Integrating black immigrants

When in 1961 the Conservatives introduced a Bill to reduce the number of black members of the Commonwealth settling in Britain, Hugh Gaitskell attacked them with impressive moral force.1 Their proposals contradicted Labour’s adherence to both the free movement of British subjects within the Commonwealth and, more importantly, its commitment to racial equality. Conventional wisdom has it that after Gaitskell’s death Labour abandoned his principled position because it alienated prejudiced white working-class voters. Hence, in 1965 Harold Wilson’s government further tightened controls and in 1968 it prevented large numbers of Kenyan Asians entering the country. While two Race Relations Acts, meant to discourage discrimination based on colour, accompanied these measures, most authorities consider them palliatives, drafted to salve Labour’s troubled conscience as ministers adhered to an essentially racist immigration policy.2

While in 1960 their party formally embraced a universal ‘brotherhood’, something the 1964–70 governments supposedly betrayed, many working-class activists nonetheless followed majority white opinion in their suspicion of black immigrants. For them, restricting black entry contradicted no principle because, so far as they were concerned, Labour’s compelling purpose was to defend the material interests of the indigenous (and implicitly white) proletariat – that is, people like themselves. Given that immigration appeared to threaten workers’ access to housing and jobs, the obvious solution seemed to be to reduce the numbers of black people entering the country, especially as (their Commonwealth status notwithstanding) they did not form part of the ‘British way of life’. As suggested in Chapter 1, this outlook was informed by a historically entrenched colour prejudice, for white immigrants far outnumbered black immigrants, but it would be simplistic to describe it as racist. Numerous surveys suggested that much white antipathy was conditional; those in the party who took its commitment to brotherhood seriously dearly hoped that this was true. Thus, a regular columnist in Socialist Commentary argued it was not immigrants’ colour that antagonised
many Britons as much as their customs – although the customs of black immigrants would be more readily obvious as a result of skin colour.\(^1\) This implied that most whites could be educated out of their malignant perceptions. However, before whites could be encouraged to look on blacks in a more positive light, the leadership came to believe government had to stem immigration to reassure them that neither their standard of living nor their established way of life was imperilled. At the same time, the new settlers needed to be encouraged to accept much of their hosts’ culture – although quite how much was subject to debate. By the time Labour entered office in 1964, the leadership therefore considered that, as famously articulated by the MP Roy Hattersley: ‘Integration without control is impossible, but control without integration is indefensible’.\(^4\) In this way, Wilson and colleagues hoped to square the party’s adherence to equality with the fact that many of their own members and potential supporters saw black immigration as a threat.

This chapter assesses Labour’s byzantine response to the issue. Many members thought the growing presence of black immigrants in Britain’s towns and cities was problematic. Moreover, the presumed dire electoral implications of rising numbers of black people encouraged party leaders to support controls to appease prejudice. However, consistent with Labour’s commitment to equality, ministers also promoted measures that challenged white opinion, while some activists and officials enthusiastically advanced the policy of integration. Overall, however, black immigration was an issue Labour was ill prepared to address and one many wished would disappear as quickly as possible. As one of the party’s few non-white activists rightly stated, the arrival of thousands of West Indians, Pakistanis and Indians provoked ‘an all pervasive sense of embarrassment’ in its ranks.\(^5\)

### Colour and the Commonwealth

During a 1948 Labour Party annual conference debate on racial discrimination, one delegate asked: if socialism ‘does not mean that common men can live together decently and live together as brothers, I ask you what does it mean?’\(^6\) Before the 1950s, however, practical expressions of the party’s commitment to racial equality were largely confined to support for anti-colonialism, an issue that preoccupied a minority of activists throughout the post-war period.\(^7\) Thus, in 1960 the National Executive Committee (NEC) supported a boycott of South African goods to protest against apartheid. Some constituency Labour parties (CLPs) took this campaign seriously: even in cash-strapped Glasgow Maryhill activists distributed 4,000 bills, held public meetings and hired a van to tour the city.\(^8\)
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The growth of black immigration meant that, during the 1950s, racial equality became more of a domestic issue and in 1953 activists in Brixton, an area of early West Indian settlement, established a committee to combat discrimination. Throughout the decade, other CLPs expressed opposition to colour prejudice, while the NEC’s Commonwealth Sub-committee supported attempts to make certain manifestations of prejudice illegal. During 1957–8, 94 per cent of ward secretaries in Manchester opposed discrimination based on colour. This commitment was confirmed in 1960, when, as a consequence of Gaitskell’s updating of the party’s aims, Labour declared its ‘central ideal’ to be ‘the brotherhood of man’; underlined its opposition to ‘discrimination on grounds of race, colour or creed’; and stated its adherence to the belief that ‘men should accord to one another equal consideration and status in recognition of the fundamental dignity of man’. So far as Gaitskell was concerned, racial equality was a principle like no other. As he told a BBC television interviewer in November 1959:

If you were to say to me, ‘Really we’ve got to accept the colour bar, because you’ll never get into power if you don’t’, I should say, ‘Well, in not very polite language, Go to hell … that’s absolutely against my principles…. But if you say to me ‘I think your argument for nationalising the machine tool industry is rather weak’, I would say, ‘Well, I’ll discuss that with you’.

Wilson appeared to be of like mind. Within minutes of telling the 1962 conference that Labour was ‘a moral crusade or it is nothing’, he asserted that to ‘attack a man because of his race, or because of his colour’ was ‘utterly repugnant to every Socialist’.

For many, colour differences obscured that which united all human beings. As the Cabinet minister Judith Hart put it, everybody should ‘recognise and admit their own humanity and decency – which tells them that a child is a child, a man is a man’, so that ‘whatever his colour may be, he is one of them, sharing the same fears and the same hopes for a better society and a better life’. While she was on the left, Hart’s perspective was the same as that of the revisionist Roy Jenkins: when he was Home Secretary, Jenkins claimed there was ‘no overall rational basis for resentment’ of black immigration, something he believed originated in ‘personal inadequacy’, ‘fear and ignorance’. While not discounting the psychological element, others on the left, like the MP Ian Mikardo, stressed the influence of material deprivation on attitudes. Mikardo thought most whites objected to black settlement because they had to compete for scarce resources: once there were enough jobs and houses, hostility would largely disappear. This perspective was also embraced by more right-wing figures: deputy leader George Brown criticised Conservative restrictions for not addressing the ‘real problems’ associated
with immigration, by which he meant the lack of resources in areas of black settlement.\textsuperscript{18}

To some, the Commonwealth was the most tangible expression of Britain’s commitment to racial harmony; Labour’s 1959 manifesto even claimed Attlee’s creation of the Commonwealth was his ‘supreme achievement’.\textsuperscript{19} As the NEC reaffirmed after the 1958 Notting Hill riots, the Commonwealth was ‘the greatest multi-racial association the world has ever known’, which enjoyed a ‘unique opportunity to create racial understanding, confidence, and co-operation’. Thus, as Britain lay at the heart of the Commonwealth, it was imperative all its citizens be able to enter the country freely: attempts to restrict movement on a racial basis would destroy it.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, it was partly because he believed in the progressive possibilities of the Commonwealth that Gaitskell turned his back on Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community.\textsuperscript{21} If Wilson’s later application to join the Community indicated that, by the end of the 1960s, the leadership no longer thought the Commonwealth able to play a decisive international role, others considered it could still exert a useful influence. The NEC’s 1968 Study Group on Immigration discussed establishing a multilateral policy for migration within the Commonwealth, based on the needs of member states. By co-ordinating population flows on a non-discriminatory basis, they hoped it might yet set an important example to the world.\textsuperscript{22}

‘First contact’

Attlee’s Cabinet did not believe its 1948 Nationality Act would encourage black immigration; if they had, ministers may well have had second thoughts.\textsuperscript{23} While fearing that large numbers of unskilled black settlers would disrupt society, they thought those who came to Britain on the Empire Windrush in 1948 were just straws in the wind. Having considered controls, ministers dismissed them as unnecessary.

The early 1950s nonetheless saw increasing numbers of blacks arrive in Britain, particularly London. Labour officials in the capital gave every impression of wishing the immigrants would go away, while they did their best to calm white fears. An article in Labour’s London News entitled ‘Coloured Folk Prove Law-Abiding’ claimed there were fewer West Indians than there might superficially appear to be: poor housing meant they spent much of their time on the streets, giving the impression of greater numbers. White readers were presumably meant to draw comfort from the assertion that most wanted to return home eventually.\textsuperscript{24} Other than to issue reassuring statements, there did not appear much else Labour could do. When the London party investigated the ‘problem of coloured people’ in the middle of the decade, it ran through various
possible solutions but rejected them all. Controls were considered ‘repugnant’, while dictating immigrants’ place of settlement once they had arrived in Britain – so as to alleviate pressure on local resources – was thought discriminatory unless also applied to whites. The only answer appeared to be the creation of a prosperous West Indies, for there would then be no reason to emigrate, a viewpoint later endorsed by the NEC.25

By the late 1950s it was, however, apparent that most immigrants would not be returning home, as the economic development of the Commonwealth was at best a long-term project. Attention was consequently increasingly focused on the position of black settlers in Britain’s cities and during 1957 Labour’s Commonwealth Officer contacted CLPs in areas with large immigrant populations to assess the situation. His researches revealed a complex and difficult situation.26 Some parties noted the hostility of ‘the more backward section’ of the working class, a category that included some Labour members. A few CLPs, such as South Paddington, reported their attempts to tackle prejudice by challenging instances of discrimination in pubs, clubs and dance halls. Elsewhere, however, immigrants were criticised for finding trouble where none existed.

By this time, white tenants were inundating parties in the capital with complaints that black landlords were driving them out of their homes and replacing them with immigrants who were prepared to live in overcrowded conditions for higher rents. David Pitt, Labour’s West Indian-born parliamentary candidate for Hampstead in 1959, believed critics of black landlords were prejudiced, as they did not attack their white counterparts with the same vigour.27 While the issue was used to legitimise a racist viewpoint, even CLPs with exemplary records opposing prejudice believed most complaints were justified. This is not necessarily evidence of their own racism: the secretary of Islington North CLP herself experienced ‘coloured Landlord trouble’ but claimed that did not mean she thought badly of all immigrants.28 Yet, no matter how far prejudice distorted reality, activists were faced with a thorny dilemma. The secretary of Vauxhall CLP in south London warned that Labour members could no longer:

blind ourselves to the fact that the present housing conditions, difference of standards and fear of possible unemployment are bound to have some effect. It is because we are so anxious to avoid this that we feel that a more realistic attitude should be adopted to what is undoubtedly becoming an increasing problem, and that not only should sympathy and understanding be extended to black immigrants, but attention should be paid to the natural reactions of working-class white people under present circumstances. Failure to realise this may have the very results which we, as Socialists, are so anxious to avoid.29
Gaitskell’s forceful condemnation of the Commonwealth Immigration Bill appeared to be enthusiastically supported by the wider party, in particular by left-inclined CLPs that had hitherto been critical of his leadership. It has even been suggested that Gaitskell opposed the Conservatives with such vigour to restore unity to ranks recently divided over clause four and nuclear disarmament.30

If Labour’s adherence to unrestricted immigration pleased some, it did not, however, enjoy universal support. After leaving office in 1951, the party leadership steered well clear of discussing controls, but more humble members did raise the issue. The Sheffield MP John Hynd was one of the more prominent advocates of regulated entry. Assuming the rural background of most black immigrants meant they were unsuited to industrial work, he suggested prospective settlers should be advised about what awaited them in Britain, in the hope that this would discourage most.31 Although they expressed sympathy for the immigrants’ plight, a number of London MPs and councillors still advocated controls, in order to take account of the anxieties of ‘our own people’ in relation to housing.32 Economic slowdowns were often the occasion for CLPs to call for regulation.33 Even in Rawtenstall, Lancashire, where immigration was insignificant, local trade unionists considered that, during a time of rising unemployment, it was wrong ‘that these people should be allowed to come into the country without let or hindrance’. The reply to this from the local MP and leading left-wing parliamentarian, Anthony Greenwood, was equivocal at best. Given Britain’s place at the head of the Commonwealth, he felt restrictions were inappropriate but conceded black immigration was ‘one of the most difficult problems that we have to face’, given difficulties associated with employment, health and ‘social relationships’.34

While the NEC reaffirmed Labour’s support for unrestricted entry after the 1958 riots in London and Nottingham, reactions to the disturbances showed how far members disagreed over the best response. MPs George Rogers and James Harrison, who respectively represented the areas concerned, called for controls – along with a variety of other measures meant to protect the ‘British way of life’.35 Rogers enjoyed his executive committee’s support, as its members believed racial tension originated from immigrants aggravating local housing shortages. Hence, it advocated a ‘wider dispersal of incomers’ to ease the pressure; failing that, there should be a ‘slowing down of the flow of immigrants’.36 The wider North Kensington party was, however, divided and advocates of unrestricted entry refused to work for Rogers in the 1959 general election.37 Yet support for ‘dispersal’ stretched much further than North Kensington. If earlier dismissed by the London party, Socialist
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Commentary and Pitt advanced it even while opposing controls. In fact, as late as 1967, the left-inclined Selly Oak general management committee (GMC) proposed dispersing Birmingham’s immigrant population across the city as part of its programme to reduce discrimination.

Behind Gaitskell, therefore, stood a party anything but united against controls; and while there were many reasons for this difference of opinion, one in particular stands out. As the 1961 Immigration Bill was debated in Westminster, two-thirds of GMC delegates in London’s working-class dockside constituency of Bermondsey came out in support of restriction. In contrast, activists in the capital’s more middle-class CLPs, such as South Kensington and Fulham, opposed the measure in similar proportions. This does not necessarily mean proletarian activists were more likely to be racist, but it does point to the possible significance of more conditional – material – factors. After Notting Hill, members of the GMC in well heeled St Marylebone declared they were prepared to ‘undergo temporary hardship’ to ensure blacks enjoyed equal access to housing, employment and welfare. It was unclear what ‘hardship’ meant to a party counting Lord and Lady Lucan as activists. Moreover, if ensuring racial equality was a question of whites foregoing material comfort for the benefit of others, less well placed Labour members believed that imperilled working-class interests. As remarked by a leading Labour council representative in Deptford, where by the mid-1960s just under 10 per cent of the population was black, ‘immigration has dragged us back twenty years … it’s all right to talk about brotherhood of man, but our first job is to defend the gains we fought for here’. Similarly, the labour movement, Nottingham North MP James Harrison stated, ‘had fought for years for better conditions for the working class’ and he was determined not to allow those he asserted had ‘lower standards of housing and wages’ to undermine them. Finally, George Pargiter, MP for Southall, where Indian settlers accounted for about 10 per cent of residents in the early 1960s, called for a ban on immigration – to his constituency at least – and claimed that, in the first instance, ‘we are entitled to look after our own people’.

Integration

It was already something of a cliché in London Labour circles when, after Notting Hill, Pitt declared that the only way to avoid further tension was the ‘full integration of Negroes into our life’. Even so, although ‘integration’ became national policy in 1962, it remained uncertain what, in practice, the term implied. In 1965 the immigration specialist Nicholas Deakin tried to clarify the matter for Socialist Commentary readers. Integration, he stated, was a reciprocal process in...
which immigrants adapted to the receiving society; the majority, in turn, should tolerate ‘certain distinct persistent religious and cultural patterns’ and not expect settlers totally to abandon their way of life, as that would amount to ‘assimilation’. Deakin’s definition still left matters open to dispute, for the balance of any agreement between host and immigrant was not prescribed. Moreover, when referring to ‘integration’ many Labour members continued to mean ‘assimilation’ or, at least, as Socialist Commentary had put it some years before Deakin’s piece, that newcomers should discard practices that ‘disturb the English community’. That this was a widespread view was confirmed by a 1968 survey of local representatives in Nottingham, which found that the overwhelming majority of Labour councillors (like their Conservative counterparts) thought integration a homogenising process in which immigrants would fully adhere to the ‘British way of life’. It is impossible to be sure how many believed colour rather than culture defined this way of life. That it could be conceived of in purely cultural terms was suggested by the West Indian Pitt’s reference to ‘our life’. Yet even those keen to promote a positive response to blacks betrayed their obsession with colour. A London News article intended to promote Pitt’s candidature in Hampstead went so far as to describe him as ‘this whitest of black men’ and a ‘unique combination of red and black’, whose face was difficult to see in the dark.

According to its 1962 formulation, Labour believed integration was a reciprocal process that encompassed: educating whites about the Commonwealth and the realities of immigration; outlawing discrimination against blacks in public places; and alleviating competition for housing in areas of greatest settlement. It also emphasised voluntary initiatives – like Willesden’s International Friendship Council – that encouraged communication between black and white, and hoped the latter would accept the former as ‘ordinary neighbours, work-mates and friends’. If whites were presumed to have things to learn, immigrants apparently had most to come to terms with, for they should not only be advised about access to housing and employment but also taught about the British way of life and urged not to indulge in activities, like holding noisy parties, that might antagonise white neighbours.

As a member of the NEC, Wilson urged conference delegates in 1962 to take integration seriously. Transport House expected CLPs to play a vital role by: helping immigrants get on the electoral roll; taking up cases of discrimination; promoting contact between black and white; and increasing the number of black members. Some had pursued these activities from the earliest days of immigration, although their record was not encouraging. In 1955 Brixton CLP expressed its desire to welcome West Indian settlers by establishing a colour sub-committee, one of whose members was supposed to be an immigrant. Unfortunately,
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no such person was found and the initiative ran into the ground, so that as late as 1964 Brixton could claim only twenty black members. If in Brixton Labour appeared to meet with immigrants’ indifference, elsewhere the problem lay in the party’s own ranks. In Coventry, during the late 1950s, officials encouraged the participation of Indian residents in the party. The borough secretary wrote to the President of the Indian Workers’ Association (IWA), which was already affiliated to the party locally, to encourage him to send representatives to meetings. When one subsequently arrived, a white delegate made ‘unfortunate personal remarks’, for which the secretary apologised and indicated that the delegate had ‘upset us probably infinitely more than yourself’.

So few blacks belonged to parties in London in the late 1950s that Jim Raisin, Labour’s organiser in the capital, made the fairly desperate proposal that, as West Indian men outnumbered women, CLPs should encourage the latter to join as a ruse to increase the former’s participation. After Notting Hill, the party in London devoted more systematic thought to the subject and suggested CLPs should enrol a small number of immigrants to liaise with their peers. While conceding this meant ‘recognising that coloured people are “different”’, officials hoped the policy would be a temporary expedient that would merely hasten the time when immigrants could enter the party on the same basis as whites. This approach was eventually adopted across the country and was thought especially helpful in the case of Asian immigrants, who often had poor English language skills. Despite the good intentions, this tactic had the effect of keeping white activists apart from black voters and putting black members at some distance from white voters. This was, however, not always the case: in Dulwich pairs of black and white activists approached immigrant and non-immigrant alike.

As the Coventry episode indicates, not all members favoured integration: that some held a ‘very deep prejudice’ against immigrants was reluctantly recognised. During the early 1960s, the Bradford East CLP suffered a rapid fall in membership and, while numerous expedients were employed to reverse the decline, no attempt was made to recruit from the expanding Pakistani population, which accounted for nearly 12 per cent of the population by 1966. Indeed, when one immigrant asked to join he was accepted only after the CLP won a community leader’s assurance that his application would not be the first of many. The reasoning behind such hostility was revealed by one account of attitudes in an unnamed city with a large Asian population. There an activist recalled that, in the early 1960s, a few Indians had joined the CLP, but when they started coming to meetings they wanted to talk about Indian affairs, and a lot of our members walked out … they said “If they’re coming, we’re going. It’s bad enough living with them next door, we don’t want them here as well”’. Despite this, members welcomed
the services of an intermediary, in this case an anglicised Indian doctor, as he promised to mobilise immigrants without making members suffer the discomfort of having Indians attend gatherings. Thus, what was meant to be the first step towards integration was employed as a means of avoiding that very end. A similar situation was evident in the Birmingham constituency of Sparkbrook, whose combined West Indian and Asian population amounted to about 8 per cent of residents by the early 1960s. Despite this, Labour membership was almost wholly white, in fact largely Irish in origin. While discrimination was not overtly practised, it was clear immigrants were unwelcome, although during the 1964 campaign intermediaries were used to rally black Labour voters.

As might be expected, the national picture was uneven. In accordance with Labour policy, in 1965 members in Flint East, north Wales, took up the case of a man of West Indian descent who had been prevented from buying a house on a new estate because the developer feared he would deter white clients. Activists organised a meeting on the ‘colour question’, which their agent hoped would ‘help both sides face the issues realistically’. Such faith in the power of fact was revealing, as was how the local MP Eirene White described the thwarted house purchaser. He was, she pointed out, a second-generation West Indian who had served in the Royal Navy, was married to an English woman and employed in skilled work. In other words, apart from being black, he adhered to conventional notions of the ‘British way of life’ and was just like any other respectable member of the community. Labour’s willingness to advance his case may also have been due to the fact that immigration was insignificant in the constituency: together with the victim’s background, this meant few locals considered their own way of life under threat.

In London, matters were much more contentious. In response to Rogers’ support for the deportation of some disreputable blacks, alderman Nat Marock, leader of Lambeth Borough Council, claimed that the West Indian population was in fact ‘clean, sober and industrious’. They were not much different in behaviour to the rest of the community and any peculiar habits, traditions, ways of eating or cooking were, he asserted, very much their own business. Rogers nonetheless claimed some settlers were ‘bad types’ and were associated with all-night parties, prostitution and exploitative landlords: they deserved to be deported. If Rogers claimed to judge immigrants on the basis of behaviour rather than colour, Marock clearly considered this a fine – even non-existent – distinction.

Similar divisions were exposed during the early 1960s in Southall, where activists were at odds over how to respond to Indian settlement. At a disputatious meeting held to discuss the issue, most municipal representatives complained there were too many immigrants locally. One even suggested that Indians threatened to ‘colonise’ some areas. If
most agreed the pressure of numbers on housing was a key issue, immigrants’ behaviour also seemed critical to some. According to one representative, their ‘immorality’ was striking, while another thought religious differences meant it would be impossible to educate them into ‘our way of life’. Others disagreed and claimed religion irrelevant. In May 1963 John Millwood, of Transport House’s Research Department, explained Labour policy to a largely irate audience; he presented it in a manner presumably meant to appease them. The purpose of integration, he assured the audience, was to ‘fit these coloured people in, and to [get them] living up to the standards of our way of life’. This was certainly the view of Southall’s MP: George Pargiter believed Sikhs should abandon their turbans and dietary laws, for only then might they be ‘absorbed into our way of life’. He even declared they had to ‘conform to our ways and standards, if they wish[ed] to be treated as part of the community’.65

The road to restriction

Despite Gaitskell’s support for unrestricted Commonwealth immigration, controls proved extremely popular with the public. By the time the Commonwealth Immigration Act received royal assent in 1962, even the Labour leader recognised the electoral need to embrace some form of limitation. Moreover, as we have seen, so far as the wider party was concerned, Gaitskell’s original position was something of an aberration.

Given the state of voter opinion, Labour officials had long thought that allowing immigration to become a topic of open debate – which in 1961–2 it most certainly was – could only help those wishing to profit from prejudice. When the Fascist Oswald Mosley proposed standing in North Kensington in 1959, Raisin believed it best to ignore him.66 If some activists wanted to affirm their opposition to discrimination, those in places such as Bradford were less distressed; as one councillor there suggested, ‘[t]he least said about the issue the better’.67 The extent of popular bigotry meant many in the party feared that if immigration became a point of open contention between the parties, Labour could only lose. Grass-roots Conservatives were, after all, not shy of exploiting the issue.68 Fenner Brockway believed he nearly lost Eton and Slough in 1959 because opposing canvassers claimed he was responsible for bringing immigrants into the constituency. Some thought Labour in Brixton suffered a huge swing to their opponents after a Conservative whispering campaign alleged the local MP, Marcus Lipton, gave immigrants special help to secure housing.69

Some survey evidence indicates that, in the 1964 general election, immigration made little impact nationally on voter loyalties, which
suggests that Labour’s embrace of controls had eliminated it as a contentious issue.\textsuperscript{70} Local perceptions were rather different. If party policy had changed, Labour leaders were too embarrassed to draw voters’ attention to it, a reluctance that frustrated those fighting marginal seats. In Dulwich, the agent claimed large numbers of long-standing supporters were considering voting Conservative in the belief that only they advocated limitation.\textsuperscript{71} The Conservatives certainly thought Labour remained vulnerable on the issue, especially in the West Midlands.\textsuperscript{72} Smethwick, near Birmingham, gave that view credibility, as Patrick Gordon Walker lost the seat after a swing to the Conservatives of 7.2 per cent – compared with a national movement to Labour of 3.5 per cent. Few doubted the Conservative candidate, Peter Griffiths, had exploited hostility to the local Asian population: Wilson was so disgusted by the tenor of his campaign he described Griffiths as a ‘Parliamentary leper’.\textsuperscript{73} Many Labour members shared his anger, but one Tribune correspondent, who claimed to be an activist from nearby Walsall, defended Griffiths against charges of racism. Arguing that one could be a socialist and oppose black immigration, he claimed the Conservative candidate made sense to those living near immigrants’ ‘smell, noise and filth’.\textsuperscript{74} As a later Leeds correspondent asserted of fellow members’ reaction to black settlers, they did ‘not enjoy having anybody living next door who cannot be understood and whose prejudices were not theirs’, ‘who themselves tend to prefer their own kind of people, and are not as serviceable neighbours as those who lived there before’.\textsuperscript{75}

As the new Prime Minister wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury after his attack on Griffiths, the ‘backlash’ against immigration, as evidenced by Smethwick, was too strong to ignore. Unless ‘dealt with head on’, Wilson predicted, ‘I am afraid that it will foul our politics … for a very considerable period of time’. He then outlined the need for legislation to outlaw racial intolerance and other efforts to promote integration – but not to restrict immigration.\textsuperscript{76} In fact, most now believed some form of further limitation had to be imposed to appease the public. Wilson hoped that tightening up known means of evading the 1962 Act would reduce the flow of immigrants without recourse to parliamentary action.\textsuperscript{77} His Home Secretary, Sir Frank Soskice, however, argued the Act still allowed what voters would consider too many to enter Britain legitimately. Initially looking on dispersal with favour, Soskice nonetheless knew of no legal means to prevent new immigrants living in areas of established settlement. Thus, appreciating most Cabinet colleagues would be ‘understandably very uneasy about my proposals’, he thought there was no alternative to the ‘extremely invidious’ introduction of further controls. To soften the blow, Soskice proposed a ‘package deal’ that combined restriction with legislation to ensure those allowed to enter the country were treated as ‘first and not second-class citizens’.
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The Cabinet accepted Soskice’s case with little enthusiasm. The Midlands MP Richard Crossman, who believed restriction was the only way to prevent further situations like that in Smethwick, described the meeting that finalised the details of the Home Secretary’s proposals as ‘desultory [and] unhappy’. Yet, by this point, even Reginald Sorenson, who as an MP during the 1950s had drafted anti-discrimination legislation and considered colour prejudice ‘the most inane and scientifically baseless of all our traditional aversions’, thought the case against more controls was fuelled by ‘intoxicated idealism’. In contrast, H. A. Alavi, a Pakistani Labour activist, believed that as restriction pandered to racism it would merely promote its growth. Yet even some who argued that Labour should stand firm in the hope this would eventually overcome white prejudice accepted the party would lose votes in the short term.

Promoting integration

In March 1965 Wilson informed the Commons that, while his government planned to reduce immigration, it would also take steps to ensure that once they were in the country new settlers were treated as full citizens. He proposed legislating to prohibit incitement to racial hatred but placed most emphasis on encouraging conciliation through a Race Relations Board. Wilson also announced that Maurice Foley, a junior minister at the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), would promote activities to advance integration.

Foley based his work on the proposition that Britain was already a ‘multi-racial society’ and, as immigrants and their children had already established roots, it was ‘no use pretending they will go back’. Recognising prejudice was rife, he believed only a small minority of whites were ‘strongly prejudiced’, while many more were ‘slightly prejudiced’ or ‘simply suspicious of newcomers’, particularly if they competed for scarce resources. Through government policy the latter group could be pushed towards deeper hostility or greater acceptance. The problem was not, however, all one way: Asian immigrants in particular were ‘introvert and cutting themselves off from the community’ and so had to change their ways. Despite the dual nature of the problem, Foley believed the main emphasis should be the education of immigrants in ‘our standards of hygiene and our social customs’, although he did not want them to be forced to become ‘ersatz Englishmen’. If integration granted immigrants rights it also gave them responsibilities, although too often the latter were never explained. Consequently, Foley claimed it was understandable if people uprooted from ‘rural primitive societies’ tipped rubbish out of bedroom windows because they had not been told that the council collected refuse every week.
Fielding

Foley was a junior minister with a small staff trying to coordinate the work of powerful ministries and local authorities that were, he complained, largely uninterested in his work. He received no support from the Home Office. Soskice might have devised the ‘package deal’ but was reluctant to promote integration himself: that was why it became the DEA’s responsibility. While committed to anti-discrimination legislation, Soskice wanted it to be of the narrowest possible scope and resisted pressure from colleagues to look into prejudice in housing, as he considered that would force government into ‘difficult and controversial matters’. This minimalist approach was not without support: Ray Gunter at the Ministry of Labour believed legislation would ‘produce more difficulties than it solves’. Thus, lacking Home Office backing, Foley could only urge Gunter’s officials to inform employers ‘that in the sort of multi-racial society that had come to stay … equality of opportunity in matters of employment was in the national interest’. As a result, the 1965 Race Relations Act was criticised for what it did not do, although, whatever its limitations, it did constitute the first legal challenge to white prejudice – and that with Labour’s re-election in the offing.

Once Roy Jenkins became Home Secretary towards the end of 1965, the tone of government policy became less mealy-mouthed. He ensured integration became part of the Home Office remit by having Foley moved from the DEA. Jenkins articulated a definition of integration that was rather more positive than Foley’s by stressing not just the reality but also the legitimacy of cultural diversity. He even talked of immigrants’ constructive contribution to British life, something Soskice never did. This shift of emphasis at the top was, however, not necessarily registered at constituency level. In Bedford, for example, where during the later 1960s at least 4 per cent of the population were black, activists remained divided. When one GMC delegate suggested that immigrants did not receive their fair share of council housing, he was informed that if he said that in public ‘there would not be one Labour Councillor left’, a warning met with shouts of agreement. Even so, during a later debate, some suggested whites should be more tolerant and immigrants might even be able to teach the majority ‘good habits’. However, others thought blacks needed to adhere fully to the dominant culture: as one delegate put it, ‘he didn’t see why we should accept their ways as it was our country’. Going further than everybody else, one speaker claimed:

we might just as well give the whole damn country to the Blacks as they would get it in the end anyway. Before long we would have a Black king on the throne and then it would be God help us! The poor old white man might just as well emigrate and leave the place to them … this Black menace had ruined our towns and forced the whites out of them. The best thing we could do would be to send the whole damn lot back to where they came from!
A subsequent discussion revealed some GMC delegates even thought rising unemployment was mainly due to this 'black invasion'. Oblivious to these sentiments, Jenkins wanted to extend the Race Relations Act. One of his main concerns was to ensure the full integration of immigrants' children, who, as Jenkins' adviser Anthony Lester informed the 1967 Labour Party conference, 'will be as English as you or I, as British as you or I, and the only difference will be the colour of their skin'. Without action to tackle discrimination in employment and housing, it was feared an alienated second generation would emerge, one stuck in badly paid jobs and forced to remain in American-style ghettos. Civil strife would be the only result. By the time legislation was ready, Jenkins had swapped jobs with the Chancellor, James Callaghan, someone whom he considered a 'reactionary' on immigration. The new Home Secretary certainly thought some of the Bill's provisions would be difficult to enforce. Yet, in spite of his reputation, Callaghan fought hard against colleagues who tried to exclude housing from the Bill because of their fear of an adverse voter reaction.

**Equality at work**

Apart from housing, the 1968 Race Relations Act broke new ground by subjecting the workplace to anti-discriminatory legislation. Prejudice in employment was a difficult issue for Labour, as it implicated many of its union supporters. Foley hoped the unions would promote integration by selecting immigrants as branch officials; the Birmingham borough party had also exhorted local unions to ensure black school-leavers suffered no prejudice in securing work. More often than not, however, trade unionists appeared to be less the solution and more part of the problem. Foley and others believed this was due to fears that immigrants would accept lower wages and so threaten white jobs. While there was no hard evidence to prove immigration reduced labour costs, Wilson's economic adviser, Thomas Balogh, counselled the Prime Minister against controls because he thought it did. True or not, during the 1963 Deptford by-election Labour canvassers told voters that the Conservative government had encouraged immigration during the 1950s for that very purpose.

While discrimination at the workplace was widespread, many of the most prominent examples which first came to light were located in public transport. This was uncomfortable for activists because those workforces found guilty of prejudice were all well unionised and often administered by Labour councils. Particularly on the buses, it was common for employees and managers jointly to restrict or even prohibit the employment of blacks and occasionally ensure they were paid less
than white workers. This contradicted Trades Union Congress (TUC) policy, which in 1955 confirmed its opposition to ‘colour prejudice wherever it may occur’. It is not clear how seriously TUC officials took that pledge, but individual union leaderships were certainly reluctant to confront instances in which their local representatives and members were involved. In confronting racial inequality among workers, activists then often stood alone. In 1958 Coventry Council’s controlling Labour Group tried to tackle discrimination on the buses after it received complaints from the IWA and met with the Transport and General Workers’ Union branch concerned. This resulted in an acrimonious encounter, after which one unionist was described as ‘more national than Socialist’ (i.e. a Nazi) and the branch secretary threatened to withdraw support for Labour if the Group pushed the matter further. Similar party–union conflicts occurred elsewhere: in Bristol equality among bus employees was achieved only after a personal intervention by Wilson.

Although few denied the existence of workplace discrimination, Gunter led the Ministry of Labour in opposing employment being subject to legislation. The Ministry did not ignore prejudice, as much time was spent encouraging managers to take on black workers – but officials believed they could not force the issue. Yet they hardly showed much sympathy to the immigrants’ plight: when Foley asked the Ministry to explain why many blacks could not find work that matched their qualifications, he was told the problem was exaggerated and in most cases blacks were themselves at fault. Gunter also claimed employers were often only responding to their employees’ prejudices in rejecting black workers, a view shared by Alice Bacon, one of Jenkins’ junior ministers. Indeed, a North Paddington Labour councillor had earlier maintained he would have employed immigrants in his business but for the objections of white staff.

Despite its formal position, along with the Confederation of British Industry the TUC urged Jenkins not to make employment subject to his Bill. Fred Hayday of the General and Municipal Workers’ Union believed legislation would ‘prejudice the integration of immigrants’ by transforming blacks into a ‘special class’. The Building Workers’ George Lowthian thought it would create ‘a new kind of discrimination’ by effectively guaranteeing immigrants employment. The unions feared legislation would make illegal workplace ‘quotas’, that is, informal agreements between employees and managers to limit the number of black workers. Leading unionists claimed quotas fostered integration by educating white workers about immigrants without threatening their jobs. The Ministry of Labour endorsed claims that too many blacks in one workplace would lead experienced whites to leave and generate discontent among those remaining. As A. S. Jouhl of the IWA stated, even his organisation initially aimed only to achieve a ‘fair proportion of white and other
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labour in factories’, and implied that a quota of a maximum 25 per cent black workers in any one workplace was acceptable.110 Given the weight of such opinion and the fact that the logic of arguments in favour of quotas echoed that of Labour’s immigration policy in general, it was no surprise that the new Act endorsed the concept of a ‘balance’ between black and white employees. Even the MP Paul Rose, a critic of the limitations of both the 1965 and 1968 Acts, thought this formula satisfactory – so long as quotas were operated in good faith.111

Whatever its shortcomings, Labour’s second Race Relations Act was welcomed by Socialist Commentary for further shifting government policy from promoting conformity among black immigrants to challenging white prejudice.112 So far as Jenkins’ advisers were concerned, the need to face up to Britain’s ‘white problem’ was an important reason for the Act.113 If, in Callaghan’s hands, the Act was slightly more conservative than it might have been had Jenkins remained in control, this was because the new Home Secretary wanted to secure the maximum possible agreement and ensure change was permanent.114 It still provoked the hostility of a substantial minority of whites: while opinion was split 53:36 per cent in favour of the general principle of preventing discrimination in housing and jobs, the balance shifted to 48:44 when the public was specifically asked whether refusing to employ someone on the grounds of colour should be made illegal; and became 44:45 when the question turned to selling or renting accommodation.115

Kenyan Asians

Enoch Powell spent much of his ‘rivers of blood’ speech of April 1968 (see Chapter 1) attacking Callaghan’s proposals to regulate the housing market and implied they proved blacks were being treated better than whites. His rhetoric had the impact it did because, at the time, many expected the imminent arrival of thousands of Kenyan Asians. When Kenya became independent from Britain in 1963, those of Asian descent could apply for citizenship of the new country or retain their British status. Having been exempted from the 1962 Immigration Act, most plumped for the latter.116 The implications of their choice became clear during the autumn of 1967, when the Kenyan government’s ‘Africanisation’ policy threatened thousands of ethnic Asians with expropriation and forced them to flee the country. Jenkins calculated that 1.5 million holders of British passports around the world were exempted from the 1962 Act and, while he accepted that few would want to settle in Britain, 200,000 East African Asians might be forced to do so. While there were ‘formidable’ legal objections to the imposition of restrictions, Jenkins feared such an influx would inflame white attitudes. Thus, if immediate
action was not thought necessary, he asked for a slot in the government’s programme should the need arise for him quickly to introduce legislation to curtail the Asians’ right of entry.117

Fortunately for Jenkins’ reputation as a liberal, when the rate of immigration from Kenya continued to rise – prompting fevered press speculation about the final number of immigrants – it fell to Callaghan to deal with it. His solution was not to deny Kenyan Asians their right to settle but to create a limit of 1,500 per year on their entry. Callaghan was, in effect, creating a queue, ostensibly to protect domestic race relations by ensuring unbearable pressure was not placed on areas of already high immigrant settlement. The main motive behind the legislation was to prevent a white backlash. Few sitting round the Cabinet table relished the policy but none put up much opposition. Even critics, such as the Colonial Secretary, George Thomas, accepted that the flow of Kenyan immigrants had to be reduced to ‘manageable proportions’ to ensure the success of integration. Thus, so as to close down the ability of East African Asians to enter the country at will, ministers extended controls to citizens of the United Kingdom and colonies ‘with no substantial connection with this country’.118 Ministers hoped this ‘connection’, defined as possession of a parent or grandparent born in Britain, meant they would appear non-discriminatory, while in practice they would be limiting only non-white entry.119 Most, however, saw it for what it was.

When Callaghan presented legislation to the Commons, he faced severe opposition from Labour MPs. The junior minister David Owen later recalled how he ‘agonized’ over how to vote, for, while appreciating the measure was ‘undoubtedly racial in character’, he feared that without it violence would ensue. Thus, if principle dictated allowing the Asians free entry, he still supported the government.120 The Home Office minister in charge of integration at this point, David Ennals, a former president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, tried his best to forestall criticism from locally employed community liaison officers by claiming ministers shared their ‘anguish’. He asked them to understand that they had been forced to choose between the harm that would be done to individuals wanting to come to Britain and the damage black–white relations would suffer if they were allowed free entry. Had limitations not been imposed, Ennals argued, greater prejudice and discrimination would have been the result, for too many whites remained inclined to racism.121 Ennals did not convince many. Resolutions passed by various community relations councils, funded by Whitehall to improve the position of immigrants, complained that blacks now believed the government was also racist and so despaired of co-operating with it.122 *Tribune* declared the proposals surrendered to racism and asserted that a government truly determined to counter prejudice would have
taken a firmer stand. Some on the Labour left had a one-eyed view of matters. *Tribune* in particular was reluctant to criticise the Kenyan government, which was after all guilty of forcing thousands to leave the country of their birth. Indeed, while one contributor attacked Callaghan’s restrictions as immoral he welcomed ‘Africanisation’ as an attack on privilege.

Opinion surveys indicated that almost three-quarters of the public approved of the government’s measures; two-thirds thought they did not go far enough. This reaction gave some credence to ministers’ fears about what might have happened had they not restricted entry. While Tony Benn dismissed Powell’s supporters as ‘white trash’ and Crossman thought they belonged to the ‘illiterate industrial proletariat’, Powell posed a real political danger. He enjoyed a special resonance with many workers: after his speech and subsequent sacking from the Conservative front bench, thousands downed tools to express their support. His views were even shared by some of the country’s leading trade unionists. Although some instigators of these demonstrations had Fascist links or already held viscerally racist views, that was not true of most of those who followed. As Ennals recognised, Powell did not create such feelings, but his speech made them appear more legitimate.

Labour was already in a weak electoral position at the time of the Kenyan Asian controversy, working-class voters having been alienated by the government’s prices and incomes policies and an economic slowdown. This was not the best of times to challenge voters’ deepest prejudices and fears about immigration. Thus, in the immediate aftermath of Powell’s speech, Wilson urged ministers to emphasise bipartisanship in race relations and to avoid attacking Powell personally. In fact Callaghan went the other way and expressed support for voluntary repatriation, claiming he had restricted Asian immigration to address the disquiet expressed by pro-Powell strikers.

Two weeks after Powell’s speech, Wilson did rebut his claims, in a speech also delivered in Birmingham. There he strongly identified Labour as an anti-racist party but reasserted the government’s position that, if the principle of racial equality was to be maintained, ‘we must create the practical conditions in which these principles are acceptable to all our people, including those who day by day live their lives alongside immigrant communities’. Hence, inner-city areas with greatest black settlement were given aid under the remit of the Urban Programme, launched not long after Wilson’s speech. This comprised modest Treasury pump-priming to local authorities that embarked on approved projects to help areas of acute deprivation. Yet, because of fears that it might arouse white antagonism, the Programme was presented as an attempt to relieve poverty in general rather than to help immigrants in particular.
Conclusion

Like his predecessor at the Home Office, Callaghan hoped the 1968 Race Relations Act would prevent second-generation immigrants becoming alienated from mainstream society. Despite ensuring the Act broadly reflected Jenkins' concerns, however, Callaghan had a different understanding of how that end might be achieved, one probably closer to the views of most Labour members and voters. During the spring of 1968 the Cabinet established a Ministerial Committee on Immigration and Assimilation, the title of which undoubtedly indicated how some believed blacks born in Britain should relate to its 'way of life'. As the Kenyan Asian crisis reached a climax, the Committee discussed a Home Office paper that reviewed the established policy of promoting a form of integration that did not compromise immigrants' 'cultural diversity'. Although the paper was written under his name, Callaghan questioned its assumptions and asked how far diversity should be permitted to develop; he noted that allowing Sikhs to wear beards and turbans at work aroused white resentment. The Home Secretary was especially concerned with what he termed the 'ineradicability of colour', for, unlike previous immigrant groups, even second-generation West Indians, Pakistanis and Indians 'could not be concealed' and thereby raised problems 'of an entirely new kind'. According to Crossman, only a minority on the Committee wanted 'the coloured communities to remain foreign', that is, to retain their cultural distinctiveness. The rest, led by Callaghan, sought their 'full integration or assimilation', so that they would effectively become 'little Englishmen' – presumably ministers hoped that they would then provoke less hostility.

If, under Callaghan’s lead, government policy appeared to take a step back, elsewhere the party gave evidence of a greater sensitivity to the issue of colour. In 1957 the Cardiff party had claimed there was ‘no marked evidence of discrimination’ in the city, a highly unlikely statement given the existence of the mainly black district of Tiger Bay. Eleven years later, the same organisation dismissed the ‘strong myth’ that Cardiff was immune to racial problems and embraced the need to educate against prejudice in schools and combat discrimination at work. By the late 1960s greater efforts were also being made to recruit black residents into the party. In Norwood, south London, for example, activists invited potential West Indian recruits to their homes to try to overcome doubts they might have about Labour. Having recruited 50 new black members, one ward in the constituency held a meeting every other month in the home of a West Indian member, to encourage the attendance of other immigrants. Tribune also challenged the assumption that black immigrants would destroy the country’s settled way of life; and if Britain became more ‘cosmopolitan’ as a result, that was a prospect some Tribune MPs appeared to welcome.
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The greater attention to and sympathy with issues relating to colour were, however, unevenly developed. In 1956 Leeds West CLP marked Charles Pannell’s first five years in the Commons by holding an evening of entertainment during which one of the acts involved songs delivered by lady members dressed as ‘nigger minstrels’. Just over a decade later, contributors to Tribune condemned The Black and White Minstrel Show (watched on BBC television every week by millions) as a disgrace for portraying black people as second-class citizens. David Ennals, the minister in charge of integration, claimed, however, that, having seen the programme, he could find no trace of prejudice in it.

Notes

The place of publication is London unless otherwise specified.

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10 LPA, NEC, Commonwealth Sub-committee papers, Minutes, agenda and documents 1955–56 and 1957–62 Boxes, passim.
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16 R. Jenkins, Essays and Speeches (1967), pp. 269–70.
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22 LPA, Study Group on Immigration papers, Commonwealth immigration, Re. 382/November 1968.


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29 RRIC, Various subjects 1929–58 Box, letter from Vauxhall CLP secretary, 26 February 1957.


33 Commonwealth Sub-committee, Minutes, agenda and documents 1955–56 Box, Analysis of resolutions received from Labour parties and trade union branches, July and September 1956; and 1957–62 Box, Resolutions from Labour parties, July 1958.

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77 This paragraph is based on: Public Record Office (PRO), PREM 13/382, Soskice to Wilson, 4 January 1965, and PRO, LAB 8/3003, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Home Department (draft), 6 January 1965.
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82 For more on this legislation, see Hansen, Citizenship, pp. 136–46.
83 Unless otherwise stated, this paragraph is based on Daily Express, 11 March; Sun, 11 March; Guardian, 5 April, 18, 21 and 24 May, 12 June, 6 August; The Times, 6 August; Daily Telegraph, 12 October 1965.
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Demonstration of dockers against the race Relations Bill on 23 April 1968, 24 April 1968; *Daily Sketch*, 27 April 1968.

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