.⁷ Black Power groups in Britain contained West Indian, Asian and African members, largely avoided publicity after 1968, were never armed and only became involved in violence during confrontations with the police. Although they were under constant surveillance by the Special Branch (the intelligence-gathering branch of the Metropolitan Police), their lives were not under threat.

⁷ COINTELPRO was an FBI domestic counter-intelligence operation that was aimed at radical African American groups between 1967 and 1971.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

British Black Power groups' propensity to echo the revolutionary rhetoric of their American counterparts led to two problems. Firstly, an organisation which states that revolution is the only answer to society's ills risks demoralising its members if that revolution does not materialise. British Black Power groups claimed to be aiming for revolution – both at home and abroad in the case of the BUFP, or just in the Third World for the BLF, which had discarded the idea of trying to rouse Britain's, in their view, irredeemably racist white working class – but concentrated on activities like consciousness-raising and community organising that were unlikely to result in the overthrow of the state. Secondly, and far more damagingly, their violent language was taken at face value by the British state, which used its powers of prosecution to silence them. Surveillance and infiltration, police raids, frequent arrests and long periods spent in prison on remand were regular occurrences for Black Power activists and a number of political trials punctuated the late 1960s and early 1970s. This did have some advantages – one of the ways the BPM recruited new members was from the steady stream of young black men who came to the organisation asking for help with police harassment and the resulting court cases against them. The manifestly unjust police treatment of black people served as excellent recruitment propaganda for Black Power groups. Nonetheless, these tactics also disrupted Black Power organisations by diverting their funds and energy into defending their members in court. Fundraising for the 'defence committee' of an activist facing prosecution became a mainstay of black political organising in the 1970s, which meant that campaigning on other issues and community organising had to take a back seat. The state response to Black Power is the subject of the next chapter, but it is necessary to flag here the significance of its role in the movement's decline.

Black Power's strengths and achievements

Although the Black Power movement in Britain had only a modest number of followers, it can claim some significant achievements. By far the most important of these was to send out the message that being black was something to be proud of. In making this statement it challenged the paternalistic assumptions of the white liberal race relations industry and, to a lesser extent, the government, and changed the way they thought about and treated black people. The insurgent politics and raw anger of Black Power activists, coupled with their insistence that having black skin did not automatically make one a social problem, fed a wider militancy in the black community, particularly among young black males. Their refusal to accept quietly the harassment of the police and discrimination of the education system and job market eventually shook the government out of its complacent belief that it only needed to make token efforts to tackle racial discrimination.

The 1976 Race Relations Act, although the third of its kind, was the first to attack racial discrimination in British society with a sharp set of teeth. This was in no small part due to the government's fear that, if the racial discrimination they faced were allowed to fester, an increasingly disaffected and volatile generation of young black Britons would actually stage the violent rebellions the Black Power movement had only threatened. But even as early as 1968, the government clearly had one eye on the Black Power movement when Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced the introduction of an Urban Programme during a speech on race relations in Birmingham on 5 May. Designed to channel money into disadvantaged areas with large black immigrant populations, the idea of urban aid was directly borrowed from the United States where some of President Johnson's Great Society

measures were explicitly designed to prevent African American disaffection turning into radical political activity and rioting in the northern cities.⁸

Impetus for reform of the inadequate anti-discrimination legislation also came from a race relations industry that, in the face of Black Power militancy, found it increasingly difficult to justify playing 'the numbers game' and approach race relations in terms of finding the magic formula for how many dark-skinned immigrants could assimilate into the white host society without challenging the status quo. The challenge to their faith in liberalism that Black Power represented for the well-meaning, overwhelmingly white, middle-class people who had joined the race relations industry, was powerful and transformative. This was especially true after the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants 'Kenyan Asians' Act in March 1968, which made many government race relations advisors and the employees of statutory bodies like the NCCI and the Race Relations Board feel that their remit to improve domestic race relations was being irreparably undermined by the government's racially discriminatory immigration policies. 'The hostile expression of our immigration law casts doubt upon the friendly expression of our race relations law', wrote lawyers Anthony Lester and Geoffrey Bindman in the introduction to their 1971 book *Race and Law*, 'However much our legislators might wish it were otherwise, the hostility is taken more seriously than the friendliness – on both sides of the colour line.'⁹

White race relations workers' crisis of confidence in the sincerity of the government's moderate, conciliatory approach to race relations, made Black Power activists' depiction of white liberalism as racism in sheep's clothing seem more palatable. In 1968, people like Oxford don Michael Dummett, who had been a

⁸ For a fuller discussion of the Urban Programme see chapter 4.

⁹ A. Lester and G. Bindman, *Race and Law* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 14.

founding member of CARD, the Oxford Committee for Racial Integration and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), were coming to the conclusion that, 'From the point of view of the racial minorities, the whole official structure, the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants and the liaison committees, stands clearly exposed as a confidence trick'.¹⁰ Dummett found himself sharing common ground with Black Power activists when he surmised that '[O]nly further demoralisation and despair can come until the whole shabby paternalist structure has been dismantled'.¹¹

The most dramatic example of a white, liberal race relations body re-examining its principles and radically redefining itself, in the light of Black Power's critique of white liberalism, was the Institute of Race Relations (IRR). In 1972 its largely white staff voted against the wishes of their board of directors and financial backers to transform the organisation from a policy-orientated, disinterested research body into a progressive think-tank in the service of the black community. 'We were doing very different kind of work before then', recalls Jenny Bourne, who joined the IRR as a junior researcher in 1970. 'It was all arguing about the projected numbers of people that were coming. It was a very reactionary debate'.¹² Britain's oldest and largest non-governmental race relations organisation, the IRR changed beyond recognition – losing its premises and the majority of its funding and staff in the process. Black Power was not the sole cause of this transformation. By 1972 the old-fashioned, hierarchical structure of the Institute was being challenged by the junior – and particularly the female – research staff. There was also an increasingly acrimonious debate between the

¹⁰ MS 2141/1/2: 'Immigrant Organisations, a JCWI paper delivered by Michael Dummett at the IRR third annual race relations conference on incipient ghettos and the concentration of minorities, 1968', p. 15. Document held in the IWA archive at Birmingham Central Library.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹² Jenny Bourne, interviewed by the author, 28 July 2004.

IRR's management and its staff about their journalistic freedom, which centred around the editorial content of the Institute's monthly journal *Race Today*. This arose out of an increasing unease about who was benefiting from the research that the Institute was undertaking. This intensified after the 1969 publication of the IRR's 'Myrdal for Britain', *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, which some staff members viewed as little more than an exercise in spying on the black community.¹³ Researcher Robin Jenkins put his doubts about the benefit to black people of the Institute's work very bluntly in a paper delivered to the British Sociological Association in 1971. 'When in future IRR researchers come knocking at their door', he told the audience, 'the immigrant should tell them to "fuck off"'.¹⁴ Jenkins's was not the only rebellion. '[I]n our unit we had been asked to do research for what was then the Community Relations Commission and we said, "no we've not been set up to do work for the government", much to the embarrassment of our director', remembers Jenny Bourne. 'There was such a massive difference between what we were studying, what we said, and what was actually the lived experience of black people. Very hard lives people were leading and our research just seemed completely at odds with that experience'.¹⁵

Unbeknown to senior management, the IRR had maintained a symbiotic relationship with Black Power activists since 1967. 'After six o'clock my library was always a venue, though the bosses may not have known it', explains former head librarian Sivanandan.¹⁶ In the process he became familiar with the developments in grassroots black political organising. 'I was closest to the BUFP, but I was a go-between all these people because I had a library and they wanted

¹³E.J.B. Rose et al, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations* (London, 1969); G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944).

¹⁴Jenkins quoted in A. Sivanandan, *Race and Resistance: the IRR Story* (London, 1974), p. 20.

¹⁵Jenny Bourne, interviewed by the author, 28 July 2004.

¹⁶A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

literature and to discuss things', he recalls. Hence, through this link between Black Power activists, Sivanandan and other sympathetic staff, the militant views from the Black Power movements in both Britain and the United States had been allowed to infiltrate the IRR and challenge its liberal orthodoxies. 'I can't stress enough how the whole black scene began to affect all our political development', says Jenny Bourne, 'All of us would be reading Cleaver, Malcolm X and later George Jackson: those were the books we were all giving each other for Christmas and birthday presents, the debate that we were all informed by'.¹⁷ 'The palace revolution didn't come out of thin air', Sivanandan confirms.¹⁸ In response to its radicalisation, by 1974 the IRR had lost all its old sources of funding and its premises and consisted of just a library and three members of staff, Sivanandan, Bourne and assistant librarian Hazel Waters. They kept the Institute going with the help of unpaid volunteers from the black community, including several Black Power activists such as the BLF's Tony Soares, the BUFP's Roger Loftus and the BPM's Darcus Howe, who was asked to be the editor of *Race Today*.

If the Black Power movement could bring about a radical cultural shift in the largely white race relations industry, its impact on those who actually joined its ranks was even more profound. For many of the young black men and women who joined the various Black Power groups, their involvement in the movement became a defining point in their lives. The sense of personal agency, confidence and political engagement conferred by being part of the movement was powerful: its alumni include many people who went on to achieve wealth, status and even fame. To take the Brixton branch of the Black Panther Movement as an example, former leader Althea Lecointe is now a doctor, Darcus Howe is a journalist and TV

¹⁷ Jenny Bourne, interviewed by the author, 28 July 2004.

¹⁸ Ibid.

presenter, Faroukh Dhondy is a film scriptwriter, Linton Kwesi Johnson is a well known poet and owns his own record label, Neil Kenlock co-founded London radio station Choice FM and is a respected photographer, and H. O. Nazareth is a playwright, film director and journalist. Activists from other organisations, such as Herman Edwards, Ashton Gibson and Vince Hines of RAAS, and Tony Soares of the BLF, were inspired by their experiences as Black Power activists to take up less glamorous but no less important and successful careers in social care.

Linton Kwesi Johnson describes his participation in the Black Panther as 'a catalyst for self-discovery':

The Panthers shaped my worldview. I came into contact with them at a very formative time of my life – in my late teens – and it had a lasting impact on me. I was grounded in politics, I discovered black literature, I discovered black poetry: it's had the most profound impact on my life. That's how I found out who I was, that's where I learned how to locate myself in history and society.¹⁹

Joining a Black Power group acted as a psychological counterweight to the low expectations of teachers and career advisors, unexplained job rejections and poor living conditions that demoralised and alienated many black people from British society. Its emphases on personal worth and community action provided a constructive alternative to 'hustling' on the streets. The type of people who had the motivation, discipline and political commitment to join Black Power groups were *ipso facto* the sort of people who wanted to be active in society, but Black Power gave them support, confidence and direction.

Black Power groups were small and localised which meant that the areas in which they were based felt the strongest impact of their activities. This was reinforced by the fact that a major part of the Black Power groups' programmes concerned consciousness-raising and providing essential services for their usually

¹⁹ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

poor and under-resourced neighbourhoods. Nurseries, housing projects, youth clubs, supplementary schools and social events were set up by activists. Black Power youth groups taught local black teenagers to direct their energies into their families, communities and politics rather than drink, drugs and crime. Black Power activists, who were often parents themselves, had been involved in supplementary education since its inception in the late 1960s. They believed that racial pride and a revolutionary consciousness could only be developed through extra-curricular classes because on the rare occasions that black children in British schools were taught about people who looked like them, they were either depicted as slaves or savages. 'British education purposely distorts our history and never teaches us of the greatness and dignity of our people and their brave struggle against European domination', charged a 1970 article in the BPM newspaper, the *Black People's News Service*.²⁰ Black Power newspapers reflected the need for a positive representation of Africa in a continuous stream of articles about people and places from African history, which featured alongside regular reports on contemporary anti-colonial struggles in places like Angola and Mozambique. The idea of Africa as the touchstone for a positive black identity became increasingly important as the Black Power movement matured. For West Indians, 'Mother Africa' could offer them the pride and sense of belonging that the 'mother country' had denied them. 'People loved the idea of Africa and they loved the African-ness in themselves because it countered the mirror white society was holding up in which black is seen as bad', explains Colin Prescod.²¹ 'But it was a critical engagement ... and it tended to be people who were politically active, who were activists, who had this

²⁰ BPM, 'What we stand for', *Black People's News Service*, March 1970, p. 7.

²¹ Colin Prescod, interviewed by the author, 23 January 2008.

culturalist response – it was another part of the trappings of militancy and confronting the status quo'.²²

The primary aim of supplementary schools was to teach black children about their heritage and engender in them a sense of pride. '[P]art of the Black Power movement was talking about the curriculum, not just the three Rs but also the cultural content', remembers BUFP member Harry Goulbourne, who after leaving university helped set up the organisation's first South East Summer School in 1971.²³ The London groups used as case studies in this thesis started a number of other educational projects catering for pre-school children through to adults. Examples of these initiatives included the Headstart project and a Sunday school for struggling West Indian children, both run from the BLF's headquarters; the BUFP's annual South East Summer Schools; the Malcolm X Montessori School started by former UCPA member Ajoy Ghose and his wife Kathy for the children in their Notting Hill street; and, from September 1969, the Free University for Black Studies, which catered for adults of any colour who wanted to find out more about black culture.²⁴ The Malcolm X Montessori School (later known by the rather gentler name of Fun With Learning) took as its motto its namesake's maxim that, 'A child is not born stupid, but made stupid'.²⁵ This neatly encapsulated Black Power activists' belief that the British education system was deliberately designed

²² Ibid.

²³ Harry Goulbourne, interviewed by the author, 6 September 2004. Goulbourne is now a professor at South Bank University.

²⁴ Headstart and the BLF Sunday supplementary school were advertised in *Grass Roots*; BUFP press releases about their South East Summer Schools are held, unfiled, at the IRR; an article 'Fun With Learning project is in the balance' about the Fun With Learning/Malcolm X Montessori Project appeared in the *Kensington Post* on 4 February 1972; and for the Free University for Black Studies see the 1971 Gemini News Service press release, 'Where they educate whites and blacks about blackness', held in the Black Groups file at the IRR.

²⁵ This quote and a picture of Malcolm X adorn the back cover of an undated pamphlet about Fun With Learning by Ajoy Ghose called 'Towards a Black Tomorrow', held, unfiled, at the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

to leave black children ignorant and demoralised. They were determined to reverse this process.

The supplementary education movement was the area in which Black Power groups' insistence on knowing about and having pride in one's heritage had a practical significance for the everyday lives of the majority of the black community. Much of the militancy of the supplementary education movement came from the strength of West Indian parents' concerns about the way their children were schooled. The way the movement developed however, was influenced by the pre-existence of a Black Power movement which placed a high emphasis on education, said that black people should actively take control of their communities, and argued that without a sense of self-worth gained through a knowledge of one's history and heritage, black people were inherently disadvantaged.²⁶ Those West Indian parents who were naturally inclined to defer to their children's teachers' authority and believe that their children were lazy or stupid, had to re-examine their assumptions in the light of the criticisms Black Power activists were tenaciously making about the British school system. The supplementary education movement is one of the longest-lasting and most successful aspects of black community action from the 1960s and Black Power played a significant role in the formation and development of that movement.

Achieving unity among such a diverse range of ethnic groups was the most challenging problem that faced the Black Power movement in Britain and one for which it could not look to the United States for guidance. The movement's

²⁶ Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, information about the Black Parents Movement, which was founded in April 1975 and was active until the mid-1980s, can be found at the George Padmore Institute (GPI) in north London. The Black Parents Movement grew out of the political activity and supplementary education initiatives, from 1968 onwards, of activists (and parents) John la Rose and Eric and Jessica Huntley, among others. Archival material about this can also be found at the GPI.

response was to create an inclusive political identity based on non-white people's shared experiences of oppression, both in the past, as Britain's colonial subjects, and in the present, as the targets of white racism in the 'mother country'. To do this it appropriated the term 'black' and used it to signify a political identity rather than a physical description. '[B]lack was the colour of our fight, our politics, not our skins', explained Sivanandan.²⁷ Political blackness did not replace ethnic, religious and national identities but rested on top of them, allowing people from disparate backgrounds to come together to campaign on issues that affected them all. 'We might have, in our lifestyles and our beliefs, defined ourselves culturally', remembers A. Sivanandan, 'but in our fight against racism we defined ourselves politically'.²⁸

The debate over political blackness was alive throughout the Black Power period and beyond, with attacks both from cultural nationalists, who tended to link blackness with Africanness, and Asians who felt uncomfortable with identifying themselves as black for a variety of reasons. Nonetheless, the idea of political blackness was broadly accepted. A 1974 article in the newspaper of one of the most cultural nationalist Black Power groups, the BLF, showed how the organisation could both support African nationalism and the idea of political blackness. 'Black people can be Brown, dark Brown, Jet Black ... in fact, all shades of Black, yet we're all defined as BLACK. From that you can see how the definition unites us', explained the article, 'When we define a person as Black, the word for one describes the non-white race, the people that person springs from; in

²⁷ Bowser, Kushnick and Grant, 'Catching History on the Wing: A. Sivanandan as Activist, Teacher and Rebel', in B. Bowser and L. Kushnick (eds) with P. Grant, *Against the Odds: Scholars who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst and Boston, 2002), p. 237.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses
our case *The African Race and the African People*'.²⁹ The idea of political blackness, in fact, achieved such hegemony that, nearly thirty years later, journal articles devoted to arguing why Asians were not black were still being published.³⁰ Simplifying race relations into a binary opposition between black and white was also an attempt to keep attention focused on white racism rather than the details of how it affected each ethnic minority differently and whether some groups were surviving better than others. It forced the post-war immigrants from Asia to ask themselves whether they were 'black' and, if so, where they stood in relation to white society. Even those who did not accept the definition of themselves as black could only reach this conclusion through a process of thinking about their ethnic identity and its relationship to white society, which often heightened their political awareness.

One significant attempt to organise around this new black political identity was the formation of the Black Peoples' Alliance (BPA) on 28 April 1968. The brainchild of the general secretary of the Indian Workers Association of Great Britain, Jagmohan Joshi, the BPA was born at a conference in Leamington Spa attended by fifty-one delegates from twenty militant African, Asian and West Indian organisations, including various Pakistani Workers' Associations, the Pakistan Democratic Front, WISC, the West Indian Association, the Caribbean Socialist Union, the Group for Nigerian Revolution, the Afro-Asian Liberation Front, BPM, IWA (GB) and the Black Regional Action Movement (BRAM).³¹ Groups with white members or reformist goals were not allowed to join, although

²⁹ 'Black Is...', *Grass Roots* 3:3 (May 1974), p. 7.

³⁰ See T. Modood, 'Political blackness and British Asians', *Sociology* 28:4 (1994).

³¹ A list of sixteen member groups is included in a CPGB report, 'Racialism and "Black Power"', 10 May 1968, in CP/LON/RACE/02/01. The involvement of BRAM is discussed in its newspaper *Black Ram*, held at the IRR, and the *Black Peoples' Alliance Newsletter*, Jan/Feb 1970, contains a report from the United Black People's Organisation in Sheffield.

the BPA was prepared to 'seek allies from [the] majority community' by working alongside militant white organisations.³² The creation of the BPA was an explicit attempt to unite different ethnic minorities. 'National minorities [have] been suspicious of one another and have sometimes seen their interests as conflicting', read the printed notes from the founding conference. 'This meeting is one of the most concrete signs of us overcoming these difficulties'.³³ The BPA was equally explicit, however, in its exclusion of middle-class reformists of any ethnicity. 'Obviously the support of all sections of the Black Communities should be sought', agreed the delegates, 'but not at the cost of taking the soft line preferred by many of the middle-class Immigrants'.³⁴ The members of the BPA saw blackness as a radical political identity, inextricably linked with class struggle. The member groups disagreed over whether it was a Black Power organisation: 'That an organisation of the composition of [the] BPA could have such wide and varied views on Black Power points to one thing, that a public discussion has to be carried out ... to enable the whole question to be cleared', reported BRAM's chairman in February 1969.³⁵ Nonetheless, all were happy to organise under the banner of political blackness.

Despite its resolution to undertake 'the kinds of activities which will mobilise our own people and not necessarily the kinds of things which the British tradition finds most acceptable', the BPA largely relied on the same old tactics of petitions and marches.³⁶ That said, the BPA's first demonstration, a 'march for dignity' to Downing Street on 12 January 1969, attracted eight thousand marchers,

³² BPA, 'Documented and adopted at the inaugural meeting 28/4/68', p. 2. Two-page document held in Tony Soares' private collection.

³³ Ibid., p. 1

³⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

³⁵ 'View of meeting', *The Black Ram* 1:3 (15 February 1969), p. 3.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

two thirds of whom were Asian, by Joshi's estimate.³⁷ The marchers converged on Downing Street, delivered a petition and then symbolically turned their backs on No. 10 and set fire to an effigy of Enoch Powell. Despite these big public displays of unity, the BPA did not achieve a great deal and the solidarity between its constituent African, West Indian and Asian member groups waned when there was not a big issue, such as the 1971 Immigration Act, to focus their opposition outwards. Nonetheless, the concept of political blackness remained for many years a useful tool to promote unity in the anti-racist movement.

A serious and much commented upon flaw in the American Black Power movement was its dismissive treatment of women, and it is worth noting that the British movement had a prouder record in this respect. By the start of the 1970s, many Black Power groups were attempting to take a strong stance against sexism, although this may have worked better on paper than in practice. The Black Power movement's position on sexism was, however, far more progressive than the nascent women's movement's stand against racism. Sexism and misogyny, particularly against white women, had been rife at the start of the Black Power movement. RAAS leader Michael X openly admitted in his autobiography to having been a pimp in his former days as a Notting Hill hustler and continued to boast that he lived off rich white women's patronage.³⁸ The UCPA had very few female members and its original leaders Roy Sawh and Obi Egbuna were hardly progressive thinkers when it came to gender issues. Both objectified white women as the sexual property of the white man and as such professed their disdain for them. A police transcript of one of Sawh's flamboyant Hyde Park speeches

³⁷ See MS2141/2: 'Report of the General Secretary presented by J. Joshi at the National Conference of the IWA (GB), 7-8 November 1970 at Nottingham', p. 21. Document held in the IWA archive at Birmingham Central Library.

³⁸ See M. Malik, *From Michael de Freitas to Michael X* (London, 1968).

reported him as saying, 'I make a living here by selling white women. They are easy to sell because they are stupid and silly'.³⁹ Sawh's words, as ever, were meant to shock rather than reflect reality, but they also pointed to an underlying lack of respect for women. Egbuna's posturing on the subject of white women was equally atavistic, but his sentimental eulogising of black women as the human embodiment of Mother Africa was more pernicious.⁴⁰ By the early 1970s, however, openly denigrating women was no longer acceptable in the movement and the BUFP, BLF and the female-led BPM all had written policies on the correct treatment of their female members. A two-day National Conference on the Rights of Black People in Britain in May 1971, jointly organised by the BUFP and BPM, included a dedicated women's session entitled "'Black women want freedom" – Black sisters speak out!'⁴¹ The conference programme contained a page on women in the movement written by the BUFP's Black Women's Action Committee (BWAC), which asserted:

Women must not be relegated to the role of kitchen troops, secretarial slaves (for typing, circulating addresses or passing ashtrays) or house servants. Our women must guard against male chauvinism and arrogance, and must be allowed to participate fully in the running of the party.⁴²

The fact that this still needed to be stated showed that the deeply entrenched chauvinism among male Black Power activists had not disappeared. It was, however, an issue that was being addressed and fought against ideologically.

³⁹ 'Transcript of shorthand notes taken by Det. Sgt. Battye, Special Branch, of parts of a speech by Roy Sawh at a meeting under the auspices of the Universal Coloured People's Association at Speaker's Corner', p. 3. Document part of DPP2/4428: 'Alton Watson, Roy Sawh, Ajoy Shankar Ghose, Michael Ezekiel, RAAS and UCPA, 23rd/24th August 1967', held at the National Archive (NA).

⁴⁰ For a lengthy example of this see Egbuna's 'Letter from Brixton Prison', in which Egbuna serenades a Harlem prostitute with Marcus Garvey's poem 'The Black Woman' after he has paid her for sex. O. Egbuna, *Destroy This Temple: the Voice of Black Power in Britain* (London, 1971), pp. 61–93.

⁴¹ 'National conference special issue', May 1971, p. 8. Document held in black organisations file at the IRR.

⁴² BUFP, 'National Conference: Struggle for our human rights', May 22–23, 1971, p. 11. Document held in the black groups file at the IRR.

A BLF pamphlet from 1971, reprinted in 1977, recognised that sexism was an issue that needed to be addressed. 'Black women in Black society are oppressed not only by white society but also by the attitudes of Black men', it stated, adding that if Black Power did not recognise and remedy its sexist attitudes, black women would be drawn into the white women's liberation movement.⁴³ A new introduction in 1977 noted, however, that 'The section on Black women and womens [sic] lib was condemned and discredited from the start'.⁴⁴ It was not discredited enough to be removed from the pamphlet though. Black feminists and former activists Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe recalled that, 'Although we worked tirelessly, the significance of our contribution to the mass mobilisation of the Black Power era was undermined and overshadowed by the men. They both set the agenda and stole the show'.⁴⁵ Despite this damning judgement, they conceded that Black Power had offered black women an early path to self-respect. 'As an ideology that expanded pride in our African heritage', they wrote. 'Black Power gave rise to one of the earliest conscious and collective expressions by Black women of cultural self-respect'.⁴⁶

Black Power's internal weaknesses and decline

Although all three phases of the Black Power movement contained elements of strength and weakness, the latter was exhibited most obviously at its start and during its decline. Like any political movement, Black Power in Britain did not spring into life fully-formed and with infallible leaders. During its first phase,

⁴³ A. Hassan, *Revolutionary Black Nationalism: Unity and Struggle Against Domination* (2nd edition, London, 1977), p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ B. Bryan, S. Dadzie and S. Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London, 1985), p. 144.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

groups like the UCPA were going through the process of thrashing out their ideologies and goals and trying out different protest strategies. Concerning the latter, former UCPA member Tony Soares recalls wryly that 'I don't think there was any idea about tactics at the time'.⁴⁷ The first Black Power organisation in Britain, the UCPA published a fifteen-page 'Special Statement' in September 1967 that offered only the vaguest of solutions to the problems it detailed at length.⁴⁸ The aim 'to propagate the solution of our problems on international levels', for example, was so vaguely defined as to be virtually meaningless.⁴⁹ Even the more concrete goals, such as 'To take immediate action for the establishment of nurseries for coloured children', were included without any explanation of how they would be achieved.⁵⁰ The statement was also littered with contradictions. 'Black people of the world can no longer afford to fight White oppression as individuals or in isolated little groups', it explained, before adding that 'Black Power is a revolutionary conspiracy ... The less the number of people involved, the more secure the conspiracy'.⁵¹ The document's attitude to white people was similarly confused. 'The Black man has no choice today. Either he smashes that [white capitalist] system with active POWER or the system will take advantage of his passive powerlessness and smash him', it declared, before stating that, 'Where we stand depends on the attitude of the White man'.⁵² The contradictions and vagueness of terms contained in the UCPA's Special Statement gave it a flexibility that could mediate between the different vantage points of the group's members, who were drawn from a variety of countries and classes, but it also meant the

⁴⁷ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

⁴⁸ UCPA, 'Black Power in Britain: a Special Statement by the Universal Coloured People's Association', 10 September 1967, contained in the Black groups file at the IRR.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13. Capitalisation original.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 9. Capitalisation original.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8, 10. Capitalisation original.

initial surge of organisational energy was not very usefully directed. In an environment as politically hostile to black people as Britain in 1968, this was a significant weakness.

Early Black Power leaders were also lacking in the skills to build and sustain a grassroots movement. Leadership was claimed by those with the most personal ambition and who sought the most publicity. Three men were publicly identified as Black Power leaders at the start of the movement and they attracted the majority of the media attention. They were RAAS leader Michael X and UCPA leaders Roy Sawh and Obi Egbuna.⁵³ All three were skilful media manipulators, ever ready with a flamboyant soundbite for journalists, who made them their first ports of call for information on Black Power. This gave them a public profile that was entirely out of proportion to their influence in the black community and often led to their personal opinions being reported as the policies of their organisations. A four-page feature in *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine* from May 1969 perfectly exemplified this trend.⁵⁴ A generally sober and thoughtful survey of Black Power in Britain, the article's major focus was, nonetheless, on Egbuna, Sawh and Michael X. This was despite the fact that within the article Egbuna admitted he was no longer politically active and it was reported that Roy Sawh's maverick behaviour had recently caused him to be disowned by his latest organisation, the Black Peoples' Alliance (BPA). 'The criticism most often levelled against [Sawh] is that he wants to be a leader of black people in the eyes of white people', the article's author reported, apparently without irony.⁵⁵

⁵³ As Michael X's character has been discussed at length in the previous chapter the following section concentrates on Sawh and Egbuna.

⁵⁴ B. Cox, 'White is a state of mind', *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, 23 May 1969, pp. 14–18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Sawh was a former Communist who had briefly lived in Moscow in 1962, but was appalled by the racism there. Returning to Britain, he became a regular orator at Speaker's Corner and, after 1967, an active campaigner for Black Power. Sawh co-founded RAAS in 1965, the UCPA in 1967, the BPA in 1968 and the Free University for Black Studies in 1969, as well as a number of less significant organisations such as the Universal Coloured People and Arab Association (UCPAAA) and the Black Power Party.⁵⁶ In November 1967 he was the second black man in Britain to be prosecuted for incitement to racial hatred for his rabble-rousing speeches at Speaker's Corner, receiving a £120 fine.⁵⁷ His natural aptitude for making witty and highly entertaining speeches, good looks and boundless energy for new ventures made Sawh an asset for attracting attention and whipping up enthusiasm for new groups. His enjoyment of the limelight, however, meant that he was less interested in the prosaic task of day-to-day organising and favoured flippant *bon mots* over thorough analysis. Sawh's unilateral, attention-seeking behaviour led, for example, to his expulsion from the Black Peoples' Alliance within a year of him being made the chairman of the organisation. 'The BPA decided to expel Roy Sawh from the organisation at Sunday's meeting because he made statements in the name of the BPA which were not true, that BPA had called a mass black strike for May 1st', reported the chairman of BRAM in February 1969.⁵⁸ Sawh's desire to offer up a sensational story to the press had got the better of him again. Harry Goulbourne, a member of the BUFP in 1970, also detected a degree of hypocrisy between Sawh's words and his deeds. 'Roy had a thing about whites, white women', remembers Goulbourne, 'but the moment he

⁵⁶ For biographical information on Sawh, see *ibid.*, pp. 14–19.

⁵⁷ Fellow UCPA members, Speaker's Corner orators and co-defendants Alton Watson, Ajoy Ghose and Michael Ezekiel were also convicted of incitement to racial hatred at the same trial. See DPP2/4428 at the National Archive (NA)

⁵⁸ *The Black Ram* 1:3 (15 February 1969), p. 3.

came off the rostrum [at Speaker's Corner] he would go for a drink and he was surrounded by his white friends. And that was how it was with a lot of these chaps'.⁵⁹ Sawh's mastery of a charismatic and entertaining style ultimately undermined the substance of his work with Black Power organisations.

A respected playwright and writer from Nigeria, who won a scholarship to study in London, Obi Egbuna had been an active member of the Committee of African Organisations before an educational exchange to the United States in 1966, organised by the British Council, introduced him to Black Power. He had been very impressed by the activists he met in the United States and returned to Britain determined to start a Black Power movement. Black people in Britain, however, were not ready for Black Power in 1966, 'So,' Egbuna explained in his autobiography, 'biding our time, we contented ourselves with our old activities in the Pan-African movement'.⁶⁰ By July 1967 his wait was over. Elected as the president of the newly formed UCPA because of his eloquence and knowledge of American Black Power, Egbuna's stewardship quickly led to splits in the organisation and he himself left to form the Black Panther Movement in April 1968.

Egbuna's musings on Black Power and his role in it were published in a 1971 book called *Destroy This Temple: The Voice of Black Power in Britain*, which revealed his egotism.⁶¹ Furthermore, anyone who had read Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, published in Britain two years earlier, would have found *Destroy This Temple* highly derivative in style and content.⁶² For example, although he was not serving a sentence for rape, as Cleaver had been when he

⁵⁹ Harry Goulbourne, interviewed by the author, 6 September 2004.

⁶⁰ See O. Egbuna, *Destroy*, pp. 17.

⁶¹ Another semi-autobiographical tome, *Diary of a Homeless Prodigal* (Enugu, Nigeria, 1978), reprised part of *Destroy This Temple*.

⁶² E. Cleaver, *Soul On Ice* (New York, 1969).

wrote *Soul On Ice*, Egbuna also included a political justification for raping white women. 'The relationship between the White woman and the Black man is not a normal one', he explained in a chapter entitled 'The Little Boy of Brussels', 'This makes her, to the Black man, the target of Black vengeance. As a symbol of European womanhood she deserves to be raped'.⁶³ The book also contained a long open address ('Letter From Brixton Prison') to a Harlem prostitute that was clearly inspired by *Soul On Ice*'s chapter of love letters from Cleaver to his lawyer Beverley Axelrod and his meditations on black men's difficulties in forming relationships with black women. In case positioning himself as Britain's answer to Eldridge Cleaver failed to cement his Black Power credentials, Egbuna had a final trump card up his sleeve. 'As I write at this very moment', he declared near the end of the book, 'I am thinking in my African language and translating very fast into English'.⁶⁴

In 1968, Egbuna had also written another, rather different, letter from Brixton prison, while spending five months on remand there with fellow activists, Peter Martin and Gideon Dolo, awaiting trial for 'uttering or writing threats to kill police officers at Hyde Park'.⁶⁵ The charges derived from a speech Egbuna had given at Speaker's Corner titled, 'What to do when cops lay their hands on Black men at the Speaker's Corner', the transcript of which he then arranged to be printed. The printer took the speech to the police and Egbuna was subsequently arrested. The heavy-handed reaction to what amounted to little more than Egbuna's habitual posturing and the refusal of bail to a middle-class playwright with no previous convictions were punitive in effect and, one suspects, intent. Having

⁶³ Egbuna, *Destoy*, pp. 56-7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶⁵ See Metropolitan Police file MEPO2/11409: 'Benedict Obi Egbuna, Peter Martin and Gideon Ketueni Dolo charged with uttering and writing threats to kill police officers at Hyde Park, W2', held at the NA.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

publicly declared that he would neither seek bail nor offer a defence, Egbuna eventually did both, using the justification that, although he wanted to 'puke fires of revolutionary venom on the white system', his two co-defendants could not take the pressure of prison.⁶⁶ 'Some of you might think this was the wrong decision', he wrote to his fellow activists, 'but if you were here and see [sic] what even the fore-taste of prison is like, and what it can do to a man like Peter, you might think again. I just couldn't do it to him'.⁶⁷ Convicted and sentenced to a year in gaol, suspended for three years, Egbuna withdrew from activities that might have landed him back in prison. By the time *Destroy This Temple* came out in 1971, after his suspended sentence had been served, Egbuna's reputation in the Black Power movement had been severely damaged and his flamboyant publicity-seeking style had gone out of vogue.

Towards the end of the 1960s, Black Power activists had begun to explore Marxism much more seriously and develop much firmer ideas about their goals. By 1969, their tactics and leadership had changed too. The first wave of self-aggrandising leaders were castigated by most Black Power supporters as self-serving traitors who were – even worse – not of the people. A statement by the BPM distancing itself from Egbuna made this its first accusation. '[H]e has never participated in the community activities of the Movement, and has never identified himself with our people at grassroot level', it thundered.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Egbuna kept bad company: 'He seeks alliance with the arch tricksters and traitors and opportunists Michael de Freitas [Michael X] and Roy Sawh, who represent no

⁶⁶ O. Egbuna, 'Letter from O. B. Egbuna in Brixton prison to his brothers and sisters', undated, p. 1. Held in Tony Soares' private collection.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁸ BPM, 'A statement on Obi Benedict Egbuna (O. B. E.)', undated, p. 1. Single page document held in the IWA archive at Birmingham Central Library.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

genuine movement of black people', castigated the BPM.⁶⁹ Having public figureheads who spoke to the press or campaigned to influence the white power structure became deeply unfashionable among Black Power organisations during the movement's second phase. Showing a willingness to lead resulted in many formerly respected Black Power activists being accused of being bourgeois and placing themselves above the people, which in the Maoist-influenced atmosphere of the 1970s Black Power movement were cardinal sins. Ron Phillips, who ran the UCPA's Manchester branch, was expelled in May 1970, for example, because, among other things, 'He spent most of his time in the university and very little time with the ordinary working people of Moss Side ... This man indulges in book worship and neglects the experience of the people'.⁷⁰ Phillips also stood accused of sexism. 'Ron Phillips' behaviour towards several black women (and white women too), shows quite clearly that he believes that women are a commodity to be used as toilet paper', his UCPA accusers spat. 'Black consciousness demands that black women be treated with the dignity and honour which is theirs'.⁷¹ By 1970, the macho, flamboyant, attention-seeking leadership style of the Black Power movement had become much more sober and low key. Althea Lecointe, Obi Egbuna's female replacement at the head of the Black Panther Movement, could rival any man with her rigid discipline and revolutionary fervour, according to former Panthers Linton Kwesi Johnson and Tony Sinclair, but went out of her way to remain anonymous outside of the movement. She achieved this with great success: apart from statements made by Lecointe as part of her defence at the

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

⁷⁰ UCPA, 'The exposure and expulsion of a con (Ron Phillips) by UCPA', May 1970, pp. 1-2. Two page document held in the Black documents file at the IRR.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 2.

Mangrove Nine trial in 1971, this author has not been able to find any written material by or about her.⁷²

The second phase of British Black Power, which lasted until 1972, was much more ideologically and organisationally disciplined. While this had many advantages, it also meant that groups began to argue over their different interpretations of Black Power and the movement began to coalesce into two mutually critical camps, one looking to Marxism-Leninism to lead the way out of Britain's oppressive capitalism and the other, although it was also socialist, focusing on Pan-Africanism and the struggles of the Third World to inspire and bolster the black struggle in Britain. BLF leader Tony Soares remembers the 'constant bickering' of 'folk who were Marxists and were into socialism and all that and on the other side ... these very traditional cultural nationalist people'.⁷³

The heterogeneous nature of Britain's black population had always posed a serious challenge to the unity of the Black Power movement. As groups became more and more tightly politically focused and appealed to smaller and smaller constituencies, they put off many existing and potential supporters. This trend toward factionalism had been observed as early as February 1970 by visiting American Black Panther Connie Matthews, who commented scathingly on it during a speaking tour of Britain. 'You're much too fragmented and you can't even organise this meeting properly', she told one gathering. 'You gotta get out of your own individual bags and do something', she snapped at another, 'You don't want

⁷² The Mangrove Nine trial, discussed in the following chapter, took place at the Old Bailey between 5 October and 16 December 1971. The nine defendants were between them accused of thirty-one serious offences arising from disturbances at a demonstration against police harassment held in Notting Hill on 9 August 1970. Some of the defendants, including Althea Lecointe, conducted their own defence.

⁷³ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses to have 16 organisations which won't work with white people'.⁷⁴ Matthews' warning was prescient. The increasingly strict adherence to different variations of Marxist doctrine among the London groups meant that members who did not want to toe the political line had little option but to splinter off to form new organisations. The BLF, for example, was founded in early 1970 by disaffected members of the North and West London branches of the Black Panther Movement, who disagreed with the increasingly strict Marxism-Leninism of leader Althea Lecointe and wanted a looser organisational structure with a greater emphasis on culture. The BLF and the BPM had much in common; both agreed that racism was a function of capitalism that could only be overturned by socialist revolution and both maintained links with the American Black Panther Party. But the BPM's inability to tolerate political heterodoxy necessitated the creation of the BLF to represent some of its members' dissident views.

Matthews' criticism of British Black Power groups' unwillingness to work with white people was less well-founded. Many British groups' newspapers reported sympathetically on, and expressed solidarity with, the republican struggle in Northern Ireland, for example. In fact, in adopting a class-based analysis of Britain's problems, groups like the BUFP and, after 1973, the BPM – or Black Workers' Movement as it became – could be said to have identified with the white working class to the detriment of the Black Power movement. In a February 1971 interview, BUFP founding member Ricky Cambridge was asked whether 'with a political analysis', he saw, 'the root problem as capitalism as opposed to race?' 'Yes', he replied, 'I think the whole business of race can be projected out of all

⁷⁴ D. Humphry, 'Sister Connie swears at the British Black Panthers', *The Sunday Times*, 22 February 1970, p. 14.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

proportion to the correlation of class forces in the society'.⁷⁵ If Cambridge was accurately representing the BUFP's line, it is hard to square this with its continuing existence as a Black Power organisation. His departure from the organisation in September 1971 perhaps indicates that his fellow members were not yet ready to completely abandon the idea of campaigning on grounds of racial oppression. A 1974 internal discussion paper explained that although the BUFP took Marxist-Leninism as its basis and was inspired by the struggles of the Chinese and Vietnamese people, it was not a true revolutionary vanguard party.⁷⁶ However, later that year, the front page headline of the BUFP's newspaper *Black Voice* proclaimed 'Communism The Only Solution', and explained that 'More and more of us working class black people in Britain are ... finding that our only salvation lies in THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF CAPITALISM'.⁷⁷ And while the article conceded that black workers were the most exploited section of their class, Black Power was not mentioned at all.

Representing the other side of the Black Power divide, groups such as the BLF did refuse to work with white people and took a more cultural nationalist line. 'The BLF is a black organisation. It's [sic] sole concern is survival for Black people in Britain', a 1971 issue of *Grass Roots* explained, 'As a rule we do not accept white members or relate to white organisations'.⁷⁸ Although it is important not to overplay the Afrocentrism of the BLF, or other Black Power groups with a cultural-nationalist bent, by the mid-1970s it was the case that their increased identification with Africa as a source of cultural pride meant that their Asian members felt less comfortable participating. An article, 'Black Is...', featured in

⁷⁵ T. Bowden, 'Questions on Black Power', *The Black Liberator* 1:2/3 (Winter 1971), p.71.

⁷⁶ See 'What is the B.U.F.P.', 3 May 1974, unpublished 46-page internal discussion paper, held, unfiled, at the IRR.

⁷⁷ 'Communism the only solution', *Black Voice* 5:1 (1974), p. 1. Capitalisation original.

⁷⁸ *Grass Roots* 1:2 (7 July 1971), p. 2.

the May 1974 issue of *Grass Roots*, defined black in a way that completely excluded Asian people. 'When we define a person as Black, the word for one describes the non-white race, the people that person springs from', the article explained, 'in our case, The African Race and The African People'.⁷⁹ Tony Soares lists nationalism as one of the reason he decided to withdraw from the BLF in 1977. 'It had ... become very Afrocentric', he says. 'I was one of the last Asians left there, so my own personal position was getting difficult'.⁸⁰ Sri Lankan-born Sivanandan also noticed the negative impact of cultural-nationalist Afrocentrism on the Black Power group he was closest to, the BUFP. 'Black nationalism to a certain extent broke down Black Power', he recalls.⁸¹

Whether one belonged to a more cultural nationalist or a Marxist-Leninist Black Power group, community self-help projects were an essential part of one's activities. But although setting up supplementary schools, nurseries and youth clubs had a positive and often long-lasting impact on their immediate communities, these activities advanced Black Power groups' underlying political aims at a painstakingly slow rate. Whether the final goal was revolutionary black nationalism in the Third World (the doctrine of the quasi-anarchist, cultural-nationalist BLF), socialist world revolution (desired by the Marxist-Leninist BUFP), or the end of capitalism and liberation of all oppressed people (the stated aim of the BPM), all three groups agreed that racism was a tool of capitalist domination and that only a revolutionary change in society would bring about racial equality. To achieve this they all adopted the same strategy of building a revolutionary black consciousness at the grassroots level, although the BUFP and

⁷⁹ 'Black Is...', *Grass Roots* 3:3 (May 1974), p.7.

⁸⁰ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

⁸¹ A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

BPM were prepared to work with revolutionary white groups while the BLF was not. The BLF's approach of retreating into the black community ran the risk of contracting the Black Power movement's influence even further, while Black Power groups' revolutionary fervour scared off middle-class West Indians, most Asians (who believed in economic advancement and organising through the trade union movement and were not prepared to sacrifice their religious beliefs for a secular revolution) and potential white allies like anti-racist liberals and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

Pamphlets published by the CPGB show that the party had an impressive understanding of the problems facing black immigrants, the injustice of their being scapegoated for Britain's pre-existing social and economic problems, and the existence of trade union racism.⁸² The Party also campaigned on behalf of incarcerated American Black Power heroes Angela Davis, herself a member of the CPUSA, and George Jackson.⁸³ It was, however, completely opposed to separatist black organisations, even Marxist ones, because it believed they divided the working class. The CPGB had reacted less than enthusiastically to the arrival of committed anti-racist campaigner Communist Claudia Jones in the 1950s, even though she had been a dedicated member of the CPUSA, and it reacted to Black Power activists' desire to place black people at the vanguard of revolutionary politics with equal suspicion. Hence, a report on racial discrimination by CPGB member Asquith Gibbes, from March 1968, acknowledged the validity of black dissatisfaction but not of Black Power. 'We have to try to understand why and how

⁸² Three representative examples of pamphlets were, H. Bourne, 'Racialism: Cause and Cure', 1965, pp. 14, London District Committee of the Communist Party, 'Brothers in the Fight for a Better Life', undated but pre-decimalisation, and Communist Party, 'One Race, The Human Race: a Communist Party broadsheet on the menace of racism', 1975, in CP/LON/RACE/01/1, CP/LON/RACE/01/02 and CP/LON/RACE/02/02 respectively, held at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester University.

⁸³ See CP/LON/RACE/01/02.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

these feelings upon which black power [sic] bases itself actually arise, and we have to recognise the positive elements in them', he wrote, 'even though unscrupulous demagogues exploit them. These propagandists mouth revolutionary phrases while in practice they remain outside the struggle'.⁸⁴ The CPGB regarded Black Power's Communist heroes Mao Tse Tung, Leon Trotsky and Che Guevara to be dangerous dissidents. 'Many of these [British Black Power] groups have links outside Britain with Trotskyist and Maoist circles and are strongly anti-Communist', reported the CPGB's international affairs committee.⁸⁵ Stokely Carmichael's reported criticism of the white left in April 1968 reinforced the CPGB's impression that Black Power was at heart a separatist, anti-white movement. 'Marxism only takes into account the economic aspect of the struggle. It cannot help black people because ours is more social and cultural than economic', a CPGB memo reported Carmichael saying, 'Besides, Marx was a honkie, and we don't want black people looking up to no white man no matter who he is'.⁸⁶

Although coming from different parts of the political spectrum, both the CPGB and white liberals mistakenly perceived the Black Power message to be that all white people were the enemy. While, during the 1960s, this had not been the case, by the early 1970s groups like the BLF and BRAM did believe that the white working class had been so corrupted by capitalism that it was beyond redemption. But without white support, even if every black person in Britain had been persuaded of the need for a Black Power revolution, they would still only have had the support of about 3 per cent of the population. And even if they had been armed,

⁸⁴ A. Gibbes, 'The fight against racial discrimination', 9–10 March 1968, p. 2. See file CP/LON/RACE/02/01 held at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester University.

⁸⁵ 'Racialism and "Black Power"', information document prepared for meeting of the International Affairs Committee, 10 May 1968, in *ibid.*.

⁸⁶ Memo from Johnny W. to Jack Woddis, reporting on Carmichael's speech at the National Black Anti-War, Anti-Draft Union Conference in April 1968 in *ibid.*.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

which British Black Power activists were not, success would still almost certainly have eluded them – despite a wider support base and a ready supply of guns, the American Black Panther Party had hardly got very far in fomenting a revolution across the Atlantic. Therefore, although the second phase of Black Power was more focused and organised, its political aims were no more achievable. A movement without realisable aims cannot sustain momentum, as former Black Panther Darcus Howe realised. 'Once you set your sights on "The Revolution", when it doesn't come you are going to have a lot of demoralised people', he reflected.⁸⁷

One of the factors behind the movement's decline in its third phase, was that activists lost their motivation to pursue political revolution as a practical aim and redirected their energies into self-help projects with more immediately demonstrable results; cultural forms of resistance; or increasingly nebulous intellectual debates about revolutionary theory. A fine example of the latter tendency, Ricky Cambridge and Colin Prescod's journal *The Black Liberator*, a self-styled 'theoretical and discussion journal for black revolution', founded at the end of 1971, was so densely written and impenetrable that Prescod liked to joke that, 'even our footnotes had footnotes'.⁸⁸ By 1977, even Tony Soares, one of the most active and committed anti-colonial and Black Power campaigners, who had not let several spells in prison deter him from following his political ideals, had given up on the promise of Black Power. 'I got the feeling that we were very much going round in circles', he says of the BLF. 'We were not making any progress and

⁸⁷ Transcript of an unpublished interview with Anne Walmsley, 16 January 1986, p. 7. The document is part of the CAM papers held at the George Padmore Institute (GPI).

⁸⁸ *The Black Liberator* 1:1 (Sept/Oct 1971), p. 1. Colin Prescod, interviewed by the author, 20 July 2004.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

I could not see it going anywhere'.⁸⁹ He quit the organisation, went to university to study sociology and has since developed a successful career in providing social housing for ethnic minorities.

Black Power in the United States was an essential source of inspiration to militant black people in Britain, even though the situation of African Americans bore little relation to that of black people in Britain. Yet, nothing 'seemed more relevant to a settling British black population than those in black America', remembers former BUFP member Harry Goulbourne, 'The Americans' books and popular publications, particularly the *Black Panthers Speak*, were avidly read'.⁹⁰ 'There is no doubt that we were influenced by events in the USA and how our black brothers there were meeting the situation', wrote Roy Sawh.⁹¹ Linton Kwesi Johnson remembers events in the United States fascinating him as a schoolboy in 1968. 'When those athletes gave the Black Power salute at the Olympics, that had a tremendous impact on a lot of us, especially me', he recalls.⁹² For Johnson and his classmate Tony Sinclair, their admiration for American Black Power spurred them on to look for local militant groups. 'The thing that led me into [joining the Black Panther Movement] in the first place was Linton and the American movement', remembers Sinclair.⁹³ Often the best-attended Black Power events in Britain were rallies and demonstrations in support of imprisoned American activists like Angela Davis, Bobby Seale and George Jackson. For example, a rally

⁸⁹ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

⁹⁰ H. Goulbourne, *Caribbean*, p. 90.

⁹¹ R. Sawh, *From Where I Stand* (London, 1987), p. 33.

⁹² Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

⁹³ Tony Sinclair, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

at Central Hall, Westminster, on 20 April 1971, to raise funds for the Soledad Brothers, attracted 3,000 people and raised £2,000.⁹⁴

The fact that American Black Power could be such an inspirational tool often led British Black Power activists to overlook the marked differences between the contexts of the two movements. Trinidadian student Colin Prescod ran up against these differences as early as July 1967, when he dared to question the practicality of Stokely Carmichael's call for armed revolution. 'I saw Stokely speak in London at the West Indian Students Centre', Prescod recalls:

He had been getting into rhetoric – arm ourselves and fight and all that business – but I raised my hand and said, "Well Stokely, yeah, all the people here are cheering like crazy but actually most of us have never seen a gun like you folks in the States. You know what guns are like: the idea of taking one up and firing it is not something we should be simply clapping about, we don't know what that means". ... I got booed down of course.⁹⁵

Outwardly, British Black Power appeared to be a close facsimile of its American progenitor, but within the movement British activists like Prescod acknowledged the differences in context between Britain and the United States. '[W]e were all first generation, we were from different countries, we were not homogenous. It wasn't quite like America, but I suppose we were all carried away with the rhetoric of America', says former BLF member Tony Soares.⁹⁶ By adopting the style and rhetoric of the American movement, British Black Power activists both showed their solidarity with their transatlantic counterparts and hoped their own organisations would appear more important and influential by association. By explicitly making these links, however, they also implied a connection between

⁹⁴ CPGB, 'Speeches From The Soledad Brothers Rally, Central Hall, Westminster, April 20, 1971', London, 1971, p. 1. Pamphlet held in the CPGB archive at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester University. The rally was organised by a coalition of groups including the BPM, BUFP and BLF.

⁹⁵ Colin Prescod, interviewed by the author, 20 July 2004.

⁹⁶ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

their groups' goals and tactics, and those of the American Black Power movement, at least in the minds of the British public, government and criminal justice system.

The BPM, for example, had no organisational affiliation to the American Black Panther Party (BPP), yet it copied both its name and branded its newspapers, the *Black People's News Service* and *Freedom News*, with the BPP's trademark insignia of a black-gloved fist and a leaping panther. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that most people outside the organisation assumed, erroneously, that the BPM was the British branch of the BPP, or at least shared its policies and tactics. British Panthers, however, always knew that there were significant differences. 'I would say that although the BPM in England was keen to follow the developments [of the BPP], at no stage in my view did the BPM think that we should become like a carbon copy of them and, for example, pick up the gun', says former British Black Panther Tony Sinclair. 'We recognised our own situation for what it was and thought we could learn some lessons from them'.⁹⁷ The BPM never actually advocated the use of anything more dangerous than martial arts in self-defence, but this was hard to tell from reading its literature. For example, the masthead on the front page of the March 1970 issue of the *Black People's News Service* interwove slogans from leading African American militants Bobby Seale and Malcolm X in the sentence, 'Black people unite and fight by any means necessary for our liberation ... Seize the time!! The time is now!' and illustrated them with an image of a snarling black panther and two pictures of men giving the Black Power salute.⁹⁸ 'I think it's the name more than anything that drove our scaring the police

⁹⁷ Tony Sinclair, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

⁹⁸ BPM, *Black People's News Service*, March 1970, p. 1. The Bobby Seale quote is 'Seize the time' and the Malcolm X quote, 'By any means necessary'.

in this country', says former British Black Panther Linton Kwesi Johnson.⁹⁹ That statement seems disingenuous until one understands both the deliberate effort made by the Black Panther Movement to link its public image with its more radical, armed American counterpart, and its lack of a strategic plan actually to pose any physical threat to the security of the British state.

Appropriating the American Black Panther Party's insurrectionary rhetoric for less than revolutionary ends was not the sole preserve of the BPM. In 1972, the BLF's newspaper *Grass Roots* reprinted from the BPP newspaper, *The Black Panther*, instructions on how to make a Molotov cocktail.¹⁰⁰ Tony Soares, who stood trial for four separate serious offences as a result of the issue, says it was definitely not part of a considered plan to equip *Grass Roots* readers with the know-how to make bombs for a coming revolution. 'No', he laughs. 'Sometimes they used to struggle to find stuff to put in, which is why that particular thing went in'.¹⁰¹ Of all the Black Power organisations the BLF's literature suggests that it was the most serious about using guerrilla tactics, if only because of its proclaimed total disillusion with white British society. Soares had already spent over a year in prison for advocating violent resistance while a member of the Vietnam Liberation Organisation and had been involved in anti-colonial struggles in Mozambique where he grew up. Looking back, however, he does not rate the BLF's revolutionary potential highly. 'There was a lot of militant rhetoric but I don't think anybody was organised enough to do something', he says. 'There were a few

⁹⁹ Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

¹⁰⁰ BLF, 'Recipes', *Grass Roots*, September 1971, p. 5. During the trial it transpired that the instructions, as printed, did not make a working bomb.

¹⁰¹ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

incidents – certain individuals – where they did throw the odd petrol bomb ... but they were very, very few'.¹⁰²

The BLF, in common with many Black Power groups, actively supported armed revolutionary struggles that had a genuine potential for success, in the form of the guerrilla campaigns of African liberation movements in countries like Guiné-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and Rhodesia. All Black Power newspapers carried reports on the progress of groups like the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), and Black Power activists looking to actively involve themselves in an armed struggle against white oppressors could fulfil this ambition by fundraising for these groups. Although the BLF was the only one of the four major London Black Power groups that openly declared that revolution in Britain was not possible and that therefore its focus was on fomenting revolution in the Third World, in practice the nearest any Black Power organisation in Britain got to armed revolutionary struggle was through expressing solidarity with African freedom fighters.

Sivanandan thought the biggest threat posed by the concept of revolutionary violence was to the Black Power movement itself. 'Very often we were suspicious of two sorts of people', he contends. 'One was Uncle Toms. ... The others were people who had stupid bloody politics, who wanted revolution and said "burn, baby burn" when they couldn't light a fag. And they were dangerous. Those were the sort of people who distracted our organisations – and organisations

¹⁰² Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses collapsed.¹⁰³ Within the Black Power groups the contradiction between their revolutionary aims and non-revolutionary methods led to confusion, frustration and disillusion. 'You see the BLF was trying to put roots down in the community, but many of the youths were impatient', recalled one anonymous former member, 'and we got attacked from all sides. Some were calling us extremists, others were saying we were selling out'.¹⁰⁴

Youthful impatience overtook grassroots political organisation in September 1975 when three black men – Anthony Monroe, Wesley Dick and Frank Davies – attempted an armed robbery on the Spaghetti House restaurant in Knightsbridge, London.¹⁰⁵ When the police arrived on the scene before the robbery had ended, the robbers took eight of the restaurant's employees hostage and during the five-day siege that followed, declared that they were called the Black Liberation Army, had links to the BLF and that the robbery had been politically motivated.¹⁰⁶ After five days, during which none of the hostages were hurt but Frank Davies attempted suicide by shooting himself in the stomach, they surrendered to the police. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Robert Mark insisted that there was no political dimension to the Spaghetti House siege. 'From the outset it was rightly assumed that this was a simple armed robbery that had gone wrong', he wrote in his memoirs, 'any attempts ... to represent it as a political act were received with the derision which they clearly deserved'.¹⁰⁷ Once in custody, however, the three robbers were held under the same conditions as political

¹⁰³ A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

¹⁰⁴ BLF member Ali Hassan (not his real name) quoted in H. O. Nazareth, 'No Simple Robbery', *Time Out*, 23–29 November 1979, p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Details about the robbery referred to in this and the next paragraph are taken from *ibid.*, A. Sivanandan and R. Lofters, 'The Spaghetti House Siege', *Afras Review* 2 (Summer 1976), pp. 28–33 and R. Mark, *In The Office of Constable* (London, 1978).

¹⁰⁶ The robbery took place on 28 September and the siege lasted until the early morning of 3 October 1975. Two hostages were released before the end of the siege.

¹⁰⁷ R. Mark, *In The Office*, p. 188.

prisoners. Inspired by IRA members they met on remand, Monroe, Dick and Davies refused to recognise the court. Having offered no defence, they received respective sentences of seventeen, eighteen and twenty-one years' imprisonment.

The BLF tried to make political capital out of the siege by refusing to confirm or deny that the three robbers were members. A BLF press statement released just after the siege declared that, 'These three men were fighting to make white society realise that they can't push Black people around too often any more', but in private many activists thought their methods were misguided.¹⁰⁸ 'It may have been a bit stupid', commented an anonymous BLF member who had known the trio. 'They were clearly not prepared and the community also was not ready for it – to support or even understand it'.¹⁰⁹ The British media, public and judiciary simply regarded the trio as common criminals. This assessment was probably correct in the case of Frank Davies, who had only just been released from a previous ten-year sentence for armed robbery, but Wesley Dick had been a volunteer at the IRR and Anthony Monroe had helped to set up a supplementary school in Shepherd's Bush, London in 1973. It is likely that both Dick and Monroe would have used part of their share to fund black community projects and that their justification for getting involved in an uncharacteristically criminal act stemmed from their political beliefs about why they, as young black men, were at the bottom of the social and economic heap. Ultimately, though, they had taken part in the robbery more out of frustration rather than as part of a conscious political programme.

In the final analysis, most black people in Britain were not interested in Black Power. '[M]ost black individuals that I met, who were not members of the

¹⁰⁸ Untitled, undated BLF press release, p. 1. Held in the Spaghetti House siege file at the IRR.

¹⁰⁹ Nazareth, 'Robbery', p. 27.

radical groups, thought that there was no real Black Power movement in London and dismissed the whole thing as a "politicised hustle", contemporary researcher Susan Craig damningly concluded.¹¹⁰ At the time she was writing, almost all black people in Britain were first-generation immigrants. Large-scale West Indian and Asian immigration to Britain had only started twelve years before the Black Power movement began, so the second generation of British-born black people that British politicians feared would react violently if they were not treated equally, had not quite yet come of age. Most of Britain's Black Power organisations were peopled by educated, first generation immigrants. Even the younger, working-class activists, like Linton Kwesi Johnson, who joined the Black Panther Movement as a teenager, had come to Britain as young children. Hence the Black Power movement addressed their political concerns, which were more international in outlook and informed by a memory of anti-colonial resistance in the countries from which they had emigrated.

The children of the first generation of the immigrants from the Caribbean, whose British upbringing gave them a more homogeneous cultural identity and increased their identification with African Americans, were influenced by the cultural messages of pride and resistance that the Black Power movement successfully transmitted well beyond its membership, but their struggle was fought against a more entrenched racism and in particular against a police force that viewed young black men with hostility and suspicion. Brought up in socially deprived areas, let down by a structurally racist education system that condemned them – at best – to unskilled, badly paid jobs, and harassed by a rising far right presence on the streets and a hostile police force, the first generation of British-

¹¹⁰ S. Craig, 'Black Power groups in London, 1967–1969', unpublished BSc thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1970, p. 6.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

born black people faced what seemed a more monolithic racism than their parents. 'The second generation didn't have a double consciousness, their culture was wholly British', says Sivanandan. 'So whereas we struggled for equality and anti-discrimination and anti-racism, against trade unions and education and bussing of children, housing etcetera, these kids said "burn, baby burn", because they had nothing'.¹¹¹ 'I think [Black Power] radicalised a section of young people and changed their perception', explains Tony Soares, 'but by then they had an entirely different problem'.¹¹² Neither Black Power's successful assertion that there was nothing inherently wrong with being black, nor the government's passage of a genuinely powerful anti-discrimination legislation in 1976 managed to halt the deterioration of the relationship between the police and black communities. When black youths fought a six-hour street battle against the police at the Notting Hill Carnival in August 1976, it was an indication both of the success of the Black Power movement in having instilled in the next generation a culture of proud resistance that enabled them to take on the police, and of its failure to bring about a society in which they would not have to.

Conclusion

The Black Power movement in Britain can be credited with both significant achievements and failures. Politically, it was a short-lived movement, starting in 1967 and peaking at the start of the 1970s. Although at least two of the main London Black Power groups continued to exist well into the 1990s, after the mid-1970s there was no longer much of a Black Power 'movement'. At times far too reliant on American Black Power for direction, British Black Power groups started

¹¹¹ A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

¹¹² Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

off unfocused and poorly led and evolved into doctrinally rigid organisations that had no chance of building a broad following. Furthermore, the socialist revolution that almost all Black Power groups stated was their ultimate aim was no further advanced by 1976 than in 1967, and disagreement over how to bring it about split some groups and distracted others from their fight against racism. The use of violent rhetoric by Black Power members and in their groups' literature was a tactical error. It handed the state a justification for using heavy-handed policing methods and severe legal sanctions against them, alienated potential white allies and confused members who grew frustrated and disillusioned when their revolutionary goals did not move any closer.

On the other hand, Black Power had a lasting cultural impact on Britain's black communities and the way race relations was discussed in Britain. It helped to bring about a radical change in the race relations industry and created an inclusive 'black' political identity that was capable of temporarily bridging the differences between diverse communities when unity was needed on specific issues. Although groups continued to define themselves and organise on the basis of their nationality, religion, geographical location, age or relationship with the police, they could also make use of the wider category of black when it imparted strength to their campaigns. The movement's central messages of black pride and agency contributed to more people becoming involved in both politics and community organising, especially in the fields of education and housing. Although the Black Power movement was small, its members' militant refusal to accept second place in British society changed the paradigm of black protest. It proved to be a watershed between past groups, which had struggled against colonialism abroad

Chapter 3: 'A revolutionary conspiracy'? Black Power's strengths and weaknesses

and petitioned the government for equality in Britain, and future organisations, which learned to use the power of their communities to push for their rights.

CHAPTER 4

Counter-insurgency and community funding: the state response

Introduction

The British state took a carrot and stick approach to dealing with the Black Power activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The police and the criminal justice system were used consistently and effectively to harass and disrupt Black Power groups and their leaders. Although it stopped short of a British COINTELPRO (the FBI's domestic counter-insurgency programme that was pursued with lethal effect against the American Black Panther Party), Black Power activists and groups were kept under constant surveillance, often infiltrated and regularly raided and arrested by the Special Branch. This resulted in a series of high profile trials such as those of Michael X in November 1967, the Mangrove Nine in October 1971 and Tony Soares of the Black Liberation Front (BLF) in March 1973. To minimise the propaganda value of prosecutions of Black Power activists, however, there seems to have been an unwritten government policy of using the courts to inconvenience and intimidate Black Power groups but not to send their members to gaol. The government had learned a sharp lesson from its heavy-handed treatment of Michael X, who was sentenced to a year's imprisonment for inciting racial hatred and was released in 1968 more famous and influential than before. After that, Black Power activists usually spent months on remand awaiting trial for offences that, upon conviction, rarely resulted in custodial sentences. The most effective punishment in terms of social control was the suspended custodial sentence, which meant that the convicted person was left with the threat of prison hanging over their head should they be arrested again.

At the same time, the government sought to tackle the wider problem of black disaffection – exemplified most vividly by the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the police and young British-born West Indians – through legislation and generous funding of social, cultural and welfare organisations in the deprived inner-city areas where most black people lived.¹ The Urban Programme, inaugurated in October 1968, was clearly influenced by American President Lyndon Baines Johnson's Great Society programmes, particularly the Economic Opportunity Act of 1965 and its Community Action Programs (CAPs). Britain had learned from Johnson's mistakes, however, and the various Urban Programmes were much more closely monitored than the early CAP schemes, which had resulted in federal money being used to fund political groups and even buy guns. The British Urban Programme channelled national and local government money directly to community groups, but they had to work within the guidelines of their funders. This significantly altered the nature of black community organising, which had previously been independent and spearheaded by Black Power groups in many of the poorest black communities. To tackle the ongoing problem of racial discrimination, successive Labour governments also passed two more Race Relations Acts in 1968 and 1976. Although the 1968 act was little improvement on its piecemeal and weakly enforced 1965 predecessor, the 1976 act was a much more comprehensive and hard-hitting law that acknowledged the principle of indirect racial discrimination and vested a new body, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), with the power to investigate potential discriminatory practices, even where no complaint had been made.

¹ Although the British-born children of West Indian immigrants were Britons, the thesis will continue to refer to them as West Indians, as this is how many continued to describe themselves.

The British state took the Black Power movement very seriously, both at home and abroad. In the five years after December 1965, when inciting racial hatred was made a criminal offence, over a third of the people prosecuted for it were Black Power activists. Although the numbers were small – only thirteen people were tried in total, five of whom were Black Power activists – this was still a disproportionately high figure both compared to the percentage of black people in the general population and the percentage of black members of radical organisations. For those prominent in the British Black Power movement, raids on their homes and organisational headquarters and arrests and court appearances for a range of alleged offences were an almost unavoidable part of life. All the known Black Power leaders, including Michael X, Roy Sawh, Obi Egbuna, Tony Soares, Darcus Howe and Althea Lecointe, were prosecuted at least once for actions related to their political activities. Abroad, the progress of Black Power in America, Africa and the Caribbean was closely monitored by the British state. Documents from the British Prime Minister's office show that Britain helped the Bermudan government to search for legal grounds on which to ban a Black Power conference on the island in July 1969. Unable to prevent it, Britain sent Special Branch officers to attend the conference undercover, while a Royal Navy ship full of marines was redirected to anchor off the Bermudan coast during the conference weekend under the guise of a training exercise, in case a military intervention was required.² Having barred Stokely Carmichael from returning to Britain in July 1967, the British government used its influence to dissuade the state-owned British

² See PREM13/2885: 'Bermuda: Black Power conference, July 10–13, 1969' and FCO44/195: "'Black Power" political activities 1969', both held in the National Archive (NA).

Overseas Airways Corporation from flying him from Trinidad to Bermuda to attend the same conference.³

The state treated the Black Power movement in Britain as highly dangerous because it believed it encouraged discontent among the already disaffected generation of black people who had been born or brought up from an early age in Britain. From the mid-1960s onwards, politicians had been worrying about how the children of the first wave of black immigrants, who were effectively British in outlook and upbringing, would react to being treated as second-class citizens. Furthermore, two reports published in 1967 persuaded MPs, academics and the press that British race relations might be more analogous to those in the United States than they had previously thought. The government-commissioned Political and Economic Planning (PEP) report on racial discrimination, published in April, concluded that racial discrimination not only existed in Britain but that it was actually worse than non-white immigrants perceived it to be.⁴ It was followed in October 1967 by the *Street Report*, a legal survey of anti-discrimination laws in other countries that recommended that parliament follow the American model as the basis for future legislation.⁵ At the same time as they were looking across the Atlantic for policy inspiration, politicians also noted the hugely destructive riots that were taking place there. The millions of dollars of damage to the Watts district of Los Angeles in August 1965 and Detroit in July 1967 made them increasingly worried that the same level of disorder might engulf Britain's cities. By the summer of 1967 the newspapers were full of articles written by race relations

³ For details of communication between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and BOAC see PREM13/2885: 'Bermuda: Black Power conference, July 10–13, 1969', held in the NA.

⁴ Political and Economic Planning (PEP), *Racial Discrimination in Britain* (London, 1967).

⁵ H. Street, G. Howe and G. Bindman, *Anti-Discrimination Legislation: the Street Report* (London, 1967).

academics debating whether race riots might take place in Britain.⁶ The likelihood of the American nightmare becoming a British reality seemed to increase between the late 1960s and early 1970s as Britain's economy entered a vertiginous decline, bringing with it increased social and class tensions, crime and racial intolerance, the latter expertly whipped up by Enoch Powell and the increasingly active National Front. The descent of Northern Ireland into virtual civil war during the early 1970s showed that British society was not immune from bloody sectarian division and the IRA's campaign of mainland bombings made domestic terrorism a very real fear.

The antagonism between the police and young black men was such an openly acknowledged social problem by the start of the 1970s that Edward Heath's Conservative government instigated a select committee investigation of police-'immigrant' relations. Its findings were published in 1972, with the government making an official response the following year.⁷ Although both the report and the government's response conceded failings in some police procedures, neither acknowledged the existence of structural racism in the police force, nor the corrosive effect on race relations of the 1971 Immigration Act, which gave the police new responsibilities and powers to search for illegal immigrants. This had a particularly negative impact on the relationship between the police and Asian communities, which were the main targets of immigration raids. The sustained strikes of Asian workers over working conditions and workplace discrimination also contributed to a sense of social unrest.

⁶ A representative example was a *Sunday Times* article from 30 July 1967, by lawyer and race relations expert Anthony Lester, titled 'Why it shouldn't happen here'.

⁷ *Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, Session 1971-1972, Police/Immigrant Relations, Volume I, Report* (London: HMSO, 1972) and *Police/Immigrant Relations in England and Wales: Observations on the Report of the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration*. (London: HMSO, 1973).

As well as these external factors, within Westminster a range of political and legal pressures combined to create the impetus for the 1976 Race Relations Act. A series of PEP reports showed that the 1968 Race Relations Act had had very little impact on racial discrimination. The passage of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 also meant that the racial and sexual discrimination laws were out of step, with racial discrimination clearly the weaker partner. The scope and strength of the 1976 Race Relations Act, which came into force on 1 January 1977, threw the half-heartedness of its predecessors into sharp relief. The act heralded a new willingness to confront the problems of structural racism rather than individual prejudice and showed that the government had at least begun to recognise the seriousness of the consequences of racial discrimination.⁸

The Urban Programme

Britain's Urban Programme, which ran from 1968 until the 1980s, owed a lot to the Great Society programmes of Lyndon Johnson and those of his successor Richard Nixon. Prior to the Urban Programme's introduction in 1968, a number of government-employed race relations workers were sent to America to study its anti-poverty programmes. Although, like Johnson, the British government denied the link between colour and poverty, the Urban Programme was clearly and at times explicitly directed at areas with high percentages of black residents. Having learned a lesson from the American government's difficulty in controlling how its CAP funding was deployed, the British government was quite successful in bringing many previously independent radical black groups under the aegis of the state through generous but closely monitored funding agreements. Many Black

⁸ *Racial Discrimination* (London: HMSO, 1975).

Power activists regarded the Urban Programme as a form of bribery, while others were prepared to downplay their politics in order to receive funding for the social programmes they were struggling to run.

The Urban Programme was first mooted by Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson during a speech on race relations in Birmingham on 5 May 1968. Put into action five months later, it was originally designed to last for four years, but was extended by the 1969 Local Government (Social Need) Act to last until 1976.⁹ The Home Office administered the Programme's overall budget of £55 million, disbursing it in stages to a series of mini-programmes aimed at different areas of need. Announcing the outline of the first in July 1968, Home Secretary James Callaghan tried to play down the link Wilson had made in his Birmingham speech between social deprivation and high levels of immigrant settlement, insisting, as Lyndon Johnson had in relation to America's Great Society programmes, that the government's scheme was colour-blind.¹⁰ One of the two criteria the Home Office used to judge which areas were in urgent social need during the initial stages of the Urban Programme, however, was whether more than 6 per cent of school places were occupied by immigrant children.¹¹ Using the presence of immigrants as an index of urban deprivation was not a new thing: under the Local Government Act of 1966 extra funding was already being provided to fifty-seven needy local authorities selected partly because immigrants constituted more than two per cent of their populations. Furthermore, although the first phases of the programme focused on the theoretically colour-blind issues of provision of nursery education,

⁹ It is not clear when the Urban Programme's lifespan was extended again, but Dilip Hiro refers to Urban Programme funding being disbursed in 1981 in D. Hiro, *Black British, White British: a History of Race Relations in Britain* (London, 1992), pp. 243–4.

¹⁰ See the round-up of news commentary on Callaghan's speech in the *Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (July 1968), p. 271.

¹¹ The other was the level of homelessness.

child-care, housing and services for the homeless, phase twelve – implemented in the mid-1970s – was exclusively aimed at funding independent black self-help groups.¹²

However much Callaghan tried to persuade his fellow MPs that the Urban Programme was about poverty not colour, the legislation was clearly aimed at countering the impact of the combination of the two. Sociologists Gideon Ben-Tovim and John Gabriel made this point in their persuasive analysis of the impact of government initiatives on radical black politics in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. ‘Evidence does suggest’, they argued, ‘that the [Urban] programme can only be understood against the debate about Commonwealth immigration and race and was devised as an attempt to defuse a potentially explosive situation’.¹³ While it is correct to identify the post-war influx of black immigrants as a source of great concern to the British government in the 1960s, it was the spectre of repeated race riots in America that led it to fear the situation might become ‘explosive’ in the second half of the decade. The British government followed America’s lead in believing that tackling inner-city social deprivation was a vital step in preventing ethnic ghettos developing in its cities. ‘The next generation who will not be immigrants but coloured Britons ... will expect full opportunities to deploy their skills’, said Home Secretary Roy Jenkins in 1967. ‘If we frustrate those expectations we shall ... creat[e] an American type situation’.¹⁴

¹² For more information on the specific details of the Urban Programme see E. J. B. Rose et al, *Colour and Citizenship: a Report on British Race Relations* (London, 1969), pp. 621–3 and G. Ben-Tovim and J. Gabriel, ‘The politics of race in Britain, 1962–79: a review of the major trends and of recent debates’ in C. Husband (ed.), *Race in Britain: Continuity and Change* (London, 1982), pp. 156–8, and R. Holman, ‘The Urban Programme’, *Venture* 23:1 (January 1971), pp. 11–14.

¹³ G. Ben-Tovim and J. Gabriel, *ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁴ Roy Jenkins’ 30 July 1967 speech on race relations is quoted in J. Solomos, *Black Youth, Racism and the State: the Politics of Ideology and Policy* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 83.

The British government, perhaps unsurprisingly, also looked to America for the solutions to the social problems it was witnessing there. Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programmes were studied by a number of government-employed race relations experts during a series of state-funded fact-finding trips to America. The general secretary of the National Commission for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI), Nadine Peppard, reported back from her month-long trip in 1966 that, 'Whatever its faults ... there are lessons to be derived from the Anti-Poverty Programme for Britain'.¹⁵ She was particularly keen that Britain should follow America's lead by taking 'an imaginative approach to the administration of funds'.¹⁶ Another lengthy fact-finding trip was undertaken the following year by Mark Bonham-Carter, the head of the Race Relations Board and in 1969 Dipak Nandy, director of the government's closest independent race relations advisors, the Runnymede Trust, reported back enthusiastically on President Nixon's attempts to get small businesses involved in the regeneration of poor African American areas. Americans were invited to bring their expertise to Britain too. In July 1967 Roger W. Wilkins, director of America's Community Relations Service, a conciliatory body set up under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, spent two days briefing the Home Secretary, various MPs and police representatives in London on how America was dealing with urban poverty in the ghettos.¹⁷

Taking its lead from the most successful Great Society initiative, the Head Start pre-school programme, the Urban Programme's initial focus was on the provision of nursery education. The British government also introduced its own

¹⁵ NCCI, 'Report of the General Secretary's visit to the USA October 12th to November 4th and November 13th to 19th 1966', p. 6, held in NCCI file at the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ See NCCI/67/50: 'Revised programme of the visit of Mr Roger Wilkins, Director of the community Relations Service, U S A, Thursday 6 July to Thursday 13 July 1967'. Document held in the NCCI file at the IRR.

version of America's CAPs, a less successful initiative to help poor communities help themselves by setting up local anti-poverty boards that gave local people real control over how funding was spent in their area. This concept was known as 'maximum feasible participation' of the poor and in many cases rapidly led to corruption and/or radicalisation. British politicians were quick to learn from the mistakes of the early CAPs: Urban Programme funding in Britain was much more tightly controlled and its recipients more carefully vetted than the American groups that had received CAP money in the mid-1960s. The concept of 'maximum feasible participation', central to the philosophy of the early CAPs but quietly dropped by the end of 1966, was also never a factor in Britain's Urban Programme. Furthermore, affirmative action and the idea of ethnic monitoring were still anathema to British leaders in the early 1970s and so were not included in government policies.

In order to obtain Urban Programme grants local councils had to apply to the government. Initially, funding applications were only accepted from thirty-four councils identified by the government as being in areas of special social need and the money they received could be spent directly by them. After phase two, all councils were eligible to apply, but on behalf of local community groups whose projects they had vetted and decided to support. Groups were, therefore, only likely to receive Urban Programme money if they proposed initiatives which fitted in with their local council's strategic aims and were run by people sympathetic to its political goals. This was partly justified by the fact that each council was obliged to provide 25 per cent of successful grant bids from local funds. Many former Black Power activists, nevertheless, blamed the targeting of black community groups for Urban Programme funding during the mid-1970s for stymieing the development of

a radical independent black political movement. 'The government started a lot of programmes that were intended to buy out the leadership. By the early 1970s it became all grants and Urban Aid [sic]', argues Tony Soares. 'A lot of money was going in, employing people, channelling them into community work and taking them away from political work. They all got caught up in some kind of project or the other because there was money on a scale they'd never seen before'.¹⁸ A Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) document from 1974 voiced similar suspicions about the motivation behind expensive government initiatives like the Urban Programme. 'Blacks organising themselves outside the state framework ... represented a threat to the state', it postulated. 'The alternatives which the state offered were plush offices, staff salaries [and] to discuss the problems and strategies in compliance with the state and its laws: within the state structure'.¹⁹ Sivanandan agrees: 'They bought off everybody except [Harambee-founder Brother] Herman with Urban Aid', he says. 'Even Herman took the money – he just thought he could tell them what to do with it'.²⁰

Sociology professor John Solomos viewed the Urban Programme as disastrous for independent black political organising. In a 1977 paper on 'Black militancy and class conflict', he described Urban Programme funding as more damaging than police harassment. 'Still worse', he wrote, 'a self-help programme for Black groups was financed which could only have the effect of castrating the groups who took the money'.²¹ Self-help had always been a key tenet of Black Power philosophy and community work was a central feature of Black Power

¹⁸ Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

¹⁹ BUFP, 'What Is The B.U.F.P. [sic]', 3 May 1974, p. 24. Unpublished document, held, unfiled, at the IRR.

²⁰ A. Sivanandan, interviewed by the author, 28 June 2004.

²¹ J. Rex, 'Black militancy and class conflict', July 1977, p. 22. Unpublished paper held, unfiled, at the IRR.

groups' activities. In London, for example, the BLF ran the Headstart nursery, a Sunday supplementary school, a 'black community legal advice service and the Black Berets youth club; the BUFP ran annual South East Summer Schools; the UCPA's Ajoy Ghose and his wife ran the Malcolm X Montessori school; RAAS's headquarters, The Black House, also functioned as a hostel for homeless youths; and the BPM provided free legal advice (and sometimes representation) to black youths who had been arrested or were having problems with their landlords or employers. Elsewhere in the country, in Manchester, Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement leader Gus John helped set up the George Jackson Trust which provided hostel accommodation, education and employment training for black youths, and in 1970 the West Indian United Association set up the Nello James centre which provided legal services and education courses. In Birmingham the African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation (ACSHO), whose newspaper, *Harambee Black Unity*, sported a black gloved fist, ran a supplementary school and welfare advice service.²²

When the Urban Programme chose to single out black self-help groups for funding, therefore, many of the groups it was targeting had close associations with Black Power. As local authorities and the Home Office were, understandably, not prepared to allocate funding to groups with political objectives, Black Power groups and activists had then to make a tough choice. Although their work in the community was in many respects an end in itself, it also helped Black Power groups establish a rapport with local people and introduce them to their political philosophy. This vital link had to be broken in order to receive Urban Programme

²² For information on the Nello James centre, see *Manchester Evening News*, 28 December 1971, p. 5. Nello was the nickname of CLR James. For the activities of ASCHO see reports in *Harambee Black Unity*, undated, held, unfiled, at the IRR. ASCHO was independent of Brother Herman's London Harambee Project.

funding. On the other hand, Black Power community initiatives were chronically under-funded and Urban Programme grants, which could run into hundreds of thousands of pounds, were extremely useful. In 1975, for example, Harambee and The Melting Pot Foundation in London and the George Jackson Housing Trust in Manchester, all community projects run by former Black Power activists, received Urban Programme grants of £281,000, £51,000 and £32,000 respectively – more money than they could possibly have raised independently.²³ The existence of the Urban Programme forced Black Power activists to choose between the political and the practical objectives of community work. Virtually everyone chose to be pragmatic.

If the strategic aim of the Urban Programme was to separate the practical work of the Black Power movement from its ideological base and bring it into the orbit of the state, it was indeed successful. The Black Power movement was split by the question of whether government money could be used to achieve radical objectives. Those who took money or accepted jobs were denounced as sell-outs, those who did not found their financial and political independence came at the price of influence and effectiveness. Brother Herman Edwards, a former member of the Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS) who founded a hostel for homeless young black ex-convicts at the start of the 1970s, was deeply embittered by his encounter with the Urban Programme. Having refused on principle to take government money for many years, he eventually accepted a grant – but refused to follow the rules on how it should be spent and accounted for. As a result, in the mid-1970s, he served several short prison sentences for embezzlement. Edwards

²³ Figures from *Urban Programme Circulars, No.s 11 and 12* (London: HMSO, 1975) quoted in Sivanandan, 'Race, class and the state: the black experience in Britain', *Race & Class* 17:4 (1976), p. 364.

ultimately came to see the Urban Programme as ‘The biggest con trick of this century’.²⁴ ‘Julius Nyerere that brilliant thinker said “aid from the west is like a rope around your neck”’, Herman wrote. ‘The west bring [sic] that same filthy dirty trickery and now calls it urban aid [sic]’.²⁵

Black Power and the criminal justice system

Between 1967 and the mid-1970s the British state used the criminal justice system to inhibit the Black Power movement. The new criminal offence of ‘incitement to racial hatred’, introduced by the 1965 Race Relations Act, was, ironically, one of the first legal weapons it used. Although the state viewed Black Power as the mirror image of white supremacy, Black Power activists were, in fact, treated less sympathetically in court than white supremacists. These black defendants and their organisations, however, quickly realised the propaganda value of being sent to prison for their political beliefs. To minimise this, the state developed an unwritten policy of handing down non-custodial sentences to Black Power activists in politically sensitive trials, even though many were denied bail prior to appearing in court.

The criminal offence of incitement to racial hatred was introduced by the 1965 Race Relations Act and left in place by the 1968 Race Relations Act. Prosecutions for inciting racial hatred could only be instigated by the Attorney-General and carried a maximum penalty of two years’ imprisonment and a fine of £1,000. Although part of an act designed to lessen racial discrimination, nearly 50 per cent of the defendants in incitement to racial hatred trials were black. The

²⁴ H. Edwards, ‘Loyalty and Duty’, undated speech transcript held in the Harambee file at the IRR, p. 6.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

Chapter 4: Counter-insurgency and community funding: the state response

incitement clause was, however, rarely used. In the almost three years between the passage of the first and second Race Relations Acts, the Attorney-General, Elwyn Jones, authorised only six trials of thirteen men. Two of these concerned five Black Power activists. A further proposed prosecution for incitement – against American Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael for speeches he had made in London in July 1967 – was shelved when the Home Secretary banned him from returning to Britain instead. The new criminal penalty set out by Britain's first law against racial discrimination was therefore being used against black people almost as often as it was against whites.

The reason for this was that, when deciding whether to prosecute, the Attorney-General assumed a level playing field between Black Power activists, seasoned fascist and neo-Nazi agitators and far-right MPs like Enoch Powell, Cyril Osborne and Duncan Sandys. This led him to treat the blood-curdling rhetorical excesses of anonymous Black Power advocates in front of small audiences at Speaker's Corner as more threatening to public order than the more soberly worded anti-immigrant statements of MPs like Enoch Powell and Duncan Sandys which routinely filled the national newspapers. Furthermore, because the Attorney-General, all judges and magistrates and the overwhelming majority of jury members were white and middle-class (property ownership was a condition of jury service until 1972), they rarely perceived the difference in impact between the racism of white majority society and the reactive verbal abuse of a few hundred Black Power activists. A July 1967 article from *The Sun* newspaper, for example, while deploring the extremism of speeches by both Duncan Sandys MP and Michael X, nonetheless concluded that, 'Black intolerance is no more acceptable

than white ... it is apartheid in reverse'.²⁶ This comparison was reiterated in parliament shortly afterwards by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, David Ennals, when he declared in October 1967 that 'Black Power in Britain and white supremacy elsewhere is out of tune with the times'.²⁷ To politicians and the media during the late 1960s and early 1970s, drawing parallels between the totalitarian apartheid regime of South Africa and an unarmed clique of Black Power activists in Britain seemed reasonable.

Black Power activists used insulting, threatening and abusive language for a variety of reasons: to make up for their lack of numerical and organisational strength, to grab their audiences' attention, to emphasise the seriousness of their grievances and sometimes just to entertain. But the Attorney-General seems to have taken statements by Black Power activists literally. Therefore, when police reported statements such as, 'I would like to see all English people die', 'We must act like the white man thinks a human being acts, that is by killing and murdering' and 'The whites have used guns and power and we shall do the same', he decided it was in the public interest to prosecute.²⁸ MPs like Duncan Sandys and Enoch Powell, on the other hand, as well as extreme-right groups like the Racial Preservation Society (RPS) and the British National Socialist Movement (BNSM) could discourse at length about the threat to white society from disease-carrying immigrants with atavistic cultures, and the undesirability of miscegenation, with little fear of being prosecuted.

²⁶ The quotation from an article in *The Sun* on 26 July 1967 is included in *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (September 1967), p. 336.

²⁷ David Ennals' speech in Wolverhampton on 9 October 1967 is reported in *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (December 1967), p. 417.

²⁸ These three quotes are taken from police transcripts of speeches at Speaker's Corner by Alton Watson, Roy Sawh and Ajoy Ghose respectively. See DPP2/4428: 'Alton Watson, Roy Sawh, Ajoy Shankar Ghose, Michael Ezekiel, RAAS and UCPA, 23–24 August 1967', held at the NA.

This was especially true if they obeyed the letter, although not the spirit, of the Race Relations Act and were a person of high social standing. The Attorney-General often seemed loath to ascribe ill motives to well-heeled white people when they made inflammatory racist statements. Furthermore, as the ‘problem’ of coloured immigration was a legitimate topic of discussion for white Britons, discussing it – even in very hostile terms – was not interpreted as encouraging hatred of black people. ‘Since the underlying assumptions of most racialists are firmly enshrined in the Immigration Act of 1971’, barrister Ian Macdonald commented acidly in 1977, ‘all kinds of racist propaganda can be dressed up as proposals for the amendment of that Act’.²⁹ This meant that despite repeated calls for Powell and Sandys to be prosecuted for incitement to racial hatred, neither was taken to court. In July 1967, for example, Sandys was reported to the Attorney-General because of a nationally-reported speech in which he called for government-funded repatriation and a complete ban on non-white immigration. At the heart of his argument was a fear of miscegenation. ‘The Government has just published a report which urges us to accept a large increase in mixed marriages as an essential element in “our declared policy of integration”’, he erroneously stated. ‘The breeding of millions of half-caste children would merely produce a generation of misfits and create increased tensions’.³⁰ There were also numerous demands for Enoch Powell to be prosecuted after his infamous ‘Rivers of blood’ speech on 20 April 1968. Even Conservative leader Edward Heath described the speech as

²⁹ I. Macdonald, *Race Relations – The New Law* (London, 1977), p. 139.

³⁰ Quote reported in *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (June/July 1967), p. 246. The Attorney-General announced his decision on 21 September 1967 that Duncan Sandys would not face prosecution.

‘racialist in tone and liable to exacerbate racial tensions’, but the Attorney-General still did not find it in the public interest to prosecute.³¹

Successful prosecution for incitement to racial hatred rested on convincing the jury of three factors: that the defendants had used insulting language, that they had done so with the intent of stirring up hatred against a group on the grounds of its colour or nationality and that their actions were likely to have this effect. Once in the dock, the conviction rate for black defendants was 100 per cent – double that for whites. The fact that all the black defendants decided to represent themselves in court may have been partly responsible for their higher conviction rate. (Although, as evidence from the next section will show, defending oneself was not necessarily foolhardy if one were a Black Power activist.) It was also the case that all the black defendants had talked about white people in openly violent terms, whereas white supremacists tended to use coded language, allowing them to argue it had not been their intention to insult. The Institute of Race Relations drew attention to this loophole in *Colour and Citizenship*. ‘Section 6 will lead to the prosecution and conviction of those who use crude, flamboyant, vulgar speech’, noted its authors, ‘but it will not touch those who express highly prejudicial opinions in a more sophisticated style’.³² Even after taking these factors into account, however, it seems clear that juries and judges had different standards for black and white defendants. In *R v. Hancock*, the March 1968 trial of four Racial Preservation Society (RPS) members for publishing a racist magazine called *Southern News*, the defence successfully argued that *Southern News* could not have been intended to be offensive to black people because it was predominantly distributed in East

³¹ Heath said this when dismissing Powell from the shadow cabinet on 28 April 1968. His speech was reported in *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (April/May 1968), p. 157. The Attorney-General announced on 2 May 1968 that Powell would not face prosecution.

³² E.J.B. Rose et al, *Colour and Citizenship: a Report on British Race Relations* (London, 1969), p. 688.

Grinstead where there was a tiny black population. In the November 1967 trial of Michael X, however, the fact that the speech for which he was being prosecuted had been delivered in a privately rented hall in front of a small audience of Black Power supporters did not stop him being convicted.

While juries had little time for Black Power activists' argument that their anti-white sentiments should be assessed in the context of an exploited minority group living in a hostile, racist country, they were often prepared to dismiss aggressive white racism as an ill-judged but essentially benign overstatement of the accepted truth that black people presented a social problem for Britain. An American academic who sat in on the trial of the four members of the RPS in March 1968 was shocked by the level of racist propagandising disguised as legal argument allowed by the judge. 'I can say that the general mood of the trial descended to a racialist level which for an American was reminiscent of "compone" invective in a trial in Mississippi in the 1940s', wrote Professor Richard P. Longaker in a report for the IRR.³³

Such notions as miscegenation, the purity of the races, dominance of coloureds in schools, the crime rate, and the inherent genetic inferiority of those non-Caucasian Anglo races were put forward to the middle class jury and no doubt the judge ... The defence also read strong words from the *Daily Express* on immigration and said that his clients, although more hard-hitting, were engaged in the same enterprise of public education on the issue.³⁴

The fact was that the Racial Preservation Society's vicious scaremongering about non-white people coming to Britain could plausibly be argued to fall within the parameters of the respectable debate on immigration. Its contention that the best number of non-white immigrants to Britain was zero was just an extreme extension

³³ 'Memorandum for Mr E. J. B. Rose on the Racial Incitement Trial, Lewes Assizes, Sussex, March 25-28, 1968', written by Richard P. Longaker, professor of political science, University of California, 3 April 1968, p. 2. Document held, unfiled, at the IRR.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

of the 'numbers game' argument used by academics and politicians. A month before the RPS trial began, for example, parliament had voted overwhelmingly to approve an immigration act that was clearly designed to stop British Asians living in East Africa from exercising their right to live in Britain. Within the context of Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s, where there was a political consensus that non-white immigration was undesirable, it was much harder to prove incitement to racial hatred in cases with white defendants than with black.

Prosecutions under section six of the 1965 Race Relations Act, only a trickle in the late 1960s, dried up completely in the 1970s. The ineffectiveness of the law in preventing anything but the most explicit racial hate-mongering had been noted in a select committee inquiry published in 1972, which concluded that 'Section 6 of the Race Relations Act 1965 should either be repealed or occasionally be brought to bear against publications and speeches manifestly seeking to stir up racial hatred'.³⁵ The government response, published as a White Paper in October 1973, declined to follow either recommendation. Describing section six as 'unobjectionable', it ascribed the paucity of prosecutions to the success of the law's deterrent effect and asserted that 'The Attorney-General would not hesitate to prosecute or give his consent to a prosecution if he believed that it would be in the public interest to do so'.³⁶

One of the reasons the Attorney-General may have been so reluctant to initiate incitement prosecutions, even of Black Power activists, was the high volume of publicity that such trials attracted. The trial of Michael X in 1967 (*R v. Malik*) was a case in point and generated an enormous amount of publicity for the

³⁵ *Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, Session 1971-1972, Police/Immigrant Relations, Volume 1, Report* (London: HMSO, 1972), p. 23.

³⁶ *Police/Immigrant Relations in England and Wales: Observations on the Report of the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration* (London, HMSO, 1973), p. 8.

Black Power movement. Michael X was indicted in September 1967 for a speech he had given in Reading on 24 July in which he had said, 'Whites ... are vicious and nasty people. ... If ever you see a white man lay his hands on a black woman kill him instantly'.³⁷ Pleading not guilty, Michael X conducted his own defence, giving him plenty of opportunity to put forward his views in front of an eager press. The newspaper coverage actually became part of the story in October, when the trial had to be abandoned after *The Sunday Times* published an unfavourably captioned picture of Michael X that the judge decided was prejudicial.³⁸ A two-day retrial at the start of November, however, resulted in his conviction and a one-year gaol sentence and after a failed appeal on 21 December Michael X was sent to prison. The extended trial process had produced three months of intense publicity for Michael X and his organisation RAAS, as the press debated the nature of Black Power and his role in it. The severity of his sentence made Michael X an instant martyr to the Black Power cause. It went a long way towards resuscitating his reputation among those in the black community who had previously doubted the sincerity of his commitment to radical black politics and evoked sympathy among white advocates of civil liberties and freedom of speech. Even his strongest detractors believed that 'Michael's sentence was harsh considering that Roy Sawh and three other blacks had merely been fined ... a week earlier for saying much the same things'.³⁹ It was the last time a Black Power activist would have to serve a custodial sentence for a political act.

In December 1968, former UCPA leader and BPM founder Obi Egbuna was convicted of 'conspiracy to utter a writing threatening to murder' because of a

³⁷ Excerpts from Michael X's Reading speech were reported in *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (June/July 1967), p. 246.

³⁸ Thomson Newspapers Ltd, which owned *The Sunday Times*, was eventually fined £5,000 for contempt of court.

³⁹ D. Humphry and D. Tindall, *False Messiah: the Story of Michael X* (London, 1977), p. 50.

pamphlet he had written. The only prison time he endured, however, was the four months he and co-defendants Peter Martin and Gideon Dolo spent on remand.⁴⁰ Egbuna, who had been under police surveillance for some time, was portrayed in the written police evidence to the court as the violent leader of an aspiring terrorist organisation. Yet, despite being convicted of conspiracy to incite murder, his sentence of one year's imprisonment was suspended for three years. (Dolo was eventually acquitted and Martin was fined £50 for his part in the conspiracy.) The state's goal of disrupting the BPM without providing it with any martyrs was adequately served by holding Egbuna and Martin on remand for four months but not sending them to gaol once convicted. 'The arrest of Egbuna and Martin has, at this stage anyway, put the [Black Panther] party in confusion and it is not likely to resurrect for many months to come', noted Detective Chief Inspector Kenneth Thompson in a memorandum commending the officers who had worked on Egbuna's case.⁴¹

Despite a policy of not sending convicted Black Power activists to prison, the government still ran the risk of giving Black Power groups publicity and reinforcing their members' sense of injustice. Linton Kwesi Johnson believes the legal harassment the BPM encountered was not entirely destructive. 'Court appearances took up a lot of our time and sapped our energy but it didn't stop us', he recalls. 'In fact it made us more determined and more committed to fight for racial equality and social justice'.⁴² In two famous trials – of the Mangrove Nine

⁴⁰ For further details of the prosecution see MEPO2/11409: 'Benedict Obi Egbuna, Peter Martin and Gideon Ketueni T. Dolo charged with uttering and writing threatening [sic] to kill police officers at Hyde Park, W2', held at the NA.

⁴¹ '203/68/74: Recommendation for commendation or reward from Detective Chief Inspector K. Thompson, January 13, 1969', in MEPO2/11409: 'Benedict Obi Egbuna, Peter Martin and Gideon Ketueni T. Dolo charged with uttering and writing threatening [sic] to kill police officers at Hyde Park, W2', held at the NA.

⁴² Linton Kwesi Johnson, interviewed by the author, 17 September 2004.

in 1971 and of Tony Soares of the BLF in 1973 – articulate black activists chose to defend themselves and in the process attracted a great deal of publicity. They used it to put the structural racism of the state on trial and attract new members to their organisations.

Former BUFP member Harry Goulbourne has written that, ‘In the black communities of London and elsewhere perhaps the single most dramatic event of these years was the trial of the Mangrove Nine in Notting Hill where the police came into direct confrontation with young and articulate black youths’.⁴³ The Mangrove Nine trial lasted for eleven weeks between 5 October and 16 December 1971 and was widely covered by the press in Britain, as well as attracting significant interest abroad. The nine black defendants were charged with riot, affray and assaulting police officers, after a march on 9 August 1970 against police harassment of the Mangrove Café in Notting Hill ended in violence. The police contended that the fighting at the end of the march had been part of a well-organised and pre-planned riot by black agitators. The defendants countered that a disproportionately large and antagonistic police presence had deliberately provoked the marchers.

The Mangrove Nine trial was regarded as political not just because it involved black people protesting against the Metropolitan Police but also because the defendants had been the subjects of police surveillance (and harassment in the case of Frank Critchlow) for a long time because of their Black Power activism. Two days after the march, Home Secretary Reginald Maudling told *The Guardian* that, ‘The Special Branch has had the movement under observation for more than a

⁴³ H. Goulbourne, *Race Relations in Britain Since 1945* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 65.

year. Police now regard Black Power as, at least, worthy of tight surveillance'.⁴⁴ It was not a coincidence that, of the twenty-three people who had been arrested during the march, it was those nine who eventually stood trial. They had been picked out from surveillance photographs taken by an undercover police photographer and some were not even arrested on the march but were picked up weeks afterwards.⁴⁵ Three of the defendants, Althea Lecointe, Radford (Darcus) Howe and Barbara Beese were leading members of the BPM. Another, Frank Critchlow, was the owner of the Mangrove Café, an unofficial community centre and regular meeting place for Black Power activists that the Metropolitan Police had been trying to close down for months. 'The trial was a political trial', wrote Louis Chase of the West Indian Standing Conference, 'and throughout the three defendants who represented themselves made the courtroom an international vehicle for black protest about injustices against the black community by the police'.⁴⁶

It was clear from the start of the Mangrove trial that the jury would have to decide between the Metropolitan Police's depiction of the Mangrove protestors as violent criminal thugs and the defendants' portrayal of the Metropolitan Police as a racist and corrupt force of occupation. Lecointe, Howe and Rhodan Gordon, presenting their case in coordination with lead defence counsel Ian Macdonald, drew on the specific experiences of Black Power activists and the black community in Notting Hill but also made broader parallels between the situation of

⁴⁴ *The Guardian*, 12 August 1970, p. 3.

⁴⁵ One defendant, Rothwell Kentish, was arrested by four policemen at the garage where he worked on 14 October 1970, six weeks after the march. He resisted arrest because the police did not have a warrant in his name and he claimed that he had left the march by the time the clash with the police took place. Subsequently acquitted of all charges during the Mangrove trial, he was, however, separately convicted of assaulting a police officer and carrying offensive weapons (the hammer, welding equipment and wire cutters he had been using at work) – charges resulting from his October 1970 arrest.

⁴⁶ L. Chase, 'What justice for the Mangrove Nine?' *Race Today* 4:2 (February 1972), p. 39.

the Mangrove defendants and African American political prisoners like George Jackson and Angela Davis. They systematically tried to highlight not only the vindictive and dishonest behaviour of the police but also the structural racism of the judicial system which, they said, prevented black people receiving a fair trial. Macdonald started the trial by requesting an all-black jury – a demand that appeared on the manifestos of all British Black Power groups. Citing the Magna Carta, he argued that only black people could understand the attitude of the police to the black community and so fairly judge the case. Judge Edward Clarke rejected this and many other defence requests, leading Macdonald to argue in his summation that, ‘We’ve been subject in this trial to spectacles of naked judicial tyranny. The judge has given the defence some latitude, but the only alternative was to send them down or to gag them like Bobby Seale’.⁴⁷ Macdonald’s use of the phrase ‘naked judicial tyranny’ seems somewhat harsh. Judge Clarke’s statements during the trial show that, while not sympathetic to the defendants, he managed to stay relatively impartial – something that judges in other Black Power cases found more difficult to do.⁴⁸

At the end of the trial, five of the defendants – Rothwell Kentish, Frank Critchlow, Radford Howe, Barbara Beese and Godfrey Millet – were acquitted of all charges. The other four – Anthony Innis, Rhodan Gordan, Althea Lecointe and Rupert Boyce – received suspended sentences for seven of the less serious charges. As the majority of the prosecution’s case rested on police testimony, this represented a clear rejection by the jury of the police’s contention that the August 1970 march had been a pre-planned riot. In light of this it was perhaps unsurprising

⁴⁷ Ian Macdonald is quoted in ‘Blacks in Britain Today’, *7 Days*, 22 December 1971, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Clarke’s comments are reported in MEPO2/9719: ‘Racial incidents: relations between the police and the black community in the Notting Hill area’, held at the NA.

that Judge Clarke gave lenient sentences to the four people who had been convicted. He even conceded during sentencing that some members of the Metropolitan Police appeared to hate black people. 'What this trial has shown', he said, 'is that there is clearly evidence of racial hatred on both sides'.⁴⁹ The sentencing followed the pattern of Black Power defendants being given non-custodial or suspended sentences. That a suspended custodial sentence was a form of social control which placed its subject at the whim of the police was angrily pointed out by one of the convicted Mangrove defendants. 'I don't want a suspended sentence', said Rhodan Gordan on hearing his punishment. 'If you give me suspended sentence I shall get nicked by police at Notting Hill anyway so you might as well put me inside'.⁵⁰ Gordan's words were prophetic: two days later he was charged with assaulting a police officer and causing an obstruction, after being asked to move his car by a Notting Hill policeman, and the suspension of his sentence was revoked.

Judge Alan King-Hamilton, who presided over the trial of the BLF's Tony Soares in March 1973, made no attempt at impartiality. Soares had been indicted on four separate serious charges of attempting to incite the murder of persons unknown, the manufacture of explosives, the possession of firearms, and arson. The basis of the charges was that instructions on how to make a Molotov cocktail had been published in the September 1971 issue of the BLF's newspaper, *Grass Roots*. The instructions had been reprinted from an American Black Power newspaper, *The Black Panther*, which was already widely available in Britain. After initially fleeing the country to escape arrest (to Morocco, where he stayed as

⁴⁹ Ibid..

⁵⁰ Gordan quoted in a Metropolitan Police memo included in MEPO2/9719: 'Notting Hill riots, 1959-1978', held at the NA.

a guest of Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver) Soares had returned to Britain in March 1972 and been arrested shortly afterwards. He then spent four months on remand in Brixton and Pentonville prisons before being granted bail. Although the prosecution could not prove that Soares was *Grass Roots*' editor, they could produce evidence that he had sent twenty-five copies of the paper overseas and was therefore involved in distributing the illegal material. According to the 'dock brief' published in *Race Today*, during the trial Judge King-Hamilton repeatedly asked defence witnesses whether they were communists and atheists, Special Branch officers sat at the front of the court noting down their names and addresses, and an IRA-planted bomb in front of the Old Bailey injured one of the jurors.⁵¹ At its conclusion, King-Hamilton instructed the jury that if they believed Soares had distributed the twenty-five newspapers they were duty bound to find him guilty on all charges. Soares was eventually convicted by majority verdict on the charges of attempting to incite arson and the manufacture of explosives.

To his great surprise, however, Soares did not receive a custodial sentence. This was indeed surprising given the seriousness of the charges, the fact that Soares had a previous conviction for distributing leaflets that incited violence and King-Hamilton's reputation as a 'hanging' judge. 'It was very, very strange', remembers Soares, 'because the judge said to the usher at sentencing time, there's an envelope in my safe from the Home Office, go and get it. He went and got the envelope and when he read what was in [it] his face went so angry – that's when this surprisingly mild sentence came out'.⁵² In the end Soares was sentenced to 200 hours of community service and bound over to keep the peace for seven years. It is very difficult to corroborate Soares' version of the sentencing, but whatever King-

⁵¹ 'Dock brief', *Race Today* 5:4 (April 1973) p. 102.

⁵² Tony Soares, interviewed by the author, 23 August 2004.

Hamilton's reasons, the sentence fitted the pattern established in the previously cited trials of Black Power activists. 'Binding over without banishment has also been used to deal with Black defendants', commented sociologist Paul Gordon on the *Grass Roots* case. Soares' sentence was 'an attempt to curtail future political activity', he concluded.⁵³

The manifest injustice of the charges brought against Soares and the behaviour of the judge in the trial won the BLF much publicity and public sympathy, which was marshalled by the well-supported *Grass Roots* Defence Committee. On the other hand, the time the BLF's linchpin Soares spent absent from the movement and the strain the trial put the BLF under undoubtedly burdened the organisation. *Sunday Times* journalist Derek Humphry described, for example, the impact of the trial on the BLF's 'Headstart' supplementary Sunday school for black children. 'Although run from the Front's headquarters ... it won approving, if discreet, praise from the teaching profession', reported Humphry. 'But "Headstart" collapsed when the police began calling on the Front in a bid to find who was responsible for the bomb article'.⁵⁴ Soares, however, ignored the conditions of his sentence and continued to be an active member of the BLF until 1977, when he left the organisation for entirely unrelated reasons. *Grass Roots* continued to be printed in roughly the same format, however, at least until 1988, although it regularly claimed to be on the verge of financial collapse.⁵⁵ Overall, the trial had achieved little more than increasing the black community's sense of victimisation by the state, at a large cost to the public purse.

⁵³ P. Gordon, *White Law: Racism in the Police, Courts and Prisons* (London, 1983), p. 116.

⁵⁴ D. Humphry, 'Black Power: reality and the rhetoric', *The Sunday Times*, 30 March 1973, p. 18.

⁵⁵ The IRR holds a non-continuous run of *Grass Roots* spanning from 1971 until 1988.

Black people and the police

The relationship between the police and black people from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia, steadily worsened throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The 1971 Immigration Act, which came into force on 1 January 1973, classified any non-British-born citizen who had neither been naturalised nor could claim a British-born parent or grandparent as a 'non-patrial' citizen with no right of abode. It also removed the automatic right of Commonwealth citizens to register as British citizens after five years' residence, and applied retrospectively, putting all black people, particularly Asians who were more likely to have arrived after the start of immigration control in 1962, under suspicion of being illegal immigrants. The police were given new powers, such as being able to arrest suspected illegal immigrants without a warrant, making them, for the first time, a branch of immigration control. To help it fulfil its new responsibilities, the Metropolitan Police set up an Immigration Intelligence Unit (IIU), which quickly gained a reputation similar to its Special Patrol Group (SPG).

The deployment of the SPG in black neighbourhoods from the mid-1960s onwards and the increasing use of the infamous 'Sus' law, which almost always resulted in a charge where the only evidence of wrongdoing was the arresting officer's statement, made policing seem brutal and corrupt.⁵⁶ An irresponsible media that characterised young West Indian men as potential muggers and Asians

⁵⁶ The Special Patrol Group was set up in 1961 as a centralised, mobile squad of the Metropolitan Police designed to respond to serious crime that local divisions could not deal with. From the mid-1960s onwards it was used to control demonstrations and police areas with high rates of street crime. Frequently the subject of allegations of racism, brutality and unaccountability, the SPG was disbanded in 1986. The offence of 'being a suspected person', part of the Vagrancy Act 1824, allowed a police officer to arrest someone on the suspicion that they were loitering with the intention of committing a criminal offence, as long as he had seen them acting suspiciously on a previous occasion. Tried in a magistrates court, if found guilty the defendant could be sentenced to up to three months in gaol. The 'sus' law was eventually repealed in 1981. For more information see C. DeMuth, *'Sus' A Report on the Vagrancy Act 1824* (London, 1978).

as illegal immigrants or their co-conspirators, made the likelihood of colour-blind justice seem even more remote.⁵⁷ Black people also complained that the police did not investigate crimes against them as thoroughly as those against whites and often arrested the black victim who had alerted them when they arrived at the scene of the crime. 'After the first years of the 1970s police brutality against black communities in the inner cities was to become so commonplace', wrote former Black Power activist and academic Harry Goulbourne, 'that it was widely believed that there was hardly a black family in Britain which had not had a nasty experience with the police'.⁵⁸

By 1971, the government was so concerned by the deteriorating relationship between the police and black communities that it set up a parliamentary select committee to look into the matter. But although its report, published in 1972, found that there was some evidence of racial prejudice among the police, it ascribed it to cultural misunderstanding rather than institutional racism. Older Asian immigrants, the report observed, came 'as strangers expecting to be treated as such' and saw 'no reason to change their style of life', while their view of the police, which ranged from 'submissive awe' to 'suspicious passivity', was 'conditioned to some extent by police customs in their homelands'.⁵⁹ Other reasons why the behaviour of the police might have inspired submissive or suspicious reactions from Asians immigrants do not appear to have been considered. Overall, the report's recommendations avoided the issue of racism and put the onus on the black community to behave in a more assimilated way in order to receive better

⁵⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the media's portrayal of young black men see Runnymede Trust, *Race and the Press* (London, 1971) and S. Hall, C. Critcher, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London, 1978).

⁵⁸ H. Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience* (London, 2002), p. 106.

⁵⁹ *Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, Session 1971-1972, Police/Immigrant Relations, Volume 1: Report* (London: HMSO, 1972), p. 67.

treatment from the police. The government's response a year later paid equally little attention to the accusations of police racism.

Black people often did not experience colour-blind justice in the courts either. The majority of magistrates automatically accepted the evidence of police witnesses as truthful and even in the cases where they were later shown to have been lying, the police very rarely faced perjury charges or even internal disciplinary procedures. Crown court judges were less predictable in their attitude to the police, but in at least one famous trial – of two West Yorkshire Police officers for the killing of a homeless Nigerian man – the judge expressed his distaste that policemen should be facing trial and instructed the jury to dismiss all the charges except assault, despite the weight of the evidence pointing strongly to the pair's guilt.⁶⁰ Finally, the Metropolitan Police force, which, because it had policed the area where the majority of black people in Britain lived, was the subject of most complaints, was highly resistant to criticism. It prevaricated when asked to hire more black officers, opposed calls for an independent complaints process, attempted, where possible, to suppress public criticism, and took only the most perfunctory steps to discipline officers who had been found to act dishonestly or out of racism.⁶¹

Strong criticism of the police by the black community pre-dated the Black Power movement and continued long after its end. As early as 1958, black witnesses to the Notting Hill riots had complained that the police had only

⁶⁰ The five-week trial of former Leeds policemen Inspector Geoffrey Ellerker and Sergeant Mark Kitching for manslaughter, perjury, grievous bodily harm of David Oluwale took place in Leeds Crown Court in December 1971. He had been found beaten and drowned in the river Aire on 18 April 1969. Kitching and Ellerker were found guilty of nine counts of assault, the only charge the jury was allowed to consider. See K Aspden, *Nationality Wog: the Hounding of David Oluwale* (London, 2007).

⁶¹ For a representative example of police self-exculpation in the case of a proven miscarriage of justice see the case of Satnam Singh Kane on pp. 241–2.

intervened to stop the violence once black people had begun to defend themselves successfully against their white aggressors. When West Indian carpenter Kelso Cochrane was stabbed to death on the same streets the following year, after a period of heightened fascist activity that the police had failed to tackle effectively, the local black community ascribed the fact that the assailants were never caught to police indifference. In 1965, Joseph Hunte of the West Indian Standing Conference (WISC), published a booklet called *Nigger Hunting in England?* based on complaints about police behaviour received by WISC from the black community in London.⁶² A firmly worded but sober document that included extensive comment from the Lambeth police, the author argued that it was needed because, 'For the seven years that I have been residing in Brixton, I have been constantly besieged by members of the immigrant population with matters of conflict between them and members of the Police Force'.⁶³ In 1969, the authors of *Colour and Citizenship* commented that, 'all organisations connected with civil liberties or race relations have files full of complaints about police practice', although they added that it was difficult to substantiate such complaints.⁶⁴ From the late 1960s onwards, most of the domestic news coverage in *all* Black Power newspapers consisted of articles about police corruption and violence towards black people. Finally, during the 1970s and 1980s, a number of book-length studies catalogued and analysed evidence of racially prejudiced police behaviour.⁶⁵

During 1971, the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration spent more than a year collecting evidence from Britain's police forces,

⁶² J. Hunte, *Nigger Hunting in England?* (London, 1965).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Rose et al, *Colour*, p. 349.

⁶⁵ See J. Lambert, *Crime, Police and Race Relations: a Study in Birmingham* (London, 1970), D. Humphry and G. John, *Because They're Black* (Harmondsworth, 1971), D. Humphry, *Police Power and Black People* (London, 1972), Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, and Institute of Race Relations, *Policing Against Black People* (London, 1987).

community organisations and Community Relations Councils, as well as individual black people. Its three-volume report was published in 1972 and contained some damning evidence. The way the evidence was interpreted, however, was generous to the police to the point of appearing to have entirely discounted the perspective of the black witnesses. The report did recommend that a lay element be introduced to the police complaints procedure as a matter of urgency and drew attention forcefully to the fact that the police's own statistics showed that crime rates among non-white populations were lower than among whites. The bulk of the report, however, evaded the issues or blamed black people for their disagreements with the police. The following excerpt is representative of the prevarication and side-stepping of issues that took place before the authors attributed only the most minor of wrong-doings to the police and laid the bulk of the blame at the feet of the black community. 'We do not doubt, on the evidence before us, that notwithstanding the loyal defence of senior officers – though some were prepared to be quite frank about it – there have been instances of policemen acting insensitively and officiously against immigrants', the authors eventually conceded before adding: 'This is particularly true of young West Indians, whose conduct is sometimes calculated to make policemen "lose their cool"'.⁶⁶

The report claimed on several occasions that there was not enough evidence, or it was too difficult, to investigate allegations of police racism. 'Again, it is impossible to know to what extent – there have been some cases – the police pick on black youths merely because they are black', it argued. 'There is very little statistical evidence about the volume of formal complaints made by immigrants

⁶⁶ *Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, Session 1971–1972, Police/Immigrant Relations, Volume 1: Report* (London: HMSO, 1972), p. 91.

against the police'.⁶⁷ In the end, it recommended more cultural awareness training for the police (including exchanges with policemen from the Caribbean), the creation of community liaison officers, and that all officers be reminded that black people were no more pre-disposed to crime than white people.⁶⁸ In terms of the black community, it implied that if West Indians could learn to behave in a more civilised manner the police would not get flustered by them and act 'insensitively'.⁶⁹ The racism black people had encountered was explained away as a misunderstanding or an exaggeration. 'Past mistakes by the police are apt to grow to legendary proportions', it noted, 'even in areas where they were unconnected'.⁷⁰ Black Power groups in Notting Hill were not impressed. 'We intend to expose this report for what it is', proclaimed a disappointed writer in the *Backyard News Sheet*, '- a lot of Middle-Class hogwash!'.⁷¹

The government printed its response in a 1973 White Paper that took its lead from the previous year's report.⁷² It used the evidence that black people were, if anything, more law-abiding than white people to dismiss the claim that there might be problems between them and the police. 'The report rightly stresses that immigrants are not in themselves a problem to the police', the report affirmed, ignoring the black community's central allegation that it was the colour of their skin not the criminality of their community that attracted the police's attention.⁷³ It continued by hinting that police prejudice against black people was the result of the agitation of the Black Power movement. 'Only a small minority of young coloured

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 70, 88.

⁶⁸ Para 243, *ibid.*, p. 71

⁶⁹ Para 338, *ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷⁰ Para 339, *ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷¹ *Backyard News Sheet* (week 37), date stamped 2 October 1972, p. 4.

⁷² *Police/Immigrant Relations in England and Wales: Observations on the Report of the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration* (London: HMSO, 1973).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

people are affected by ... confrontation with the police', noted the government. 'Some groups, apparently anxious to imitate the behaviour amongst the black community in the United States, themselves provoke the difficulties'.⁷⁴ It would have been extraordinary if the paper had concluded that institutional racism existed in Britain's police forces as the government did not even acknowledge the existence of indirect racism until 1976. Its failure even to consider the possibility of police racism, however, gave ammunition to its harshest critics. 'The police are viewed as the army of the enemy, which is the immigration-controlling, arms-to-South-Africa-selling, friend-of-Ian-Smith British government', journalist Derek Humphry had written in 1972.⁷⁵ The government's published response in 1973 to the previous year's select committee findings on 'police/immigrant relations' only served to reinforce the impression.

While magistrates' and judges' attitudes to black people and black defendants differed widely, their view of police officers was generally that they were honest, trustworthy, tolerant, socially-minded people doing a tough a job in difficult circumstances. They were inclined, therefore, to believe police officers' evidence and to give them the benefit of the doubt when their actions were questioned. 'A series of judicial decisions and police comments seemed to suggest', commented sociologist John Rex in 1977, 'that, if anything, the judges and the police were more concerned with the threat of Black action against white society than they were with the defence of Black civil rights'.⁷⁶ Judicial behaviour in trials of Black Power activists has already been discussed, but those trials usually took place in the Crown court, where trained barristers were present,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Humphry, *Police Power*, pp. 11–12.

⁷⁶ J. Rex, 'Black militancy and class conflict' (July 1977), p. 22. Speech transcript held, unfiled, at the IRR.

experienced judges oversaw proceedings, and an entire jury had to be convinced. The majority of young West Indian men passing through Britain's legal system appeared in magistrates courts charged with petty crimes. Their trials could last a matter of minutes and often involved no witnesses being called, other than the police officer who had arrested them. A 1973 survey into the policing of black people in the London borough of Ealing reported that, of twenty magistrates interviewed, 'Exactly half ... were unequivocal in their views of the incorruptibility of the British police'.⁷⁷ The other half had expressed broadly the same sentiment, but in less emphatic terms. 'The general tenor appeared to be that JPs [that is, magistrates] and the police were fighting the same cause', the author noted.⁷⁸ When asked how they viewed non-white defendants, the majority of the magistrates agreed that they must have 'at least done something to be in court in the first place'.⁷⁹ Although he argued that most magistrates were not consciously racist, academic Stanislaus Pullé concluded that, in Ealing at least, it was not possible for black people to receive a fair trial in a magistrates court.

If reform would not be imposed from other branches of the British legal system, there was very little chance it could come from within the police forces themselves. The Metropolitan Police, for example, reacted with indignation to suggestions that an outside body should monitor its practices. When Home Secretary, and nominal head of the Metropolitan Police force, James Callaghan proposed, in 1968, to add a clause to the Police Code making it an offence to discriminate against black immigrants, the head of the policemen's union, the Police Federation, declared that it was, 'A gross insult even to suggest it. ... The

⁷⁷ S. Pullé, *Police Immigrant Relations in Ealing* (London, 1973), p. 59.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

only purpose of this extra clause is to placate the misplaced fears of some immigrant bodies that they may not get fair treatment'.⁸⁰ The Police Federation was also strongly opposed to an independent element being incorporated into the police complaints procedure. This was in keeping with many senior officers' siege mentality in which outside criticism was not brooked. In July 1968, for example, when the investigative BBC series *Cause For Concern* had attempted to air its programme 'Equal Before The Law?' which featured interviews with black people who had successfully sued the police for malicious prosecution, the Metropolitan Police threatened legal action if it was shown. The programme was eventually aired after protests from civil liberties and race relations organisations. The Metropolitan Police continued to maintain that the black people in the programme had fabricated their stories: future Chief Commissioner Robert Mark described it in his memoirs as, 'one of the most distorted and inaccurate films ever to find its way on to a BBC screen'.⁸¹ When Judge Clarke commented at the end of the Mangrove Nine trial in December 1971 that there was clear evidence of racial hatred on both sides, the Metropolitan Police rejected his observation out of hand. 'I believe there was no justification for this remark respecting witnesses appearing for the Crown', wrote Detective Inspector Graham Stockwell, 'certainly not from Police witnesses'.⁸² In 1973, the Metropolitan Police objected strongly to a report commissioned by the Ealing Community Relations Council into policing in the borough, which concluded that, 'there are, to put it no higher, elements of doubt about the evidence presented by the police'.⁸³

⁸⁰ See C. Worrell, 'Police Insulted Mr Callaghan Told: Race Clause Plan Attacked', *The Guardian*, 15 May 1968, p. 7.

⁸¹ R. Mark, *In the Office of Constable* (London, 1978), p. 100.

⁸² 'Memo from Detective Inspector Graham Stockwell, 21 December 1971', in MEPO2/9719: 'Notting Hill riots, 1959-1978', held at the NA.

⁸³ Pullé, *Police*, p. 71.

The Metropolitan Police recruited black police cadets reluctantly while protesting that it was the dearth of suitable candidates that prevented more black people becoming police officers. Black candidates' lack of educational attainment was usually cited as the reason for their failure to be selected. An internal memorandum to the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, from December 1963, however, showed that other factors were at play. 'The truth is, of course, that we are not yet prepared to recruit any coloured men', the author candidly admitted, 'although the time may not be so far distant when we shall be unable to turn down well-qualified men who have been born and educated in this country'.⁸⁴ The Metropolitan Police managed to procrastinate for another four years before recruiting Norwell Roberts as London's first black police officer in 1967.⁸⁵ In August 1973, Home Office figures revealed that there were still only sixty-five black police officers in the whole of England and Wales.⁸⁶

Race Relations Legislation

The 1976 Race Relations Act represented an important advance from its 1968 predecessor. The 1968 act had been viewed by many as a window-dressing exercise by the Labour government after its unseemly scramble to pass the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in March 1968. It had little impact on Black Power groups because it neither significantly redressed the issues that led black people to support the movement, nor increased the risk of prosecution for publicly advocating Black Power by strengthening the incitement to racial hatred clause of

⁸⁴ The memo is included in MEPO2/9854: 'Police liaison with the West Indian community in London', held at the NA.

⁸⁵ Astley Lloyd Blair was Britain's first black policeman. He joined the Gloucestershire constabulary in 1964.

⁸⁶ *Police/Immigrant Relations in England and Wales: Observations on the Report of the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration* (London: HMSO, 1973), p. 11.

the 1965 act. The 1976 act, however, had real teeth and represented a more committed and thorough attempt to lessen the gap between British-born black people's expectation of equality and their actual experience of social, educational and economic subordination. Tellingly, it was the first Race Relations Act not to be accompanied by legislation restricting black immigration. That the act was passed in 1976 was partly attributable to the scale and militancy of black people's campaigns for their equal rights during the first half of the 1970s and some credit for this should go to the Black Power movement. The primary driving force behind the act, however, was the need to halt the frightening and socially destabilising deterioration of the relationship between West Indian youth and the police. The British government had believed that suppressing the Black Power movement would help prevent disaffection spreading in the black community but by 1976 it had realised that it needed to attack the causes of this disaffection rather than its expression.

Although Home Secretary Roy Jenkins announced the government's intention to draft a second, stronger Race Relations Act and banned Stokely Carmichael from Britain on the same day, the 1968 Race Relations Act was not a legislative response to the rise of a Black Power movement in Britain. Neither did its eventual passage in October 1968 have much impact on the movement. The main catalyst for the 1968 act was the publication, in April 1967, of the PEP report *Racial Discrimination in Britain*, which showed that the 1965 Race Relations Act had not come close to eradicating racial discrimination. Rather, as a later survey neatly quipped, the PEP's 'situation tests', whereby it sent a white Briton, a white Hungarian and a black West Indian to apply for the same jobs, housing and commercial services and compared the responses they received, revealed that, for

people with black skin racial discrimination in Britain ranged from ‘the massive to the substantial’.⁸⁷ The case for strengthening the first act was further reinforced by the publication of the *Street Report* six months later. The Street committee analysed anti-discrimination legislation in other countries – focusing primarily on the United States – and argued that the approach favoured in America, of targeting discrimination through civil rather than criminal law, and choosing conciliation over compulsion, could also work in Britain. ‘The accumulation from this report, the earlier PEP study on discrimination in housing and employment and Elizabeth Burney’s study of local housing policy’, reported the *IRR Newsletter*, ‘has silenced nearly all the doubters’.⁸⁸

The Race Relations Act that eventually came into force in November 1968 was, however, widely regarded as weak and difficult to enforce. It did plug some of the more obvious gaps of its predecessor: in addition to the ‘places of public resort’ covered by the 1965 act, racial discrimination was prohibited in the provision of various public services, employment, trade unions, advertisements and housing. The Race Relations Board was also given new powers to initiate civil proceedings against those practising racial discrimination and those found guilty could henceforth be sued for damages. Nonetheless, even those who took a generous view of the 1968 Race Relations Act thought it was ill-conceived. Remarking that it contained a ‘most unusual’ mixture of civil and criminal legal procedures, the authors of *Colour and Citizenship* concluded: ‘[W]e fear that although the new Act is liberal in intention and broad in range it contains

⁸⁷ E. J. B. Rose et al, *Colour*, p. 414. For a fuller discussion of the weaknesses of the 1965 act and the criticisms of it, see chapter one.

⁸⁸ *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* (December 1967), p. 430. Elizabeth Burney was a researcher for the Institute of Race Relations who wrote a book detailing how some councils’ housing allocation schemes discriminated against immigrants. E. Burney, *Housing on Trial: a Study of Immigrants and Local Government* (London, 1967).

weaknesses that may well result in a loss of confidence in the efficacy of legislation of this kind'.⁸⁹ A 1975 government White Paper on race relations legislation confirmed that confidence in the act had indeed been lost – even by its own employees. Both the Race Relations Board and the Community Relations Council, it stated, 'have forcefully drawn attention to the inability of the legislation to deal with widespread patterns of discrimination ... a lack of confidence among minority groups in the effectiveness of the law, and a lack of credibility in the efficacy of the work of the Race Relations Board and the Community Relations Commission themselves'.⁹⁰ Most disillusioning for black people, perhaps, was the limp and tentative appearance of the 1968 act in comparison to the speed and vigour with which the Commonwealth Immigrants Act had been pushed through parliament earlier in the year. Many would have agreed with sociologist Paul Gordon's assessment that 'It was obvious that the 1968 Act would scarcely dent the surface of racism in Britain. It was equally obvious that discrimination could have been dealt with had the desire and political will to do so existed. The reality, however, was otherwise'.⁹¹

By 1976, the political will to tackle racial discrimination more effectively had been created. The Labour government's 1975 White Paper, *Racial Discrimination*, which set out its plans for a new act, gave several clues as to why. The fear of social unrest was a recurring theme. '[I]t is vital to our well-being as a society', the authors argued, 'to tap those reservoirs of resilience, initiative and vigour in the racial minority groups and not to allow them to lie unused or to be deflected into negative protest on account of arbitrary and unfair discriminatory

⁸⁹ Rose et al, *Colour*, pp. 686, 687.

⁹⁰ *Racial Discrimination* (London: HMSO, 1975), p. 8.

⁹¹ Gordon, *White Law*, p. 18.

practices'.⁹² Without making explicit reference to the intense criticism of policing and judicial practices being levelled by the Black Power movement and the black community, it also acknowledged that, 'It is no longer necessary to recite the immense damage, material as well as moral, which ensues when a minority loses faith in the capacity of social institutions to be impartial and fair.'⁹³ Describing racial discrimination as, 'a form of economic and social waste', it concluded that, 'It is the Government's duty to prevent these morally unacceptable and socially divisive inequalities from hardening into entrenched patterns'.⁹⁴

The section of the White Paper setting out the proposed new race relations legislation showed how reform of the 1968 act had been precipitated by the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act. The 1976 Race Relations Act was to be the fulfilment of the government's promise, made in its White Paper *Equality for Women*, to "harmonise the powers and procedures for dealing with sex and race discrimination so as to secure genuine equality of opportunity in both fields".⁹⁵ The authors of the Sex Discrimination Act had thoroughly investigated the weaknesses of the 1968 Race Relations Act in order not to replicate them. Once the failures of the 1968 Race Relations Act had been officially acknowledged, pressure quickly built up to remedy them. Although the White Paper side-stepped the issue somewhat, by arguing that 'It is not possible to provide a quantifiable measure of the practical impact of the 1968 Act', it made it clear that the Sex Discrimination Act, rather than previous race relations legislation, was to be the model for the new law.⁹⁶ 'Except for good reason, the two statutes and the procedures for their

⁹² *Racial Discrimination* (London: HMSO, 1975), p. 31.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁵ *Equality for Women* (London: HMSO, 1974), quoted in *Racial Discrimination* (London: HMSO, 1975), p. 11.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

administration and enforcement will be framed in similar forms', explained the Paper.⁹⁷

Impetus for the 1976 act also came from the black community. The persistent strikes by Asian and West Indian workers from the mid-1960s onwards in factories like Woolf's (1965), Coneygre Foundry (1967), Ford Motors (1973) and Imperial Typewriters (1974) made it clear to employers, trade unionists and the government that that they were no longer prepared to be used as sweatshop labour and wanted to participate equally in Britain's workforce and trade union movement. Barrister Ian Macdonald believed that the 1976 Race Relations Act was both, 'a recognition of the justice of their case', and, 'at the same time an attempt to prevent any such future conflict'.⁹⁸ The amount and the militancy of independent organising in black areas, where black people set up their own amenities like youth centres, homeless shelters, supplementary schools, nurseries and legal advice centres, also put pressure on the state to take the initiative in promoting equality and fighting economic and social injustice. It was also becoming increasingly clear that black communities were organising to protect themselves from the police. Groups in some areas (for example, the Brixton branch of the Black Panther Movement) formed citizen patrols to watch the police while, in other places, crowds of local people spontaneously intervened when they thought police were unfairly harassing black people. Police could no longer expect to make public arrests of black people without encountering spirited resistance, not just from the arrestee but bystanders too. A steady stream of trials with multiple defendants (and accompanying defence campaigns), resulting from black people resisting arrest with public help,

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹⁸ Macdonald, *Race Relations*, p. iv.

punctuated the 1970s.⁹⁹ By 1975, the government had realised that if it did not legislate for black people's rights they would take up the battle themselves on their own terms. 'To abandon a whole group of people in society without legal redress against unfair discrimination', warned the White Paper, 'is to leave them with no option but to find their own redress'.¹⁰⁰

By the mid 1970s, black people who had been born or brought up in Britain were having their own children and getting actively involved, alongside their parents, in their communities and workplaces. It had become obvious, both to the government and to black people themselves that, whether inadvertently or by choice, they had become settlers. The 1975 White Paper acknowledged Britain's multiracialism. This was an important development from 1971, when the Conservative government's Immigration Act had created a definition of British citizenship that privileged those with white ancestors and gave the Home Secretary power to fund the voluntary repatriation of non-patrials. 'The government's proposals are based on a clear recognition of the proposition that the overwhelming majority of the coloured population is here to stay', the White Paper announced, even conceding that, 'a substantial and increasing proportion of that population belongs to this country'.¹⁰¹ Having moved black people from the category of 'immigrant other' to 'British', it then framed its attack on racial discrimination as a protection of British rights. '[T]he time has come for a determined effort', it resolved, 'to ensure fair and equal treatment for all *our people*, regardless of their race, colour or national origins'.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ For examples of these numeric trials, such as those of the Metro 4 (1971), the Oval Four (1972), the Brockwell Park 3 (1973) and the Cricklewood 12 (1974), see 'Cases to remember', *Race Today* (July/August 1976), p. 151.

¹⁰⁰ *Racial Discrimination* (London: HMSO, 1975), p. 6.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 2. Italics added.

The major innovations of the 1976 Race Relations Act were to: recognise the concept of indirect discrimination (whereby a seemingly fair rule or practice might inadvertently unfairly disadvantage a specific racial group); give individuals the power to make direct complaints about racial discrimination to an industrial tribunal or county court; replace the Race Relations Board and Community Relations Commission by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and vest this new body with the power to initiate investigations into racial discrimination and to enforce its decisions. It also made it illegal to victimise a person who had reported discrimination under the Race Relations Act. The 1976 Act removed most of the exemptions that had applied to its predecessors – no longer allowing, for example, working men's clubs to refuse black people entry and white ferry passengers to refuse to share a cabin with a black person. It also made inciting racial hatred part of the Public Order Act and removed the necessity to prove intent, making prosecution slightly easier.

The form of the act owed much to American anti-discrimination laws, as well as British sexual equality legislation. Although the authors of the 1976 act were not prepared to mandate affirmative action or ethnic monitoring – both in use in America at the time – American political scientist Erik Bleich has argued that it was studying American legislation that persuaded them to incorporate indirect discrimination into the law. Noting that Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, *Street Report* co-author Anthony Lester and members of the parliamentary select committee on race relations and immigration all visited America to consult with race relations experts in the two years before the act, Bleich asserts that, 'One of the lessons learned from U.S. developments was that confining the definition of

discrimination to direct intentional acts was insufficient'.¹⁰³ Ian Macdonald also pointed to America as the source of inspiration for the incorporation of indirect discrimination into British law. 'The concept ... is derived from the U.S. experience', he wrote in 1977. 'It bears a strong family likeness to the judicial interpretation which the U.S. Supreme Court had placed on the anti-discrimination provisions of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act 1964 as amended by the Equal Opportunities Act 1972'.¹⁰⁴

The last piece of race relations legislation to be passed in the twentieth century, the 1976 act was a significant improvement on its predecessors. It made a noticeable impact on discriminatory practices in the workplace and contributed to the sharp decline in trade union racism after 1976. The black community's belief in the Labour government's commitment to racial equality continued to be undermined by its support for the 1971 Immigration Act, however, and the 1976 Race Relations Act did not go nearly far enough in countering racial discrimination in the most crucial section of society: the police. It did not stop the police from continuing to think of and treat black people as a social problem, nor did it have the scope to break 'the familiar cycle of cumulative disadvantage' which the 1975 White Paper had warned that, when combined with racial discrimination, would lead to a 'vicious downward spiral of deprivation'.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

By using a two-pronged policy of harassment by the police and through the courts, coupled with generous funding of social work projects, the government managed

¹⁰³ E. Bleich, 'Continuity as the path to change: institutional innovation in the 1976 British Race Relations Act', unpublished paper presented to the British study group of the Center for European Studies, Harvard University, 15 March 2002, p.18.

¹⁰⁴ Macdonald, *Race Relations*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Racial Discrimination* (London: HMSO, 1975), p. 3.

to disrupt the activities of some Black Power groups and depoliticise the work of others. State persecution was a blunt tool, though, and many Black Power groups capitalised on the victimisation of their members to gain publicity, credibility and sympathy. The heavy-handed treatment of black youths by the police also served as a recruitment tool for groups like the Black Panther Movement and the Black Liberation Front which offered legal advice and representation, not just to members but to anyone in the black community. The introduction of government funding schemes under the Urban Programme from 1968, and particularly its 1976 phase of offering direct funding to black groups, meant that activists in Black Power groups in dire need of money to continue their social welfare programmes had to make a hard choice between their work being funded and regulated by the state, or spending most of their time scrabbling for donations from an already poor support base. For most of them the price of independence was too high and they divorced their social philanthropy from their political perspectives, the marriage of which had been at the heart of the Black Power movement.

During the 1970s the antagonism between young West Indian men and the police steadily escalated. Although the first generation of British blacks experienced discrimination in education, housing and the job market without regard to gender, it was male teenagers whom the police targeted as a social problem. A self-regulating body, the police were very resistant to the suggestion that they suffered from institutional racism or that complaints against them should be investigated. Despite a two-year select committee enquiry into the attitude of the police to black people, which found they held a prejudiced view of black criminality, the government continued to treat the problem between the police and young black men as one of cultural misunderstanding. By 1976, young Asian men

were expressing the same levels of frustration at their communities' treatment by the police as their West Indian counterparts and as a response the first of what became a national network of Asian Youth Movements was founded in Southall.

In an attempt to remove some of the grievances of the black community, the government passed the country's first thorough and effective Race Relations Act in 1976. Recognising that discrimination could operate indirectly in policies and practices, as well as being deliberate, direct and personal, the act represented an important step towards a more equal society, particularly in the field of employment. A watershed year for all involved in British race relations, 1976 marked the political awakening of a new generation of Asians, a much firmer commitment to tackle discrimination by the state and a new phase in the resistance of West Indian youth to their mistreatment by the police. In August 1976, Britain's first major street battle between young black men and the police broke out, as local youths reacted angrily to a provocatively large police presence on the streets of Notting Hill during the Carnival celebrations. It was to be the first of many.

CHAPTER 5

'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

Introduction

The history of Asian immigrants in Britain has often been overshadowed by the story of immigration from the Caribbean. It is easy to fall into the trap of conceiving British race relations in the binary, black and white American mould. Even the most integrated and inclusive histories of the black experience in Britain have tended to privilege the African diasporan experience over the Asian.¹ Peter Fryer, for example, whose book *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain* remains the most useful general history of non-white immigration to Britain, has been justly criticised by Asian academic Tariq Modood for his slight coverage of the Asian immigrant experience.² The danger of under-representing the agency of Asian immigrants is that they become seen as passive, apolitical and marginal to the history of non-white people in Britain. In defence of those who unwittingly perpetuate this impression, it must be acknowledged that it is very difficult to weave the Asian, African and Caribbean stories into one coherent narrative because the experiences and activities of the three groups often seem so discrete. The enormous differences in language, culture, religion and social organisation and the differing ways in which British imperialism operated in southern Asia, Africa and the Caribbean mean that few easy parallels can be drawn between the Indian, Pakistani, East African Asian, African and Caribbean

¹ It is worth noting that historians' treatments of the diasporan African experience in Britain after the Second World War have also tended to overlook the contribution of immigrants from continental Africa in favour of those from the Caribbean.

² P. Fryer, *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984). For a critique see T. Modood, 'The limits of America: rethinking equality in the changing context of British race relations', in B. Ward and A. Badger (eds), *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 181–93.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

communities in post-war Britain. By examining the inter-relationship between the seemingly separate spheres of Asian politics, industrial militancy and the Black Power movement, however, this chapter presents a more integrated history. It shows that Asians, Africans and West Indians, despite their disparate goals and methods, were all historical agents in the same struggle.

Indians' and Pakistanis' struggles against racial discrimination began long before the industrial action of Asian factory workers caught the attention of the British media and public in the 1970s. The small but historically significant Asian population that existed in Britain before the period of large-scale immigration from the Indian subcontinent in the 1960s included, for example, three members of the House of Commons and a peer. The active political engagement of the Indian community represents a thread of continuity between the pre- and post-war periods. The Indian Workers' Association (IWA), for example, one of the most important and active Asian organisations campaigning for racial equality in Britain during the 1960s, was founded in 1938 to campaign for Indian independence. During the Second World War several thousand Indian civilians worked manufacturing arms in Britain and over two million signed up in India to join the British army. Indian soldiers fought in both Europe and South-East Asia, although very few were stationed in Britain.

The just under 350,000 Indian and Pakistani immigrants who arrived in Britain in the first half of the 1960s went through broadly the same processes of acclimatisation and politicisation that immigrants from the Caribbean had embarked on in large numbers from the mid-1950s.³ The language barriers and

³ For immigration statistics see *Commonwealth Immigrants in Britain* (London: HMSO, 1967), p.12. The estimated total number of immigrants from India and Pakistan to Britain between 1960 and 1965 (inclusive) was 335,653.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

cultural differences that inhibited social contact, however, initially shielded them a little from realising the full extent of white British racism, delaying their disillusionment. Also, as the experience and impact of British imperialism had been quite different in the Indian subcontinent than in the Caribbean, Asians had very different expectations of Britain to West Indians. Compared to plantation slavery in the Caribbean, the colonisation of India had largely left its peoples' cultures, languages and heritages intact, giving Asians a much stronger sense of identity and community than West Indians. They did not think of themselves as English and did not look on Britain as the mother country. Equally, Indians and Pakistanis found West Indians and Africans as culturally alien as white Britons and the great majority did not perceive themselves as black or identify with the Black Power politics of the 1960s.

This did not mean, however, that they were not political. The image of the Asian immigrant as ignorant, timid and apolitical was a popular misconception held by many Britons during the 1960s. Once Asian immigrants realised that their stay in Britain was going to be a long or even permanent one, they started to campaign against a range of domestic injustices. Asians campaigned hard against a variety of issues that specifically or disproportionately affected their communities, for example immigration restriction and the right to religious observance. They campaigned on these issues both through their own organisations, such as the IWAs, and broader groups like Birmingham's Co-ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD), founded in 1961 to campaign against the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), set up in 1967 to provide immediate help and advice to newly arrived immigrants. Asians also played a leading role in Britain's most ambitious

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

civil rights group, the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD), founded in January 1965. Historian Anandi Ramamurthy highlighted the significance of these earlier political struggles in providing a basis for future, more radical groups, such as the Asian Youth Movements (AYMs) of the mid-to-late 1970s. The AYM, she writes, 'would never have been formed without being able to build on the struggles of earlier generations of Asian activists'.⁴

Jagmohan Joshi, of the IWA (GB) Birmingham, was the Asian leader with the closest links to the Black Power movements in both Britain and America. A Punjabi Sikh who moved to Britain to train as an accountant, Joshi became the general secretary of the Birmingham IWA in 1958. A co-founder of the radical Black Peoples' Alliance (BPA) a decade later, he also worked closely with Black Power groups like the Universal Coloured People's Association (UCPA) and the Black Panther Movement (BPM) and regularly used the numerical strength of the IWA (GB) to bolster Black Power marches. Joshi's widow recalls that Malcolm X requested a meeting with the IWA (GB) when he visited Birmingham in February 1965 and that various American Black Power leaders made personal visits to their home during the late 1960s. Although politically radical and deeply suspicious of mainstream British politics, Joshi was not himself an advocate of Black Power. He did, however, subscribe to the political definition of blackness that connected his and other Asians' struggles with those of immigrants from the Caribbean.

Joshi's outlook was exceptional. Outside his orbit the British Black Power movement had little appeal to or impact on Asians living in Britain at the time. The small number of Asian men who had joined Black Power groups after 1967 dwindled as parts of the movement became increasingly cultural nationalist during

⁴ A. Ramamurthy, 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', *Race & Class* 48:2 (2006), p. 39.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

the early 1970s. At the same time, however, a rise in anti-Asian violence, colloquially known as 'Paki-bashing', police indifference and poor job prospects compounded by racial discrimination, led to the political radicalisation of a younger generation of Asians. During the early 1970s, Asians' increasing disillusionment with the police provided points of crossover between them and the Black Power movement. Faced with the same problems of police harassment and inadequate protection against violence from assorted white racists and supporters of the growing National Front, young Asians began to react with the defiant anger more normally attributed to their West Indian counterparts. The Southall Youth Movement (SYM), which emerged as a spontaneous response to the Metropolitan Police's failure to adequately investigate the racist murder of a local Asian teenager in June 1976, clearly referenced Black Power. Adopting the black fist as their logo and basing their code of conduct on the strict rules of the Black Panther Party, the AYMs that sprang up in Asian areas around the country in the late 1970s borrowed from both the style and the substance of the American and British Black Power movements.

The chapter concludes with an examination of Asian involvement in the struggle against racial discrimination in the workplace and the trade union movement. The Marxist philosophy of the remaining Black Power groups in the 1970s dictated that black workers should be in the vanguard of the battle against racism and its progenitor capitalism. (As previously noted, the Black Panther Movement even changed its name to the Black Workers Movement (BWM) in 1973 to reflect this change in emphasis.) The section of the black community at the forefront of the working-class struggle in the early 1970s, however, was undoubtedly Asian industrial workers in the Midlands and the North. The ultimate

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

goal of these Asian strikers, however, was to be integrated into Britain's economic system on the basis of equality, not to overthrow it. The arrival in Britain of thousands of middle-class Asians from Uganda in the early 1970s boosted Asian industrial militancy but also reinforced the capitalist nature of its aspirations. The strike at the Grunwick film processing plant in North London, which began in August 1976, was led by a female Ugandan Asian worker, Jayaben Desai. It marked a watershed moment in the trade union movement's attitude towards its black members, as for the first time a spontaneous strike of Asian workers was officially recognised by their union and supported by the whole trade union movement. While Black Power radicals saw this as co-option, Desai and her fellow strikers viewed it as a crucial forward step.

Asians in Britain: a brief history

Indians both lived and were politically active in Britain before large-scale migration from southern Asia began after the Second World War.⁵ The majority of them were working class – usually either lascar sailors or itinerant peddlers. There were also a few Indian members of the upper class, however, and it seems that they experienced an acceptance in British society that their West Indian and African counterparts did not. Although a tiny minority, they appear to have enjoyed all the privileges of their white British counterparts. For example, four Indian men sat in the Houses of Parliament between 1892 and 1929; Dadabhai Naoroji served as the Liberal MP for Finsbury Central between 1892 and 1895, Mancherjee Bhownagree was the Conservative MP for Bethnal Green between 1895 and 1906, Shapurji Saklatvala was elected as the Communist MP for Battersea between 1922 and 1929

⁵ Pakistan broke away from India to become an independent nation in August 1947. Therefore, before that date only immigration from India can be discussed.

and Lord Sinha of Raipur sat in the House of Lords from 1919 until his death in 1928. Though, as David Cannadine has pointed out, 'individual social ordering often took precedence over collective racial othering' in the British empire, it is still remarkable that three Indians were popularly elected to positions of real political power in the imperial metropolis.⁶ To put this in a comparative context, the first MPs of African descent had to wait until 1987 for the same opportunity.⁷

Extra-parliamentary political activity by the Indian community in Britain in the inter-war period included the foundation of the first Indian Workers' Association (IWA) in Coventry in 1938. Set up to campaign for Indian independence, the majority of the IWA's members were Sikhs from the Punjab. In 1940, Udham Singh, a founding member of the IWA, assassinated the former governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, in revenge for the Amritsar massacre of 1919, during which his brother had been shot dead by British troops, along with hundreds of other unarmed protestors. Singh was hanged in London on 31 July 1940 but Home Office records show that MI5 continued to keep the IWA under surveillance for the rest of the decade.⁸ After India was granted independence in 1947 the IWA dwindled into obsolescence, until it was revived as a social and welfare organisation in the mid-1950s.

The two million Indians who fought in the British army during the Second World War, had quite a different experience from the tens of thousands of West Indians who also signed up. In common with Britain's African troops, tens of thousands of which fought in Burma, Italy and Germany, most Indian soldiers saw

⁶ D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London, 2001), p. 10.

⁷ Paul Boateng and Bernie Grant were both elected as Labour MPs in 1987.

⁸ See HO 45/25460: 'Disturbances: Indian Workers Association: "inflammatory" tone of *Azad Hind* (Quit India), a bi-lingual monthly in Punjabi and Urdu, 1945-1951', held at the National Archive (NA).

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

active service in Europe and South-East Asia, whereas West Indian recruits were more often sent to Britain to fulfil auxiliary roles.⁹ Indians were involved in the domestic British war effort – for example, historian Rozina Visram estimates that there were more than 3,000 Indian civilians working in British munitions factories by the middle of 1942.¹⁰ The majority of these people had been resident in Britain before the war, however, and had taken advantage of the wartime demand for labour to get better-paid jobs. The number of demobilised Indian soldiers who decided to move to Britain in the decade after the war was small though, because few of them had any direct connection with the country.

After the war, the creation of a National Health Service in 1948 attracted a number of Indian doctors, although only a small number of Asian immigrants travelled to Britain during the 1950s.¹¹ When immigration from India and Pakistan sharply increased at the start of the 1960s, its composition also changed. Whereas most Asian immigrants had previously been young men, the new arrivals began to include their parents, wives and children, as people rushed to get their families into Britain before its open door closed. Statistics compiled by the Central Office of Information showed that, in 1959, 16,500 West Indians but only 2,950 Indians and 850 Pakistanis migrated to Britain. In 1962, however, immigration from India and Pakistan outstripped that from the Caribbean, and by 1963 there were more than four times as many immigrants arriving from Asia as from the Caribbean.¹²

⁹ Ministry of Defence figures state, for example, that 200,000 Indian and 90,000 African troops fought in Burma between 1942 and 1945. See:

http://www.wewerethere.defencedynamics.mod.uk/wewerethere_old/infareast.html.

¹⁰ R. Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London, 2002), p. 268.

¹¹ Pakistan consisted of two separate territories, East and West Pakistan, which were part of the same country despite being over a thousand miles apart. In December 1971 civil war in East Pakistan resulted in some of its territory rejoining India and the rest forming a new country, Bangladesh.

¹² *Commonwealth Immigrants to Britain* (London: HMSO, 1967), p12. The immigration figures for 1963 were 7,928 West Indians, 16,336 Pakistanis and 17,498 Indians.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

Most Pakistani immigrants to Britain during the 1960s were tenant farmers or peasants from the poor, agricultural, battle-torn border regions of Mirpur in West Pakistan and Sylhet in East Pakistan and were Muslims. Indian immigrants usually came from the slightly more industrialised districts of Punjab and Gujarat and were mainly Sikh (from the Punjab) with a small minority of Hindus (from Gujarat). Western and Eastern Pakistanis and Punjabi and Gujarati Indians all spoke different languages. Despite these differences the young Indian and Pakistani men, who made up more than three quarters of the initial immigrants, shared the same goals once in Britain.¹³ For all of them, their migration was driven by the desire to accrue enough money to improve the quality of life and standing of their families and communities back home. Initially, they did not intend to remain in Britain once they had made enough money to meet their responsibilities at home. Unlike many male West Indian immigrants, who had already migrated with or subsequently sent for their wives and children by the time the Commonwealth Immigrants Act came into effect on 1 July 1962, these Asian men still viewed themselves as temporary migrants rather than settlers. Once they realised that their financial ambitions could not be easily realised and that the stringent restrictions of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act meant that if they left Britain they might not have the chance to return, they too began to send for their families, who as their dependents were still allowed to enter Britain without restriction.

With the arrival of wives, parents and children came a tightening up of the social mores within Asian communities in Britain. The young single men, who had been their enjoying freedom away from the watchful eyes of their parents and communities, had adapted their lifestyles to the West. It was not an unusual sight,

¹³ Hiro estimates that in 1960 the ratio of male to female immigrants was 3:1 from India and 40:1 from Pakistan. See D. Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London, 1971), p. 108.

for example, to see Pakistani Muslim men drinking beer in a pub and many Indian Sikh men had shaved their beards and cut their hair to make it easier to find work. A similar relaxing of religious observance for female Asian immigrants would have been unthinkable, however, as women were traditionally the bearers of their family honour, and as such their behaviour was more closely watched and regulated. Because they were often not allowed to work or socialise outside of their families, Asian women in Britain were more insulated from westernising influences than men. Religion was often extremely important to them because displays of piety and religious devotion were one of the few ways they could gain status and express themselves. Many Asian families in Britain discovered, however, that they could not make ends meet unless the women undertook paid work. The 1971 census recorded that 40.8 per cent of Indian women and 20.7 per cent of Pakistani women earned wages.¹⁴ Pakistani women, who had to follow more strict religious observances, were more likely to undertake piecework that could be done at home, which was considered a more honourable solution. Indian women also laboured at this low-paid and unregulated home-work, but also took jobs in factories and laundries. The dishonour of having to work outside the home in an environment that included men was lessened by the fact that whole shifts were often staffed entirely by Indian women.

The Pakistani and Indian communities that grew in Britain in the 1960s were concentrated in London, the West Midlands and Yorkshire, with more Indians living in the South and more Pakistanis in the North.¹⁵ Whatever their

¹⁴ Statistics quoted in P. Parmar, 'Gender, race and class: Asian women in resistance' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London, 1982), p. 247.

¹⁵ Much of the information in this paragraph is taken from a Political and Economic Planning (PEP) survey published as D. Smith, *The Facts of Racial Disadvantage: a National Survey* (London, 1976).

professions had been at home, most Asian men initially joined the British working class on the lowest rung. The jobs that were open to them were usually badly paid, often dangerous and almost invariably involved unsociable hours and/or shift-work. To avoid this, a small *petit bourgeoisie* of shopkeepers and restaurateurs quickly developed – as all those who could circumvent the widespread racial discrimination of British employers by working for themselves, did so. Once established in Britain, however, Pakistanis and Indians fared quite differently in terms of economic advancement, educational achievement and social integration. A 1971 Runnymede Trust survey of 450 young Indian, Pakistani and West Indian immigrants noted that, 'Clearly most people would consider the young Pakistanis to be the worst off. They are almost certainly the most circumscribed of the three groups in terms of educational background, job status and, to some extent, housing conditions'.¹⁶ Although the survey found that West Indians were most economically successful overall, it noted that Indians spoke much better English than Pakistanis and had higher educational qualifications than either Pakistanis or West Indians. Of the three groups, the Pakistanis were the least likely to stay on at school after the age of sixteen and the most likely to work in unskilled jobs.¹⁷ Furthermore, the survey concluded, 'Insofar as [political] passivity does exist, it is most common among the Pakistani youth interviewed'.¹⁸

The most upwardly mobile group of Asian immigrants did not arrive in Britain until the end of the 1960s. They were African Asians who arrived either as British citizens or refugees from Kenya, Uganda, Malawi and Tanzania between 1967 and 1976. The 1976 Political and Economic Planning survey, *The Facts of*

¹⁶ P. Evans, *The Attitudes of Young Immigrants* (London, 1971), p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

Racial Disadvantage, noted that African Asians had the best English language skills and the most educational qualifications of all Asian immigrants.¹⁹ Although they were descended from Indian 'coolie' labourers brought over by British imperial administrators in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to work on projects like the Uganda-Kenya railway, by the 1960s Asians in eastern and southern African countries were disproportionately represented in the professional middle classes. It was precisely these Asians' relative financial and social superiority that leaders like Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta and Uganda's Idi Amin exploited in order to garner public support for policies restricting their activities in Africa or expelling them entirely. The majority of the Asians who emigrated to Britain from Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s had chosen to take British citizenship when the African colonies they lived in gained independence and were finding life as foreign nationals very difficult under the Africanisation laws of the new independent nations. They were political refugees rather than economic migrants and already well practised at making the most of living in an alien and potentially hostile country. Despite successive British governments' best efforts to keep them out or make them move to areas where there were few fellow Asians, the majority of the East African Asians eventually settled in London or the Midlands, where they played an important role in the industrial disputes of the 1970s.

Asian political activity during the 1960s

Asians – particularly Indians – campaigned on a range of issues that affected their communities during the 1960s, including immigration rules, the infringement of

¹⁹ Smith, *The Facts*, pp. 44, 47.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

their religious rites, discrimination at work and educational inequalities such as the bussing of their children to distant schools. They also participated in broader organisations fighting for racial equality, even those with radical agendas. The most active Asian organisations were the Indian Workers Associations, both those in the Midlands network that were part of Joshi's IWA (GB) and the separate, independent IWA Southall. Of all the issues affecting Asians in Britain, immigration restriction and the tangle of sometimes arbitrary and unjust rules and practices that complicated their passage to Britain and attempts to settle once there, were the most important. With the possible exception of CCARD, all the groups mentioned at the start of the chapter campaigned hard against Britain's immigration laws.

Founded in Birmingham in February 1961, CCARD was the first post-war broad-front, anti-racist organisation outside of London. Set up jointly by the Birmingham IWA, the West Indian Workers' Association, the Pakistani Workers' Association and the Birmingham University Socialist Union, CCARD was dedicated to racial equality. Because of its coalitional make-up, CCARD was, in some ways, less radical than the local IWA, from which much of its membership came, but it grew from the same political heritage. White CPGB member Shirley Fossick was recruited to CCARD as its campaign secretary in 1962 and later went on to marry its co-founder Jagmohan Joshi. She maintains that CCARD's form and direction were very much influenced by its Asian membership. 'It was born of the experiences of a lot of the people who came from the Punjab, who were politicised and had experience working in broad fronts in India', she says. 'Pakistani workers, Indian workers were all central ... There were other organisations and trade unionists that were there and alongside it, but the black workers' organisations

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

were at the forefront'.²⁰ CCARD, therefore, was an early British civil rights organisation that had its roots in independent Asian traditions of political dissent and campaigning for equality.

The fact that CCARD preceded the similar but much higher profile London-based Campaign Against Racial Discrimination by almost four years undermines the assumption that Asian communities were inward-looking and apolitical and lagged behind West Indians and Africans in terms of organising against racism. Far from being politically apathetic, Asian activists by the mid-1960s were engaged in a heated debate over the tactics required to achieve their organisations' goals of economic and social equality. The invitation to join CARD exposed an ideological divide in many organisations over whether they should follow Joshi's example of independent, grassroots and increasingly militant campaigning or CARD's policy of lobbying the government and trying to use its legislation to promote equality. The IWA (GB) had refused to join CARD, declaring it to be, 'nothing but a middle-class organisation trying to eliminate discrimination superficially and without any backing of the three major immigrant communities'.²¹ CCARD, also led by Joshi, declined its invitation to join on similar grounds. The large and influential IWA Southall, however, had been instrumental in setting up CARD and the National Federation of Pakistani Organisations (NFPA) and the Indian Social Club were also among its member organisations.²² Furthermore, several Asians, such as Pakistani academic Hamza Alavi, Ranjana Ash, the Runnymede Trust's Dipak Nandy and IWA Southall leader Vishnu Sharma, served on CARD's executive committee.

²⁰ Shirley Joshi, interviewed by the author, 2 November 2004.

²¹ Undated document held in the IWA archive at Birmingham Central Library.

²² The NFPA, founded in 1963, was itself an umbrella organisation representing over twenty Pakistani groups.

The number of Asians in leadership positions in CARD led Black Power activists to denounce it as Asian-dominated at its third annual conference in 1967. Although, in reality, it was not, 'The story was widely believed that CARD had been taken over by a sinister coalition of whites and Asians', former CARD member Michael Dummett recalled.²³ 'The first session of the Convention was conducted in an atmosphere of hysteria, fanned by personal abuse from which ... insulting racial epithets – directed against Asians as well as whites – were not absent'.²⁴ The Black Power activists' main objection to the perceived Asian over-representation in CARD, was that they viewed those Asians in leadership positions as being middle-class government apologists. This impression was partly based on CARD vice-chair Hamza Alavi's decision to agree to be co-opted onto statutory body, the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, in September 1965. Another factor was the reputation of the IWA Southall, which was seen as a middle-class organisation with conservative, integrationist, aims.

Founded in May 1957, the IWA Southall supported the Communist Party of India (CPI) and its leader Vishnu Sharma was a lifetime member of the British Communist Party (CPGB), even sitting on its National Executive from 1971. Representing one of the largest settlements of Asians in Britain, the IWA Southall welcomed Pakistani as well as Indian members. It was well funded, collecting enough money from membership dues to purchase the Dominion cinema, which it transformed into an Indian film house, as well as a meeting space for all black people. It campaigned against the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill in 1961,

²³ M. Dummett, 'CARD Reconsidered', *Race Today* 5:2 (1973) p. 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43. Dummett's article was written as a riposte to fellow former CARD member Marion Glean who had argued in a book review – M. Glean, 'Whatever happened to CARD?', *Race Today*, 5:1 (1973) – that there was no antipathy between Asians and West Indians in CARD in 1967. Dummett's argument is the more convincing of the two, especially as Glean had left CARD by 1967 and did not attend the conference.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

provided food and money for striking workers at the local Woolf's factory in 1965 and, in 1967, joined forces with the West Indian Standing Conference to found the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. (An organisation that campaigns effectively for the better treatment of immigrants and provides a direly needed welfare and advocacy service for them at the ports of entry, the JCWI still exists.) In 1969 the IWA Southall also joined the campaign against Ealing borough council's discriminatory policy of bussing black schoolchildren.²⁵

These campaigning activities notwithstanding, the accusation of conservatism and shying away from hard politics in favour of cultural issues was levelled against the IWA Southall by other Indian and Black Power groups in the 1960s and 1970s. 'Apart from one major demonstration against the Immigration Act of 1972 [sic], into which the IWA [Southall] leadership was forced, it has done absolutely nothing', thundered a pamphlet published by another Southall group, the Indian Workers' Front. 'Most of the time this gentry are happy to act as the stooges of the Home Office'.²⁶ The main source of the Indian Workers' Front's hatred of the IWA Southall, however, stemmed from the latter's continued support of the 'fascist' Congress Party of India, not its conduct in Britain. Politics in the home country clearly still shaped political allegiances in the metropolis, even as late as the mid-1970s. It was certainly the case, though, that the IWA Southall was not as radical as the Birmingham branch of the IWA (GB), particularly with regard

²⁵ In 1963, in response to complaints from white parents in Ealing that they did not want their children to be educated in classes with a majority of 'immigrant' (that is, black) pupils, the borough council asked education minister Edward Boyle to visit Ealing's schools and advise them what to do. Boyle's solution was to suggest that a quota be introduced, restricting the number of 'immigrant' children per class to a third. Those that exceeded the quota would be bussed to a school with fewer 'immigrant' pupils. This stigmatised black children and took away their choice to go to a local school. They also frequently found that they were very unwelcome at the school to which they had been bussed. White children were never subject to bussing. The 1965 White Paper, *Immigration from the Commonwealth*, recommended that all schools use a quota system for 'immigrant children' and, hence, bussing.

²⁶ Indian Workers' Front, 'On the lap-dogs of Indian Fascism: an exposure of the leading clique of the IWA (Southall)', undated, p. 2. Held, unfiled, at the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

to its willingness to work with the Labour Party. 'Though the IWA-Southall has criticized the Labour government', wrote sociologist DeWitt John in 1969, 'it has consistently supported Labour candidates in British elections'.²⁷ Ultimately, it was this willingness to collaborate with the state that undermined the IWA's reputation in many eyes. Assessing the legacy of the leaders of the IWA Southall, academic Harwant Bains concluded that, although it achieved many things, 'Unfortunately, they also succeeded in opening the back door to forms of state sponsorship which destroyed the very principles of autonomous organisation for which they formerly stood'.²⁸ Bains' assessment throws up superficially striking parallels with the transformation of several Black Power activists into government-sponsored social workers in the mid-1970s under the Urban Programme, but the IWA Southall never professed to be part of a radical movement and its achievements should be judged within its own frame of reference.

Asians displayed great militancy in defending their cultural rights and these should not be overlooked by defining political activity solely in narrow party or organisational terms. Religious issues, in particular, should not be considered apart from their political and social context. Many Indians and Pakistanis who did not think it an appropriate use of their time to protest against the attacks of far-right politicians like Enoch Powell and Duncan Sandys, were quick to demonstrate when they felt their religious freedom was being threatened. For example, when, in August 1967, the transport department of Wolverhampton council threatened to sack a Sikh bus conductor if he did not shave his beard and replace his turban with a cap, it sparked a two-year campaign of resistance. The actions taken included a

²⁷ D. John, *Indian Workers' Associations in Britain* (London, 1969), p.159.

²⁸ H. Bains, 'Southall Youth: an old-fashioned story' in P. Cohen and H. Bains (eds), *Multi-Racist Britain* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 241.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

silent march of 5,000 Sikhs through Wolverhampton in February 1968 and culminated in sixty-six-year-old local leader Sohan Singh Jolly committing himself to ritual self-immolation if turban-wearing were not allowed by the Sikh new year in 1969. Jolly's way of showing his resistance to cultural imperialism was more than even the most extreme Black Power activist in Britain had ever proposed.²⁹

Although the Sikh bus staff's grievances were ostensibly religious, their West Indian co-workers viewed their campaign as also against racism, despite local MP Enoch Powell's dismissal of the dispute as nothing more than Indian 'communalism' in a February 1968 speech.³⁰ In a union ballot on whether to support Sikh bus staff's demands, West Indians voted with the Asian members. 'The result was clearly unexpected by the union leaders, who imagined the West Indians would vote with the whites', explained a study of the dispute.³¹ West Indian workers had noted, however, the ugly racist tone of the public opposition to the Sikh workers' cause. Wolverhampton council eventually backed down on 9 April 1969, to avoid putting Jolly's ultimatum to the test and because the Sikh community showed absolutely no sign of weakening its stance.

In 1967 the issue of primary immigration became a central issue in British politics once again as several thousand British passport-holding Asians facing expulsion from Kenya attempted to take up their right of abode in Britain. The length to which the British government was prepared to go to prevent more non-white immigration shocked and in many cases radicalised those Asians already living in Britain. On 1 March 1968, the Commonwealth Immigration Act was voted into law by an overwhelming majority of MPs, after only one week's debate.

²⁹ The information about the Wolverhampton dispute is taken from D. Bentham, *Transport and Turbans: a Comparative Study in Local Politics* (London, 1970).

³⁰ Extracts from Powell's speech at Walsall in February 1968 are included in H. Bains, 'Southall Youth: an old-fashioned story' in Cohen and Bains (eds), *Multi-Racist Britain*, p. 56.

³¹ Bentham, *Transport and Turbans*, p. 44.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

'By far the most disturbing and demoralizing experience for Pakistani and Indian settlers was the 1968 Immigration Bill', concluded Indian commentator Hiro.³² Having been portrayed as little better than a plague of locusts during the run-up to the 'Kenyan Asians' Act, Asians provided the backbone of the campaign against it. Several Asian organisations also joined the new Black Peoples' Alliance (BPA), in which only groups that had never taken government money and whose representatives did not sit on government bodies were allowed to participate. In a tone-setting act of defiance, the founding conference on 28 April 1968 was held in a house in Leamington Spa that had previously been attacked by a British branch of the Ku Klux Klan. Several of the original twenty member groups advocated Black Power.

Asian militancy and Black Power

Although some Asian individuals and organisations did participate in the Black Power movement, it held little appeal for their wider communities. Patterned after American Black Power, the British movement focused on issues that were much more relevant to people of African than Asian descent. Black Power's central emphases on self-determination and cultural nationalism were non-issues to Indians and Pakistanis. European imperialism had subjugated and indentured Asians in the countries it administered, but not enslaved them, deliberately dismantled their family structure, or tried to eradicate their indigenous cultures, as it had in the Caribbean. Asian communities in Britain were imbued with traditions, customs and religions that stretched back thousands of years – cultural nationalism to them was not a goal to aspire to but a daily reality.

³² Ibid., p. 144.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

Recalling his visit to London in July 1967, Stokely Carmichael wrote that he had been pleasantly surprised, 'to hear Black Power resonating and to see the raised fists in the *Asian* communities, especially among Pakistani youth'.³³ This anomalous statement, given the general indifference of Pakistani immigrants in Britain to Black Power, on either side of the Atlantic, can probably be explained by the visits between 1964 and 1966 of outspoken and charismatic Nation of Islam (NoI) proselytisers Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali. Despite its name, the NoI was not recognised as a religious group by orthodox Muslims (and in fact was regarded as heretical), but this did not stop some young British Muslims being fascinated by its spokesmen. Former second-in-command, Malcolm X, was invited to speak at Islamic student society meetings at the universities of Sheffield and Birmingham in December 1964 and February 1965 and did so to packed audiences, although in Sheffield, at least, the majority of attendees were white. By December 1964 Malcolm X had left the NoI, become an orthodox Sunni Muslim, and was attempting to formulate a new global political movement of oppressed black people. Unfettered by the political conservatism of the NoI, he could have become a powerful radical Muslim leader. His untimely death on 21 February 1965, cut short this potential.

Wildly popular with Muslim and non-Muslim black people alike, world heavyweight boxing champion Ali visited London twice in 1966 to fight British boxers. On both occasions he was chaperoned by Michael X and 'made a point of reaching out into the Muslim communities'.³⁴ Furthermore, in April 1967, the news that Ali had refused to answer the draft to fight in the Vietnam war, on

³³ S. Carmichael with E. M. Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: the Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York, 2003), p. 576.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

religious grounds, forfeiting his title and risking prison as a result, earned him the respect of Muslims and black people across the world. In 1971, a survey of young immigrants revealed that when asked whom they most admired, most Pakistanis named Muhammad Ali.³⁵ Unlike Malcolm X, Ali was still a devoted member of the NoI when he visited Britain. But although it was bracketed with the Black Power movement by white Americans, who found its members' advocacy of self-defence and disdain for white society equally frightening, the NoI was in fact not interested in challenging the status quo. Espousing a millenarian eschatology, it deliberately abstained from earthly politics, and thus would neither have sought to encourage Muslim immigrants in Britain to take an interest in Black Power, nor viewed such an outcome as desirable. Nonetheless, Ali's radical stand against white imperialism in the name of his version of Islam was a powerful example of political radicalism to young Muslims.

Although British Black Power theoretically embraced all oppressed non-white people as politically 'black', in practice this did not always reflect the feelings of its advocates. Those Black Power groups, such as the Black Liberation Front (BLF), that tended more towards cultural nationalism, found that their emphasis on constructing a positive black identity via a closer identification with and celebration of African culture and history had limited appeal for their Asian members.³⁶ Groups which defined oppression in class terms, like the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) and the Black Panther Movement (BPM), found it easier to bridge ethnic divisions. This was demonstrated in 1968, when the expulsion of thousands of Asians from Kenya presented a potential challenge to

³⁵ Evans, *Young Immigrants*, p. 26. West Indians put Ali in joint first position with Martin Luther King, whereas Indians placed him third, after Mahatma Gandhi and, somewhat more surprisingly, Harold Wilson.

³⁶ For a fuller discussion of this see chapter 3.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

the unity of Black Power groups. A statement from the inaugural meeting of the BPA in 1968, made reference to the sometimes antagonistic interests of its members of African and Asian descent. 'Further contradictions appear between the national minorities. They have been suspicious of each other and have sometimes seen their interests conflicting, e.g. over the Kenyan Asians', it read, but added, hopefully, 'This meeting is one of the most concrete signs of us overcoming these differences'.³⁷ An article in the journal of the BPA-affiliated Black Revolutionary Action Movement (BRAM), showed, however, how a class-based analysis could be used to overcome nationalist divisions. Criticising both the policy of Africanisation for being 'bourgeois nationalism' and the behaviour of East African Asians as 'collaborating with imperialism at every level', it explained that, 'the only true and everlasting solution to the Asian problem is for the Asian working class and African workers and peasants to overcome their racial bigotry, realise the new African bourgeoisie is a common enemy to both and ... establish a truly socialist society abolishing the exploitation of man'.³⁸ In 1973, however, the issue of East African Asians again showed up divisions in the Black Power movement. A BPM 'Statement on the Ugandan Asian situation' from September 1972 noted that, 'We can see that the Ugandan Asian issue is having the effect of deepening the suspicions that exist between black people of African origin and black people of Asian origin'.³⁹ Despite BRAM's exhortations to join together in a socialist utopia, class antagonisms and a degree of mutual suspicion still existed between people of African and Asian descent in the Black Power movement.

³⁷ 'Black Peoples' Alliance: documented and adopted at the inaugural meeting 28/4/68'. Document held in Tony Soares' private collection.

³⁸ 'The problem of Asians in East Africa', *The Black Ram* 1:5 (November 1969), p. 5.

³⁹ Black Panther Movement, 'Statement on Ugandan Asian Situation', 11 September 1972, p. 1. Held in Tony Soares' private collection.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

The overwhelming majority of Asians were highly suspicious of Black Power groups, even those promoting a racially inclusive socialist agenda. The media and politicians' depiction of Black Power as an anarchistic revolutionary movement, or the black equivalent of the National Front, worried most Asians just as much as it did white Britons. A 1971 survey, which asked young Asians whether they should 'be prepared to fight for [their] rights as a black man', found that 91 per cent of Indians and 71 per cent of Pakistanis agreed to some extent.⁴⁰ Asked, additionally, if they thought they should join a Black Power group, the overwhelming majority, however, said they did not – although Indians were reported as being keener on the idea than Pakistanis.⁴¹ Joshi encouraged members of the IWA (GB) to think of themselves as 'black' as well as Asian. 'People like Joshi were very clear that they were black and took on that identification', remembers his widow. 'If some of the elements in some of the Black Power organisations among the African-Caribbean community would say, "no you're not", Joshi's position was we're in a common struggle, let's not fight over who's black'.⁴² He took great pains, however, to justify to IWA members his decision to align the association with Black Power groups in the BPA, finessing the definition of 'Black Power' to suit their proclivities. 'Some of the organizations which we worked with in the Alliance belonged to the Black Power Movement and we therefore felt it important that we should clearly define our attitude to black power [sic]', he explained to the IWA (GB)'s 1970 national conference.

The only general definition we can accept is one which defines black people in terms of their class basis, as workers, peasants, capitalists etc. and then proceeds to explain black power as the control of the state by the great

⁴⁰ Evans, *Young Immigrants*, p. 25.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴² Shirley Joshi, interviewed by the author, 2 November 2004.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

majority of black people, workers and peasants, in the lands in which they live.⁴³

Joshi's definition of Black Power stemmed from an unusually intimate knowledge of the movement. He had had as much first-hand experience of American Black Power as any of the London Black Power groups' leaders. Malcolm X had arranged a meeting with the IWA (GB) leadership during his visit to Birmingham in February 1965. His was not the only visit. Shirley Joshi recalls: 'I can remember the press camped out in our front garden because there were visitors from Black Power organisations ... One was carrying a gun!'⁴⁴ Joshi and the IWA (GB) also had a close relationship with British Black Power groups. 'Toward the end of the 1960s leading members of the IWA talked about themselves as black and made those connections with the progressive elements of the Black Power movement', recalls Shirley Joshi.⁴⁵ The connections were not just at the level of leaders. Rank and file IWA (GB) members – sometimes in their thousands – regularly constituted the majority of marchers on demonstrations organised by Black Power groups, just as they had for more moderate organisations in the 1960s. After a BPA demonstration in 1969, Earl Corlis, leader of BRAM, made an appeal 'to my African and West Indian brothers and sisters', that, 'in future we hope to see more of [you] on the street demonstrating and not to depend on our Asian brothers and sisters and our white liberal friends'.⁴⁶ The following March, when another BPA-organised demonstration outside the American embassy in London, against the prosecution of American Black Panther

⁴³ MS 2141/2: 'Report of the General Secretary presented by J. Joshi at the National Conference of the IWA (GB), 7/11/70–8/11/70, in Nottingham', p. 18. Held in the IWA archive in Birmingham Central Library.

⁴⁴ Shirley Joshi, interviewed by the author, 2 November 2004.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Earl Corlis, 'The Black Peoples [sic] Alliance. Report of meeting', *The Black Ram* 1:3 (15 February 1969), p. 4.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

chairman Bobby Seale, resulted in several protesters being arrested, the IWA (GB) took a leading role in a solidarty protest outside the embassy the following week. Joshi explained that they were protesting, 'Not only at racism in the US and in particular the treatment of Bobby Seale, but also at the disgraceful behaviour of the police towards black workers in Britain'.⁴⁷ The IWA(GB) was not the only Asian organisation to become directly involved in the Black Power movement. The London-based, revolutionary Pakistan Progressive Party (PPP) gave the Universal Coloured People's Association (UCPA) and its successor the BUFP material help such as printing its leaflets and the Pakistani Workers' Union (PWU) also collaborated with the UCPA and the BUFP.⁴⁸

Other Asian groups that did not see the relevance of the Black Power movement to their members, unintentionally promoted behaviour compatible with its principles. 'The Black Power concept is seen to have two basic elements: racial and cultural pride and integrity; and racial or ethnic self-help', wrote Hiro in 1971. 'In that context many Asian settlers show a remarkable (albeit unrecognised) rapport with it'.⁴⁹ One of the most frequent complaints about Asian immigrants made by white Britons was that they did not try to integrate; that is they continued to dress distinctively, eat exotic food and speak foreign languages. This was exactly the effect the British Black Power movement was trying to manufacture by the adoption of African dress, the opening of soul food restaurants like the Back-a-Yard and the Mangrove cafés in Notting Hill and the use of Jamaican patois and African American slang.

⁴⁷ MS 2141/2: 'Report of the General Secretary presented by J. Joshi at the National Conference of the IWA (GB), 7/11/70-8/11/70, in Nottingham', p. 22. Held in the IWA archive in Birmingham Central Library.

⁴⁸ The front page of the first edition of UCPA newspaper *Black Power Speaks*, for example, declared it was 'Produced by P. P. P.', and other UCPA and BUFP documents, such as flyers for meetings, held at the IRR bear the initials of both the PPP and the PWU.

⁴⁹ Hiro, *Black British*, p. 148.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

Asians' deep religious commitments could also be a source of strength and cohesion in secular activities. Sikh gurdwaras, Muslim mosques and Hindu temples provided public spaces where black people could gather privately, out of sight and hearing of white society, just as many African American churches in the Deep South had done during the civil rights movement. Shirley Joshi says that IWA members received a great deal of support from Birmingham's gurdwaras. 'They'd pay for coaches down to demonstrations, provide food for people on the demos and give a platform to people', she remembers.⁵⁰ Gurdwaras and mosques also took collections for striking Asian workers who were not unionised or whose union was not supporting their action. These religious institutions did not instigate campaigns against racial discrimination, but neither did they refuse to participate in them. Even when strict codes of behaviour, dress and decorum were traversed, such as by Indian women strikers during the Grunwick dispute, religious bodies often continued to give them their moral backing and material support.

By the late 1960s the popular perception of Asian people as meek and submissive was increasingly resulting in Asian men being targeted for violence by white skinhead gangs. 'Paki-bashing' was reported as a new phenomenon in British newspapers after a spate of attacks on Asian hospital workers and the fatal stabbing of kitchen porter Tosir Ali in East London in the first week of April 1970, but in fact anti-Asian violence was not new. During the 1958 Notting Hill and Nottingham riots, which took place before wide-scale immigration from India and Pakistan had started, the tiny Sikh population of the St Ann's district of Nottingham was targeted by local teddy boys. The Indian community responded by founding a branch of the IWA in Nottingham at the end of 1958, but they did not

⁵⁰ Shirley Joshi, interviewed by the author, 2 November 2004.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

physically fight back, unlike many West Indians had in Notting Hill. West Indians were seen as likely to defend themselves if attacked, an impression reinforced, after 1967, by the advent of Black Power. Violent white bigots, therefore, increasingly chose to target Asians instead.

Young white racists also felt themselves antagonised by Asians' cultural differences in a way they were not by the younger generation of West Indians who were much more British in outlook. In March 1970 a *World In Action* documentary about the relationship between white and black youths in the East End of London was aired on television. It contained interviews with various young white men. Explaining why he got on better with West Indians, one said, 'They're just like other English blokes, you can talk to them, you look at the way they dress, there's things about them you can learn'.⁵¹ Asked why 'white toughs' did not target West Indians, another replied, 'Because they'd get a right tasty beating ... [T]he white boys are going to pick on the Pakistanis because they know the Jamaican boy is going to fight back. That's why they pick on the Pakistanis, because they know they're the weakest race'.⁵²

In 1967, a spate of assaults on Pakistanis in the King's Cross area of London prompted the Pakistani Workers' Union to set up defence patrols and publish *A Memorandum Concerning Attacks on Pakistani People in London*.⁵³ The patrols quickly put an end to the attacks in King's Cross, but political developments at the end of the 1960s both alienated Asians from white society and increased their chances of being physically assaulted by white people. Such developments included the scaremongering that preceded the passage of the 1968

⁵¹ Transcript of *World In Action*, 'Trouble Down East', broadcast on ITV on 9 March 1970, p. 23. Held at the IRR.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵³ Pakistani Workers' Union, *A Memorandum Concerning Attacks on Pakistani People in London* (London, 1967).

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

Commonwealth Immigrants Act, Enoch Powell's inflammatory speeches on immigration from April 1968 onwards, and the rising popularity of far right groups like the newly created National Front.⁵⁴ The most important factor in the rise of violence against Asians during this period, however, was the police's apparent unwillingness or inability to catch Asians' assailants.⁵⁵ 'Many Asian women I spoke to told me that for protection from racial attacks it was essential to have Asian neighbours', recorded Amrit Wilson in 1978. 'Calling the police had proved again and again to be useless'.⁵⁶ This reticence on the part of the police meant that white racists felt they could attack Asians without fear of arrest or prosecution. Conversely, many Asians felt there was little point in even reporting attacks as the police would either do nothing or, worse, arrest them for having been involved in a fight. The relationship between the police and the Asian communities was further strained by the use of police to break up pickets during strikes and to track down illegal immigrants. The 1971 Immigration Act charged police with the latter responsibility and although it was promised that they would not do this by means of 'fishing raids', after 1972 impromptu invasions of workplaces and homes became a feared and unpleasant part of many Asians' lives. The Metropolitan Police's newly formed Immigration Intelligence Unit, which masterminded the searches for illegal immigrants in the capital, quickly came to occupy a similar level of notoriety among Asian communities as the Special Patrol Groups did in West Indian neighbourhoods.

After 1970, therefore, Asians were being forced to take a position on two issues that had been affecting West Indian and African immigrants since the 1950s:

⁵⁴ The National Front was a coalition of the League of Empire Loyalists, the British National Party and a section of the Racial Preservation Society.

⁵⁵ For numerous examples see L. London, 'The East End of London: Paki-Bashing in 1970', *Race Today*, 5:11 (1973), pp. 337-41.

⁵⁶ A. Wilson, *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain* (London, 1978), p. 19.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

anti-black violence by white people and racism in the police force. The response of some Asian groups was in every way as militant as that of the Black Panther Movement or the Racial Adjustment Action Society: vigilante groups were formed, retaliatory violence was promised and the police were condemned. The IWA (GB), for example, publicly expressed its disillusionment with the police and its support for the use of violence in self-defence at its annual conference in November 1970. 'The black community have [sic] little faith in the processes of law in Britain. They have frequently found themselves at the end of discriminatory behaviour by the police', explained Joshi.⁵⁷

But the black workers are now standing up to defend themselves. When the recent wave of skin-head attacks began the Indian Workers' Association immediately called upon its members in all cities and towns to take whatever measures were necessary, including the formation of self-defence committees to protect Indian lives and property. The Central Executive Committee of the Indian Workers' Association also promised financial help to Indians involved in court cases arising out of their self-defence. The response was immediate and as a result the skin-heads have been silenced in the majority of towns where Indian workers live.⁵⁸

This statement represented a significant change from the IWA (GB)'s position in 1966, and makes it clear how disillusioned with the police the organisation had become in the intervening four years. Reporting the IWA's response to the violent harassment of a Smethwick member by local whites, the 1966 executive committee report recorded that, 'A letter was sent to the police and the Watch Committee in which the IWA demanded the protection of the racial minorities by the law of the country. It further stated that if adequate protection was not given then the racial minorities would set up vigilante committees in different areas to protect their

⁵⁷ MS 2141/2: 'Report of the General Secretary presented by J. Joshi at the National Conference of the IWA (GB), 7/11/70-8/11/70', pp. 21-22. Held in the IWA archive in Birmingham Central Library.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

communities'.⁵⁹ The threat of the local community taking the law into its own hands appears to have galvanised the police into action. 'After this the police increased its [sic] patrol and the attackers who were at large for two weeks were arrested in 24 hours', the report noted.⁶⁰ Although the IWA (GB) was willing to bypass the police and resort to self-defence as early as 1966, by 1970 it had given up on the idea of petitioning the police to uphold the law and assumed that Asians would be prosecuted for defending themselves.

Jagmohan Joshi's views on police racism in 1970 were not representative of those of most Asians. A Runnymede Trust survey of young immigrants' attitudes in 1971 showed that 66 per cent of young Indians and 75 per cent of young Pakistanis agreed with the statement that the police dealt fairly with their ethnic group.⁶¹ The same survey noted, however, that of the young Asians and West Indians it interviewed, 'The most militant have had most encounters of an unpleasant kind with the police'.⁶² Events such as the widely publicised case of Satnam Singh Kane were very damaging to the police's reputation. Nineteen-year-old Indian Kane was arrested in March 1973 and confessed in Southall police station to stealing £50 from his employers, an Ealing petrol station. In court he changed his plea to not guilty and said he had been beaten and threatened into confessing, and when the missing money was subsequently found by his employers, Kane's case was thrown out and an inquiry ordered into how he had

⁵⁹ 'Indian Workers Association Great Britain, Birmingham Branch. Report of the Executive Committee, from 1st May 1963 to 1st April 1966', p. 2. Document held in IWA archive at Birmingham Central Library.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶¹ Evans, *Young Immigrants*, p. 28.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

been persuaded to plead guilty. In October 1973, however, an internal Metropolitan Police inquiry cleared all the officers involved of wrong-doing.⁶³

By 1976, in Southall at least, the cumulative experience of white racism and cases such as Kane's had caused a sea change in young Asians' attitudes. The catalyst for a new wave of more radical, direct action organisations, was the murder of another Indian teenager, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, outside the IWA-owned Dominion cinema, by a gang of white youths on 4 June 1976 and the police response to it. When Metropolitan Police Commissioner Robert Mark publicly discounted racism as a possible motive for the murder, young Asians in Southall took to the streets in protest, clashing violently with the police. Ignoring the wishes of the IWA Southall, which did not support direct action, the youths marched on the local police station and staged a sit-in, demanding (and securing) the release of two Asians who had been arrested during the protests. The next day, at a meeting at the Dominion cinema, the Southall Youth Movement was formed.⁶⁴

Taking as its logo a clenched, black-gloved fist, the Southall Youth Movement instantly paid homage to the American Black Panther Party (BPP). Future Asian Youth Movements (AYMs) followed the blueprint of the BPP more deeply. 'If you consider how the Black Panther Party emerges, AYM was very similar', explained a Birmingham organiser. 'We also adopted many of the rules of the Panthers'.⁶⁵ The SYM also drew on the radical black politics of the British Black Power movement, particularly in its appeal to Asians on secular, inclusive grounds. '[T]he Asian Youth Movements of the 1970s and 1980s were powerful examples of political movements that were influenced by black politics', wrote

⁶³ See L. Mackie, 'No charges over "confession"', *The Guardian*, 8 October 1973.

⁶⁴ Details of the formation of the Southall Youth Movement taken from CARF/Southall Rights, *Southall: the Birth of a Black Community* (London, 1981), p. 51.

⁶⁵ Birmingham AYM member Bhopinder Bassi quoted in Ramamurthy, 'The Politics', p. 45.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

Asian historian Anandi Ramamurthy. 'For the AYMs the term "black" denoted a political allegiance between those of African and Asian origin, without denying the specific cultural differences of each group'.⁶⁶ This political definition of black was a direct legacy of Britain's Black Power movement. It was not surprising that the AYMs replicated, in places, the ideology of Black Power, because their formation was a response to the same conditions that inspired the creation of those militant organisations in the 1960s. 'The death of Chaggar may have been the incident that spurred the Asian youth into organising themselves', concluded the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF), 'but the basis of their militancy was the racism that they experienced at school, in the streets and in the search for jobs'.⁶⁷ Their specific experiences of British racism dictated the focus of the AYMs' direct actions. Hence, according to Ramamurthy, 'The SYM tackled head-on what young Asians perceived as two central issues: popular racism and police racism'.⁶⁸ Almost nine years to the day after the first Black Power organisation was formed, Asian youth began to fan the embers of radical black politics and vowed to remain 'here to stay, here to fight'.⁶⁹

Asian workers and the trade union movement

Asians took the lead in industrial militancy among black workers from the mid-1960s onwards and were the driving force behind their struggle to participate in the trade union movement. Although the ultimate goal of most striking Asian workers was integration into the mainstream economy, to achieve this they had to first tackle the racism of the trade unions, employers and the state. 'Indians cannot

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

⁶⁷ CARF/Southall Rights, *Southall*, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Ramamurthy, 'The Politics', p. 42.

⁶⁹ 'Here to stay, here to fight!' was a popular slogan of the AYMs.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

afford to wait for the white workers to come out and defend their interests', explained the 1968 IWA (GB) pamphlet, 'Indian Workers, British Industry and the Trade Unions'.⁷⁰ The arrival of middle-class Asians, with higher expectations, from the East African countries of Kenya and Uganda in the late 1960s and early 1970s reinforced their efforts. 'At the bottom of the hierarchy of the production structure where spirits are assumed to be crushed, have come a new army of workers – fresh, vivacious and increasingly angry', wrote Amrit Wilson of the impact of (female) East African Asian workers on industrial militancy in Britain. 'Their expectations are high because many of them have, until recently had a middle-class life and outlook ... and because, unlike the British working class, they have not been ground down and prepared for their jobs by the British education system'.⁷¹ In August 1976, a pivotal strike was initiated by Jayaben Desai, a Ugandan Asian female worker at the Grunwick film-processing factory in North West London. The Grunwick dispute marked a turning point in the trade union movement's attitude to black workers and obliterated the image of Asian women as submissive and downtrodden. Asian women had initiated industrial action before, however, as early as 1967, when forty female cleaners working at Heathrow airport struck over low pay. Inexperienced, lacking good English and ill-supported by their union (the TGWU), their protest simply resulted in all forty being summarily sacked.⁷²

Hailing from countries with strong traditions of trade unionism and successful strike action, Caribbean, African and Asian immigrants made joining a trade union a priority as soon as they secured jobs in Britain. A government survey

⁷⁰ IWA (GB), 'Indian Workers, British Industry and the Trade Unions' (1968), p.9.

⁷¹ Amrit Wilson quoted in H. Mirza (ed.), *Black British Feminism: a Reader* (London, 1997), p. 31.

⁷² See letter from Ealing Community Relations Council to A. Wallis Johnson of the Joseph Rowntree Trust, 14 March 1973, p. 2. Held in the Black documents file at the IRR.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

from 1976 showed that the incidence of trade union membership among black male workers was consistently higher than that of their white counterparts, and that union membership among white and black women was roughly equal. 'Among men from minority groups who are in employment', stated the report, '61 per cent are members of a trade union, compared with 41 per cent of white men'.⁷³ Even very recent black male immigrants, it showed, were as likely to be union members as white workers.⁷⁴ These black workers soon found, however, that even when they joined a union, active membership was discouraged and their grievances were ignored. The same 1976 survey that recorded black workers' enthusiasm for trade unionism also noted that union leaders, 'had not generally taken steps to ensure that they got to know about cases of discrimination within the union, nor had they always taken decisive action to combat discrimination when they had got to know about it'. Furthermore, 'Little had been done to induct the new minority membership into the history, purposes and practices of the movement'.⁷⁵ The IWA (GB) had reached the same conclusion at the end of the 1960s. 'In the earlier years of this decade the main task of our Organisation has been to organise the Indian workers into trade unions and to fight against the discriminatory policies of the employers', explained a 1968 pamphlet. 'In the last few years ... Indian workers have found it increasingly necessary to also combat the racist attitudes and behaviour of the trade unions'.⁷⁶

Hence black workers often initiated industrial action without going through union channels and directed strikes against union racism as much as employer discrimination. Their ability to organise independently was facilitated by

⁷³ Smith, *The Facts*, p. 115.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁷⁶ IWA (GB), 'Indian Workers, British Industry and the Trade Unions' (1968), p. 1.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

discriminatory hiring practices and the unwillingness of white workers to do the lowest paid, most inconvenient and dangerous work, which meant that, although a factory's workforce might be racially mixed, black workers were often concentrated in certain departments or on specific shifts. This *de facto* segregation of black workers made it easier to discriminate against them because their differential treatment could plausibly be explained in terms of their specific job description or shift pattern. On the other hand, it also meant that black workers could come together more easily to recognise their grievances and organise independently to remedy them. In *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality*, American historian Bruce Nelson relates the similar situation facing African American steelworkers in the 1950s.⁷⁷ Noting their concentration in the lowest paid and most junior jobs and how the leadership of a comparatively progressive industrial union, the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), failed to honour its commitment to racial equality in the face of the opposition of rank and file white members, he concludes that African American steelworkers had little choice but to organise separate, racially-defined unions. '[T]he move toward black self-organisation in the mills and other work-places', he argues, 'was as inevitable as it was necessary'.⁷⁸ In the context of Britain in the 1970s, however, forming separate black unions was neither possible nor desirable for Asian workers.

The first nationally significant strike by black workers in Britain took place at Courtauld's Red Scar Mill in Preston in May 1965, but industrial action became a more urgent battle at the start of the 1970s. This was a result of the slowdown of

⁷⁷ B. Nelson, *Divided We Stand: Black Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton and Oxford, 2001).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

the British economy, which disproportionately affected black workers who were usually the last hired and first fired, as well as the combined impact of the Immigration and Industrial Relations Acts of 1971 and a campaign of shop floor recruitment by the National Front, which formed its own Trade Union Association in 1973. The combination of the Industrial Relations Act and the Immigration Act put black workers in a particularly precarious position. The Industrial Relations Act made it illegal for non-registered trade union officials to call spontaneous strikes. As unions very rarely took action over black workers' grievances and even less often supported their independent protests, this gave them no legal recourse to industrial action. Furthermore, as the terms of the 1971 Immigration Act stipulated that immigrants without residential status could be deported if they either lost their jobs or got into trouble with the police, immigrants who participated in unauthorised strikes risked losing far more than their jobs.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, a number of strikes after 1971, for example at Crepe Sizes in Nottingham in 1972 and Birmid Qualcast in Smethwick in 1973, highlighted the willingness of black workers to stand up for their rights. Without the support of their white co-workers and unions, however, these strikes almost always failed.

Tension between militant black activists who wanted separate unions and the majority of black workers, who did not, had first arisen during the dispute at Courtauld's in 1965. The strike of several hundred Asian and West Indian workers over pay rates attracted the attention of the recently formed Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS), whose leaders Michael X and Roy Sawh sought to make political capital out of the dispute. Travelling to Preston, Sawh and Michael X spoke at strike meetings, suggesting the idea of separate black unions and

⁷⁹ The 1971 Immigration Act came into force on 1 January 1973.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

highlighting the racial elements of the strikers' grievances. Drawing attention to the racial composition of the strikers was a double-edged sword, however, which could be used for or against the workers' cause. A BPM pamphlet from May 1971 noted that the Courtauld workers' legitimate grievance, that their workload had been increased without a commensurate pay raise, had been dismissed by their union, the TGWU, because most of the striking workers were black. The TGWU, therefore, 'stigmatised it as a "racial" strike', the pamphlet reported, 'because, they said, only the black workers were involved'.⁸⁰ RAAS's presence at strike meetings and Michael X's talk of separate black unions helped the TGWU and did not reflect the wishes of the strikers, who consistently protested that their grievances were economic. Reporting in the *Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* that both Michael X and Roy Sawh 'talked consistently in racial terms about the black man's burden and the white exploiter', white socialist Paul Foot noted that, 'They were respected by the strikers for their interest and wish to help but their views did not, in general, impress'.⁸¹

In the early 1970s, many Black Power groups trained their focus on black workers. In March 1971, the Black Workers' League (BWL, also known as the Black Workers Defence League or BWDL) was formed in London from an amalgamation of the Black Power Party, the Caribbean Workers' Union, the Committee of Afro-Asian Peoples and the Pakistani Workers Group.⁸² In 1973, partly to make it more appealing to Asian workers, the Black Panther Movement changed its name to the Black Workers Movement (BWM). 'Workers from Asia,

⁸⁰ BPM, 'The Position of Black People in Britain Today', May 1971, p. 8. Pamphlet held, unfiled, at the IRR.

⁸¹ P. Foot, 'The Strike at Courtauld's, 24 May to 12 June 1965', *The Institute of Race Relations Newsletter* supplement (July 1965), p. 4.

⁸² See 'Black liberation in Britain: Black Workers' League Manifesto', *The Black Liberator* 1:2/3 (Winter 1971), pp. 75-9.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

while marching side by side with us on the immigration issue ... picket lines and in the communities against racist attacks, regarded us as an Afro-organisation', explained an article on the name change in the BPM's newspaper, 'The Panther name seemed to exclude them...'.⁸³

Very few British Black Power activists believed it was possible to organise jointly on the shop floor with whites, although their reasons for thinking this differed greatly. The Black Liberation Front believed that racism was a much greater source of oppression than class and therefore collaborations with white people, especially the white working class, which it identified as the most racist section of society, were ill-advised. 'Nobody can tell a Black worker that he must unite with a white worker when all the time the white worker tells him to get back to where he came from', thundered a BLF pamphlet from 1971.⁸⁴ The BLF's reasons for not wanting to work with whites did not just have their basis in theory, but were a reaction to white working-class and trade union racism. 'Organised, militant and so-called progressive workers supported Enoch Powell', its pamphlet explained.⁸⁵ The Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFPP), on the other hand, following a strict Marxist-Leninist philosophy, believed in the primacy of class oppression and that it was essential for white and black workers to work together. The BUFPP concluded, however, that as the white working class had been corrupted by the bourgeois belief that their skin colour conferred higher status, it was up to black workers alone to take on the role of revolutionary vanguard. '[T]he working class, has temporarily abandoned its historic mission', explained one BUFPP document. 'In effect, the working class has joined forces with the ruling class, in

⁸³ 'Black Panther Movement to Black Workers Movement', *Freedom News*, 9 June 1973, back page.

⁸⁴ BLF, 'Revolutionary Black Nationalism', 1971, p. 3. Pamphlet held, unfiled, at the IRR.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

an unholy alliance against the interest of Black peoples'.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the BUFP, as a matter of policy, supported all white-led strikes that 'could lessen the contradictions between Black and white [or] ... could neutralise the more overt racist'.⁸⁷

Although the BWM, BUFP and BWL tried to support striking black (and sometimes white) workers by publicising their strikes and holding support meetings, they had virtually no base in the workforce and little or no impact on the trade union movement. This would not have worried the BWL, which declared in a 1971 leaflet that, 'We have no time for trade union or parliamentary forms of action'.⁸⁸ It did not offer an alternative vision of how black workers could achieve their goals outside the trade union movement though. 'We need organisations for the politicisation of the mass of black workers', it argued, but what these organisations might be went unspecified.⁸⁹ To the industrial workers in the Midlands, Yorkshire and Lancashire, who were forcing the trade union movement to re-examine its practices in the 1970s, the theoretical exhortations of such London groups were irrelevant.

The issue of separate black unions revealed a fundamental difference in how Black Power activists and Asian workers perceived themselves. Asians saw themselves as workers first and foremost and had enough faith in the trade union system to attempt to reform it from within. When given the genuine backing of their union and the support of the trade union movement, as they were during the Grunwick strike, Asian members were prepared to work within the trade union system. Writing about the Grunwick strikers, A. Sivanandan commented that, 'In

⁸⁶ Untitled BUFP document, dated 2 May 1969, held, unfiled, at the IRR.

⁸⁷ BUFP, 'What is the B.U.F.P [sic]', 3 May 1974, p. 46. Held, unfiled, at the IRR.

⁸⁸ Untitled document by the Black Workers Defence League, dated March 1971, held in the IWA archive in Birmingham Central Library, p. 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

the course of accepting union support, they also accepted the union line ... losing in the process the lasting support of the black community'.⁹⁰ His interpretation that the Grunwick strike was another example of the state co-opting and thus subverting a black political struggle would have been contested, however, by strike leader Jayaben Desai. She counted Asian workers' incorporation into the trade union movement as one of the benefits of the strike. 'This dispute is bringing us so many good things,' she told a journalist in 1977. 'Before the trade unions in this country were feeling that our community was not interested ... People coming here from all over the country are seeing us as part of the workers now'.⁹¹

To others, including sociologists Robert Miles and Anne-Marie Phizacklea and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), which waged a prolonged propaganda war against trade union racism in the 1970s, the universalisation of the problems of black workers was a significant victory. To be able to fight management simply as workers, rather than as black workers, with the backing of a union that provided effective representation to its members regardless of their skin colour, was a large part of what the strikers at factories like Mansfield Hosiery Mills and Imperial Typewriters had been protesting for. A pamphlet published by the IWA (GB) in the late 1960s acknowledged the double discrimination imposed on its members by trade union racism but saw their fight as an economic rather than a racial one. 'In a number of factories and foundries all over the country', read the pamphlet, 'Indian workers have been forced into militant activity to defend their interests *as workers*'.⁹² Although more reticent about social integration,

⁹⁰ A. Sivanandan, *From Resistance to Rebellion, Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain* (London, 1986), p. 144.

⁹¹ B. Campbell and V. Charlton, 'Grunwick women – why they are striking and why their sisters are supporting them', *Spare Rib*, 61 (August 1977), p. 7.

⁹² IWA, 'Indian workers, British industry and the trade unions', undated, p. 1. Document held, unfiled, at the IRR. Italics added.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

Asians thought their economic interests would be best served as part of an integrated workforce.

The relationship between the TUC, individual trade unions and their black members in the post-war period has been the subject of many articles by sociologists Phizacklea and Miles and, more recently, Satnam Virdee. At the end of the 1970s Miles and Phizacklea published two joint papers, based on previously unused records from the TUC's annual congresses, which gave a convincing analysis of the changing relationship between the TUC and black workers between 1954 and 1976.⁹³ Making an important distinction between the attitudes of the myriad individual trade unions and the General Council of the TUC, which spoke officially for the trade union movement, Miles and Phizacklea showed that, until 1973, the TUC, while regularly passing resolutions condemning racism, largely blamed its existence on the failure of non-white immigrant workers to integrate into British society. Bruce Nelson's description of the United Steel Workers of America's 'glacial incrementalism and hollow declarations of good intent', in respect of its black members, echoes in the history of the TUC in Britain.⁹⁴ Even after USWA's leaders had been convinced that they needed to address racial inequality within their union, Nelson writes that, 'they wanted "the Negro" to remain orderly, to defer to duly constituted authority and to act in ways that were consistent with the USWA's sense of propriety and principle'.⁹⁵ In a similar fashion, the TUC condemned black workers for not waiting for the backing of their

⁹³ R. Miles and A. Phizacklea, *The TUC, Black Workers and New Commonwealth Immigration, 1954-1973*, SSRC Working Paper on Ethnic Relations, no. 6 (Bristol University, 1977). R. Miles and A. Phizacklea, 'The T.U.C. and black workers, 1974-1976', *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 16 (1978). These two papers continue to provide the framework for more recent analyses like radical historian Ron Ramdin's *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (London, 1987) and Virdee's work in the 1990s.

⁹⁴ Nelson, *Divided*, p. 186.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

unions before taking strike action, but at the same time did not recognise white working-class racism among its members as a factor contributing to discrimination in the workplace, opposed the introduction of racial equality legislation in the field of employment and supported immigration control. It recognised black workers as having racially specific problems only as far as language and cultural barriers prevented them from fully participating in trade union activity and assimilating into British life. The TUC, therefore, took a strong stand against racism in principle but not in practice – which left black workers with no option but to challenge it.

Both Miles and Phizacklea and Satnam Virdee have singled out the agency of black workers as the main factor that caused the TUC to change its policy on racism and racial discrimination between 1973 and 1976. Miles and Phizacklea pointed particularly to the '[n]umber of industrial disputes which were distinguished by ... complaints by black workers of discrimination made against trade union officials'.⁹⁶ Twenty-five years later Virdee also concluded that '[c]ritical were the independent struggles that had been waged by black workers for almost a decade prior to the mid-1970s'.⁹⁷ The foremost examples of independent black strikes given by Miles and Phizacklea were those at the Mansfield Hosiery Mills in March 1973 and at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester in May 1974, which both involved accusations of discrimination against the

⁹⁶ Miles and Phizacklea, '1974–1976', p. 195.

⁹⁷ S. Virdee, 'A Marxist critique of black radical theories of trade-union racism', *Sociology* 34 (2000), p. 558.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

employers and the unions supposed to be representing the workers.⁹⁸ Other factors, such as trade unionists' unease over far-right groups targeting their unions for recruitment, from 1973, put increasing pressure on the TUC to actively campaign against racism in the trade union movement and beyond, but it was the militant agency of Asian workers that finally tipped the balance. The strike at Grunwick, which lasted for two years, demonstrated powerfully how much greater the impact of industrial action by Asian workers could be when it was supported, not only by their own union, but also the entire trade union movement. Although ultimately it failed, this was – for the first time – not because the trade union movement had withheld its support for the industrial action of black workers. The Asian, mainly female employees lost their struggle against the management at Grunwick because of a combination of the extraordinary intransigence of company director George Ward who refused to accept the conciliation of industrial arbitrators ACAS, the interference of the hard right Conservative anti-union organisation the National Association for Freedom (NAFF), and the weakened position of trade unions operating under the Labour government's Social Contract in a time of high

⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 200. The Mansfield Hosiery Mills strike started after a finding by the East Midlands Conciliation Committee that both the employer and the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers (NUHKW) had discriminated against Asian employees when deciding whom to promote to the better-paid knitters' jobs. Although both promised to stop discriminating, when Asian workers struck on the matter the NUHKW was reluctant to give them strike pay and refused to ask white workers to join the strike. The Imperial Typewriters dispute was started by Asian workers unhappy over bonuses and work rates set by the management and the disproportionately small number of Asian shop stewards taken on by their union, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). The Asian workers felt that the TGWU stewards were making deals on work conditions with management without consulting their Asian members who constituted much more than half the workforce.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

unemployment.⁹⁹ In doing so, however, they overturned the expectation, both within their own communities and wider society, that Asian women would be submissive and easily cowed. Most crucially, though, they brought the whole trade union movement out in support of black workers' equal right to join and be protected by a union. This represented a significant break with the past.

Conclusion

Although the overwhelming majority of Asian people in Britain were neither interested in nor affected by the Black Power movement, in various ways their lifestyles fitted with its credo. Asian immigrants' commitment to upholding their traditions, languages and cultures in Britain, made them inadvertent cultural nationalists. By challenging racial discrimination in the workplace and the trade union movement they fulfilled aspects of the vanguard role prescribed for black workers by the Black Power movement's Marxist philosophies. A small number of Asians participated directly in the Black Power movement during the 1960s, most notably Ajoy Ghose, Roy Sawh and Tony Soares, who between them held leadership positions in several organisations. There was a symbiotic, if intermittent, linkage between Asian organisations like Jagmohan Joshi's IWA (GB) Birmingham and Black Power groups, with the former donating manpower to Black Power marches and the latter supporting the industrial action of Asian workers. When the new generation of young Asians who had been born or

⁹⁹ The Social Contract was drawn up between the new Labour government and the TUC in 1974 during a time of massive industrial unrest. In return for promising to increase spending on social services such as housing and schools and replacing the Conservative party's hated 1971 Industrial Relations Act with a number of new laws that protected various workers' and union rights, the TUC agreed to accept caps on wages and to exhaust government conciliation procedures before beginning industrial action. Black workers were a fly in the ointment of this deal between the government and the trade union movement because, as they did not feel they were fairly represented by their unions, there was little incentive for them to cooperate with the trade unions' agreement not to call wildcat strikes.

Chapter 5: 'Here to stay, here to fight!' Asian militancy, Black Power and the trade union movement

educated in Britain decided to break with their parents' political forms and create their own Youth Movements, their choice of self-presentation and organisational structure showed clear influences from both the British and American Black Power movements.

Ultimately, however, the Asian workers who challenged discriminatory trade unionists and exploitative bosses were not seeking the revolutionary overthrow of Britain's economic system that Black Power activists advocated. Asians fought to be treated equally in the workplace largely because racial discrimination hampered them from pursuing conventional goals of economic advancement. When the trade union movement finally overturned decades of neglect of its non-white members in 1976 to come out in support of striking Asian workers during the Grunwick dispute, those workers readily allowed themselves to be subsumed into a broader trade union campaign. Having demonstrated their collective strength and determination during a decade of unofficial industrial action, after 1976 Asian workers and their communities finally began to move towards their goal, not of overthrowing the system, but of integrating into it.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored a facet of recent British history that has not previously been given serious consideration by historians. The historical myopia that has so often obscured not just the contribution of black people to British history but even their very presence in the country, has meant that although a sizeable amount has been written about the post-war migration of Britain's former colonial subjects to the metropole, little of this literature deals with the independent political activity of the black immigrants. This thesis has chronicled one of the most militant political responses of black immigrants to the racism – individual, institutional and state-sanctioned – they encountered in Britain.

Between 1955, when the government started monitoring immigration from the predominantly non-white countries of the New Commonwealth, and 1962, when the Commonwealth Immigrants Act imposed immigration control on those countries' citizens, the foundations of modern multiracial Britain were laid. Working hard to establish themselves financially in Britain and not intending to stay, the majority of black immigrants who arrived during that period did not, at first, pay much attention to British politics. In 1958, however, white-on-black rioting in Nottingham and Notting Hill exposed the ugly and violent face of white British racism, disabusing West Indians in particular of the romantic notion of being welcomed to the mother country. More important for the politicisation of black immigrants, however, was the transmigration of British racism from the street to the statute book, a process that began with the Conservative government's 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, resurfaced during the general election of 1964, and was completed when the Labour Party tightened immigration control in the 1965 White Paper, *Immigration From The Commonwealth*. Between 1962 and

Conclusion

1965, Labour shifted its position from one of outright opposition to immigration control, through grudging acceptance, to its active promotion. Although it was the Labour government which took the first legislative steps to combat racial discrimination with the Race Relations Act of 1965, this did little to lessen black people's sense of betrayal. Alienated from mainstream politics, they began to realise the need to form their own political organisations.

The Black Power movement, which started in London in June 1967 and reached its peak in the early 1970s, had a greater impact on British society than its small membership and short political lifespan suggest. On a micro-level the difference that participating in a Black Power group could make to the lives of individual members was often tremendous. Former Black Power activists who submitted to their organisations' strict codes of discipline and intense programmes of study testify to what a transformative experience it was. One of the central tenets of Black Power was self-determination: that black people should take control of their own lives. On a personal level this encouraged agency and social engagement. An impressive number of Black Power activists went on to have highly successful careers in academia, the media and local politics, among other areas. Even living in an area that contained a Black Power group could have material benefits. The movement's emphasis on self-help, self-sufficiency and community action resulted in Black Power groups providing nurseries, supplementary schools, hostels for the homeless and other social welfare amenities in the neighbourhoods in which they were active.

On a macro-level, Black Power undermined the stigma attached to being black by reclaiming the identity and injecting it with a much-needed sense of pride. In a time when black immigrants were treated as *ipso facto* a social problem in

Conclusion

Britain, Black Power identified white racism, not black immigration, as the cause of racial strife. It encouraged black people to actively assert their equality rather than apply to the government for it to be endowed. In the process it contributed to the radicalisation of the race relations industry, the white liberal practitioners of which started to consider whether their research was in the interests of its black subjects. The positive reconfiguration of blackness had a psychological impact on black people, but also an important political impact. The re-assertion of a political definition of black that encompassed all non-white people who were oppressed by white western societies provided a way for the heterogeneous post-war immigrant communities in Britain to work together when it was politically expedient to do so. Calling oneself black did not mean ignoring the substantial differences between Britain's immigrant communities and their multiplicity of ethnic and religious identities – one could still be Sikh Indian and 'black'. Rather it overlaid these personal identities with a common political identity that was used as the basis for anti-racism campaigns from the late 1960s onwards.

Its creation of a black political identity notwithstanding, the Black Power movement largely failed to engage the biggest post-war immigrant groups in Britain: Indians and Pakistanis. They found many of the movement's concerns irrelevant – for example Indian and Pakistani communities had always enjoyed strong independent cultures and young Asian men did not face nearly as much antagonism from the police in the late 1960s and early 1970s as their West Indian counterparts. Asians largely concentrated their political activities on fighting racial discrimination in the areas of immigration and trade unionism. Their hard-fought battles against economic super-exploitation by their employers and for representation by unions that viewed them as a threat to white jobs and were

Conclusion

reluctant to support their grievances, eventually paid off during the Grunwick strike in 1976. In the same year, the reaction of a younger generation of British-born Asians to the murder of an Indian teenager by a white gang and the subsequent indifference of the police revealed that Black Power had been more influential on them than their parents. The Southall Youth Movement was the first of what would become a national network of Asian Youth Movements which all adopted the Black Power logo of the black-gloved, clenched fist.

The British Black Power movement only had critical mass as a political movement for a short time and by the mid-1970s no longer represented the cutting edge of black protest. This was due both to the movement's internal weaknesses and the substantial repression visited upon its constituent organisations and members by the state. Poor leadership and a lack of ideological focus in the early stages gave way in the 1970s to an ever hardening schism. On the one side was inflexible Marxism Leninism, which pushed groups' focus away from race in favour of class oppression. On the other was cultural nationalism, which eventually alienated potential Asian members and gave its members little hope of effecting positive political change in white capitalist Britain. The Black Power movement's decline was compounded by a sustained and very successful campaign of harassment against its activists, by the police and through the courts, often using the legislative powers criminalising incitement to racial hatred introduced by the 1965 Race Relations Act. Black Power activists' habitual use of violent rhetoric and calls for revolution and their deliberate identification with the American Black Power movement, whose members were armed, did little to assuage the government's fears. Even so, the state's response was disproportionate to the threat presented by Black Power – a movement that was never armed and was partly in

Conclusion

reaction to successive governments' failure to legislate effectively against racial discrimination before 1976 or acknowledge the vindictive and racist behaviour of the police towards young black men. Show trials of Black Power activists, such as the Mangrove Nine trial in 1971, only served to further convince black people that they lived in an unjust, racist state.

Rather than contributing to the deterioration of the relationship between young black men and the police, which finally boiled over into open street battles at the 1976 Notting Hill carnival, Black Power had actually provided a constructive but militant channel for black frustration and anger. Its legacy was visible in the rise of well-organised defence campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s that highlighted the injustices black people faced at all stages of the legal system. Black Power's emphases on black self-determination and self-help were also reflected in increasing political activity at the community level throughout the 1970s. Ultimately, the Black Power movement's most crucial and long-lasting legacy was the sense of self-worth it instilled in black people who, rather than keeping their heads down or petitioning the state for reform, held their heads high and demanded equality as their right.

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