



RAT

**AND THE
DEGRADATION
OF
BLACK STRUGGLE**

A. SIVANANDAN

**HAITI
INDENTURED LABOUR AND APARTHEID
RACISM AND RADICAL FEMINISM
SRI LANKA: STATE TERROR
POETRY OF THE MINERS' STRIKE**

**RACE &
CLASS**

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RAT and the degradation of black struggle

There is a class war going on within Marxism as to who – in the period of the de-construction of industrial capitalism and the re-composition of the working class – are the real agents of revolutionary change: the orthodox working class, which is orthodox no more, or the ‘ideological classes’ who pass for the new social force or forces. It is a war that was engendered, on the one hand, by the growing disillusion with Soviet communism and, on the other, by the receding prospect of capturing state power in late capitalist societies where such power was becoming increasingly diffuse and opaque. The solution to both, on the ground, pointed to a variant of social democracy under the rubric of Eurocommunism. The solution, for theory, pointed to a re-reading of Marx, a re-hashing of Gramsci and a return to intellectual rigour accompanied by activist mortis. The working class, as a consequence, was stripped of its richest political seams – black, feminist, gay, green, etc. – and left, in the name of anti-economism, a prey to economism. Conversely, the new social forces, freed from the ballast of economic determinism (and class reductionism), have been floated as the political and ideological ‘classes’ of the new radicalism. But that flight from class has served only to turn ideological priorities into idealistic preoccupations, and political autonomy into personalised politics and palliatives – which, for all that, have passed into common left currency and found a habitation and a name in Labour local authorities. The

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clearest expression of these tendencies and the mortality they bring to the new social movements are to be seen in the philosophy and practice of Racism Awareness Training (RAT), the blight of the black struggle – itself a result of the flight of race from class.

Culture, community and class

What, however, had led to the flight from class within the black movement in Britain was the demise of the black community. That community – of Black, of Afro-Caribbean-Asian – had been created in the post-war years by a culture of resistance to racism in the factories and the neighbourhoods of the inner cities to which Afro-Caribbeans and Asians had been condemned to work and live. As workers, they were initially separated by a colonial division of labour which, by and large, assigned Afro-Caribbeans to the service industries and Asians to the foundries and factories. But, as denizens of the same ghetto, they found common cause against a racism that denied them their basic needs in housing, schooling and social and welfare services and brought them up against racist landlords, racist teachers, racist social workers and racist policemen. Common problems and common interests led to a common culture of resistance – and to community.

That sense of community was reinforced by a common (albeit different) tradition of struggle against colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Nkrumah, Nehru, Garvey, Padmore, James, Williams were all stars of a common constellation, and the struggles of one continent flowed and ebbed into the struggles of the other. So that when the trade unions refused to take up the cause of the Afro-Caribbean or Asian workers over industrial disputes or racial discrimination and/or exploitation, black communities closed ranks behind them and gave them the sustenance and the support to mount a protest or conduct a strike. And that then wove the interests of the class into the concerns of the community and made for a formidable political force far in excess of its numbers.

The direction for that political force and its ideological tenets came from a variety of black marxist organisations (the Indian Workers' Association (IWA) and the Universal Coloured Peoples' Association (UCPA) foremost among them) which, in reaction to the eurocentrism of the white metropolitan left and its attempts to subsume race to class, held this much in common: that the unity and autonomy of black struggle could only enrich and politicise the struggles of the class as a whole. That did not mean that they were culturally exclusive. On the contrary, their struggles, though informed by a resistance to the oppression of black people, were directed towards the liberation of the class. And in this, they were guided by the understanding that any struggle against racism which deepened and extended the class struggle

was the right struggle. Conversely, any struggle that led to the cul de sac of reactionary nationalism was the wrong one. Hence their stand: for the blacks and therefore for the class.

This politics was, in turn, fed back to the community, in the temples and the churches and Sunday schools, and through meetings and marches and news-sheets and pamphlets that linked the struggles here to the struggles back home and made common cause with the movements in Africa and Asia and the Caribbean. And it was this common and burgeoning culture of active resistance to racism and imperialism that cohered black community, linked race to class and engendered the struggles of the second generation.¹

It was no accident, therefore, that the state should, as of nature, go for the cultural jugular of the black movement, with strategies to disaggregate that culture into its constituent parts – and then put them up for integration. And integration, as defined by Home Secretary Roy Jenkins in May 1966, was to be seen ‘not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance’. But ‘equal opportunity’ never got off the ground, nor was meant to, and the plea for ‘mutual tolerance’ proved to be conclusively cynical with the passage of yet another racist Immigration Act two years later. The emphasis was on ‘cultural diversity’ – and the integration of those cultures into a ‘cultural’ pluralist set-up. Racism was not a matter of racial oppression and exploitation, of race and class, but of cultural differences and their acceptability. The 1965 White Paper had got it wrong in trying to get the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI) to teach British culture to ‘coloured immigrants’. But the Race Relations Act of 1968* was going to teach immigrant cultures to the white power structure instead – through a national Community Relations Commission (CRC) and its myriad provincial progeny – and so minimise the social and political cost of racial exploitation. And to facilitate that process in the most fraught areas of urban deprivation, the government would provide special financial aid – some of which might even trickle down to ‘the Coloured quarter’.

But that type of multiculturalism did not quite work out either. Explaining West Indian and Asian peoples to white groups and individuals in positions of power – as the CRC did – or picking (ineffectually) at racial discrimination – as the Race Relations Board (RRB) was wont to do – seemed to have little effect in managing racism or breaking down black resistance. Nor had urban aid reached the parts

* This was meant to balance out the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of a few months earlier (which denied British citizenship to British Asians in Kenya). For, as Hattersley had said, ‘without integration limitation is inexcusable, without limitation integration is impossible’.

(of society) that would have lubricated such a strategy; and, though a class of black collaborators was springing up in the shadow of the CRC and the RRB, they were still too few in number to take the heart out of black protest. And to make matters worse, the (Tory) government brought in yet another Immigration Act (1971)* stopping dead all primary immigration and putting all dependants on a hit list (those, that is, who were waiting in their countries of origin to join their families in Britain).²

A different struggle ...

The Act may have diverted the struggles of the black community, and the Asians in particular, from the (political) fight against racism to the more legalistic fight for entry permits for their dependants. But, by creating an official category of illegal immigrants (and overstayers) and setting up a special police unit (IIIU) to pursue them, the Act served also to stoke the fires of black resistance. Already, Afro-Caribbean youth were being brutalised by the police and criminalised by the 'Sus' law; now, the Asians were suspected of being illegals and so open to arrest in their work-places or their homes. And on the streets, the sport of Paki-bashing had grown, with police indifference (if not connivance), into more generalised and organised racial violence. In education, the relegation of Afro-Caribbean children to ESN schools and the dispersal of Asian children to schools outside their neighbourhoods combined to agitate black parents. On the shopfloor, the power of the employers (heightened by the Industrial Relations Act of 1971) was compounded by the racism of the unions.

And as racism intensified, the resistance to it intensified too – but in different ways from the 1950s and 1960s. Whereas the struggles of that period had been taken up with the 'first-generation' fight against a brutal racism that denied basic needs and services to Afro-Caribbeans and Asians, those of the late 1960s and early 1970s had to address themselves to creating a social and educational infrastructure for the second generation – in self-help groups and social centres, supplementary schools and neighbourhood schools, workshops and bookshops, hostels for the unemployed and the homeless, youth clubs and associations. And because of the differential racism now visited on the different communities, these activities themselves became differentiated as between Afro-Caribbean and Asian. But they still found their expression in and through political groups and organisations – which, if

* The Tory government is mentioned not because there is any difference between Tory and Labour Immigration Acts – Callaghan, the Home Secretary in the previous Labour government, had in fact foreshadowed the 1971 Act by preventing the entry of fiancés – except that with every one of its Acts to restrict numbers, Labour had a balancing Act to restrict social dislocation.

they tended to be less 'universal' than the UCPA (1967-71), less generalised than the IWA (now split three ways), still came together to gather the community and mount a protest, organise a march, set up a picket. And through their newspapers and bulletins and demonstrations, they continued to connect the struggles of black people in Britain to the struggles of the Third World, the struggle against racism with the struggle against imperialism. The parameters of struggle were still the same as in the decade before – except that now, with the second generation, the priorities of resistance were beginning to change. And, though there was still a culture of resistance that held black communities together and made for race/class struggle, this owed more to the self-conscious ideology of black political parties and organisations than to spontaneous local community initiatives.

Besides, the deployment of black workers itself had changed from the earlier period: they were scattered now in various industries and not necessarily concentrated (race-wise) in a few. Hence the strikes of '72, '73, '74 in the East Midlands (Nottingham, Loughborough, Leicester), Birmingham, Greater London were distinguished not only by the support they received from black political organisations, but also by their attempts to break down the racism of the trade unions and involve them more directly in black workers' struggle.* 'Unions, after all, were the organisations of their class and, however vital their struggles as blacks, to remain a people apart would be to set back the class struggle itself: the struggle against racism was still a struggle for the class.'

The politics of the black youth, however, were of a different order. They were not prepared to do the 'shit work' that their (immigrant) parents had been forced to do – they wanted what they were entitled to as of right – and their politics were therefore insurrectionary. Nor were they prepared to put up with mounting police harassment and brutality – which, in 1972, had received the blessing of the press and, in 1973, the government's imprimatur.** A series of running battles with the police marked the early years of the 1970s – at Brockwell Park Fair, for instance, in 1973, and at the Carib Club (1974) and in Chapeltown, Leeds, on bonfire night (1975) – and exploded into direct confrontation with bricks and bottles and burning of police cars at the Notting Hill Carnival of 1976.

... and a different state strategy

Already, by 1974, the anxieties of the state had begun to shift from the

* From this emerged the first National Committee for Trade Unions Against Racism (1973).

** The White Paper on Police-Immigrant Relations (1973) warned of 'a small minority of young coloured people ... anxious to imitate behaviour amongst the black community in the United States'.

resistances of the first generation to those of the second. The 1968 version of multiculturalism cum urban aid had clearly failed because it was aimed primarily at the white power structure. All it had done was to spawn a nursery of comprador blacks – in the race relations industry. The new labour strategy of multiculturalism-with-urban-aid, therefore, would be aimed at the black communities – financing in particular the *respective* self-help projects of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans, which were starved of funds. Accordingly, in January 1975, the Home Office announced the granting of aid to ‘urban areas facing special social problems’ to the tune of £7,000,000, funding a host of black community groups in the process.⁴ And in September of that same year, the (Labour) government indicated in a White Paper on Racial Discrimination its intention this time to include effective equal opportunities programmes into its multicultural strategy. For ‘the character of the coloured population resident in this country has changed dramatically over the decade ... and the time is not far off when the majority of the coloured population will be British born’ – and it was ‘vital to tap the 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 protests on account of arbitrary and unfair discriminatory practices’.⁵

The strategy and purpose of the White Paper, and the Race Relations Act that followed from it (1976), have been anticipated and analysed in ‘Race, class and the state’ (1976).^{*} For my argument here, what is important to note is that the combined strategy of promoting individual cultures, funding self-help groups and setting down anti-discriminatory and equal opportunity guidelines, not least through the collapsing of the RRB and CRC into a single Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), began finally to break down the earlier cohesion of culture, community and class. Multiculturalism deflected the political concerns of the black community into the cultural concerns of different communities, the struggle against racism to the struggle for culture. Government funding of self-help groups undermined the self-reliance, the self-created social and economic base, of those groups: they were no longer responsive to or responsible for the people they served – and service itself became a profitable concern.

Anti-discriminatory action was either ineffectual or touched only the cultural fringes of discrimination – so that you could wear a turban and still get a job – and behind equal opportunity, based as it was on

* ‘Within ten years Britain will have solved its “black problem” – but “solved” in the sense of having diverted revolutionary aspiration into nationalist achievement, reduced militancy to rhetoric, put protest to profit and, above all, kept a black underclass from bringing to the struggles of the white workers political dimensions peculiar to its own historic battle against capital.’⁶

the concept of racial disadvantage (as opposed to institutional racism), hovered the notion of differential opportunities for Asians and West Indians respectively.⁷ If opportunity there was, it was opportunity for the 'black' compradors, preened and pruned by the CRE to blossom into the new 'black' leadership, and later the 'state-class', that would manage racism and keep the lid on protest – or at least deflect it from political struggle. And as a further bonus, Labour had, under the previous Tory administration, been gifted a cross-section of Asian business men from Uganda (passing for refugees), presumably to add to 'the leaven of energy and resourcefulness that immigrant communities brought with them'.⁸

Underlying the whole of the state's project was a divisive culturalism that turned the living, dynamic, progressive aspects of black people's culture into artefact and habit and custom – and began to break up community.

In fact, the collapse of the long-standing strike at Grunwick at the end of 1977 owes not a little to this process. The strikers (predominantly Asian women in a predominantly Asian workforce), it has been argued by some black activists, would have done better to have relied on the black community and black organisations for their support than to have looked to the trade unions – who finally betrayed them.⁹ But except for the support of women and of the odd black organisation, that community, which as recently as 1973-74 had rallied to a series of black strikes in the East Midlands, was no longer there. And even in the strikes that followed Grunwick's in the next couple of years – as at Futters, and Chix – it was the women in the black community who turned out to help the class.

Black women had 'held up half the sky', without getting half the recognition, during the black power era. But now, when the rest of the community was falling away, it was they who stood out against the skyline. And, informed not only by their struggles against racism and sexism but by those of their sisters against sexism and imperialism in the Third World, it was they who found common cause with the class.*

It was the women, besides, who had to bear the brunt of the cuts in health, education and welfare which marked the last years of Callaghan's Labour government. These affected Asian and Afro-Caribbean families in particular, and it was the women from the communities who took up the issues of child care (Afro-Caribbean and Asian), black prisoners' rights (Afro-Caribbean), the virginity testing and X-raying of immigrants (Asian), the enforced use of depo-provera (Afro-Caribbean and Asian), the neglect of 'ethnic diseases' such as

* By 1978, black women's groups had sprung up all over Britain and came together to form one powerful national body, the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD), with a national newspaper, FOWAAD.¹⁰

sickle cell anaemia (Afro-Caribbean) and rickets (Asian), the easy relegation of Afro-Caribbean children to adjustment units ('sin-bins') and the fight against the deportation of 'illegal' (Asian) mothers or for the entry of 'illegal' (Asian) children to join them. But, of their very nature, these issues had a differential impact on the two communities and tended to make for separate struggles on the ground. And although ideologically the black women's movement still tried to cohere the common interests of race, gender and class, the black culture of resistance of an earlier period was now being put under review by a feminist culture of resistance which was still not confident enough to create new black parameters.

From black struggle to anti-racist struggle

The struggles of the youth, already divided by the propagation of multi-culture, had also taken off in different directions. The trouncing the police had received at the hands of the Afro-Caribbean youth at the Notting Hill Carnival (1976) had only led to a more sophisticated, mailed-fist velvet-glove, approach to policing. The tactic of using the media to legitimate the criminalisation of black youth, first begun under Police Commissioner Robert Mark, was continued by his successor, David McNee – only he, taking to heart his nickname 'The Hammer', now brought riot shields to the 'defence' of his force. And increasing police authoritarianism itself found legitimacy in the policies of a Labour government which, with an eye to the forthcoming elections, had begun to back-pedal on its anti-discriminatory programme (however ineffective) and rely instead on the forces of law and order to smother black discontent.

Labour had earlier – as part of its balancing act between restricting immigration and improving integration – started yet another Dutch auction on immigration control through, this time, a Green Paper on Nationality Law. The Tories, under Thatcher, upped the ante and promised pass laws to control 'internal immigration' and 'arrangements' to facilitate voluntary repatriation. And the National Front, thus released into respectability, became more brazen in its attacks on the Asian community – and so occupied the attention of Asian youth. But since the Front's bravery was invariably under 'police protection', the Asian youth were up against the police as well. The killing of Gurdip Singh Chaggar in 1976 by young fascist thugs in the heart of Southall had led to clashes with the police (who held that the murder was not necessarily racial). In 1977, the Front, under police escort, had staged virulently racist and provocative marches through black city areas and were stopped by the youth of both communities. In 1978, Judge McKinnon ruled that the National Party leader Kingsley Read's pronouncement on Chaggar's murder – 'one down, one million to go' –

did not constitute incitement to racial hatred.* In 1979, the Front, abetted by the policies of the local Tory council and the police, flaunted its fascist election programmes in Southall Town Hall – and was repelled by the citizenry, but at the cost of the life of a teacher, who was battered to death by the Special Patrol Group.

The rise of the right had, three years earlier, brought together radical whites and blacks in the inner-city areas in an Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Co-ordinating Committee (ARAFCC) with its own newspaper, *CARF*. Their battle was joined a year later by white organisations under the broad banner of the Anti-Nazi League (ANL). But, in the process, the direction of the battle got deflected from a fight against racism and, therefore, fascism to a fight against fascism and, incidentally, racism. The whites from the local committees of ARAFCC defected to the ANL, which, with its spectacular events such as rock concerts and fetes and carnivals, its youth organisations such as School Kids Against the Nazis and its paper *SKAN*, and its mass leafleting drives, was able to attract more (white) support and mobilise more (white) people. The fascists, as a result, were stopped dead in their electoral tracks; but they were also driven from the (white) high streets into the (black) alley ways of the inner city, there to continue their depredations and their recruitment. And when, after the general election of 1979, the ANL (its mission accomplished) disbanded, the issues of racism and fascism had become separated, and the joint struggles of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans likewise. The black struggle (for community and class) was becoming more narrowly a struggle against racism, and the anti-racist struggle itself was tending to divide into struggles that concerned Asians (mainly) and the struggles that concerned Afro-Caribbeans (mainly).** The protest over Akhtar Ali Baig's murder (July 1980) in Newham, for example, was mostly an Asian affair, and the massive march following the burning to death of thirteen young Afro-Caribbeans in a fire in New Cross (January 1981) chiefly an Afro-Caribbean one.

And then, in the summer of 1981, the youth of the benighted inner cities, black and white, Afro-Caribbean and Asian, came together again – not so much in joint struggle as in a blinding moment of spontaneous insurrection against the impossibility of their common condition. For, in the course of two brief years, Thatcherite monetarism had blighted the future of all working-class youth, not just black, and left them a bleak landscape of 'rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds'

* 'In this England of ours', the good judge observed, 'we are allowed to have our own view still, thank goodness, and long may it last.'

** But not before the Indian Workers' Association, the Black Socialist Alliance, Blacks Against State Harassment and various black women's groups had organised one final national demonstration against state harassment and fascist thuggery – in June 1979.

over-shadowed by policemen.

The rebellions shook the government. The danger now was not the black community as such. There was no *black* community. The promotion of cultural separatism (euphemistically known as cultural diversity or multiculturalism) was keeping Asians and Afro-Caribbeans apart; the development of a youth culture and a women's culture were further de-composing the forces within the community, without, as yet, re-aligning them in a new black configuration; and the emergence of an Afro-Caribbean managerial class in the race relations industry (and sub-managers in the nationalised self-help groups), together with the flowering of Ugandan-Asian entrepreneurship, were breaking up community into classes. The danger to the state stemmed from the never-employed youth of the inner cities, both black and white, hounded and harried by the police. But the blacks, by virtue of their racial oppression, were the insurrectionary tinder.*

Hence, while a Task Force of town planners and bankers and business men under the Minister for the Environment was sent to study mixed areas like Toxteth in Liverpool, to see how such areas could be regenerated, black (mainly Afro-Caribbean) areas like Brixton got the attention also of a quasi-judicial inquiry under Lord Scarman to investigate the 'disorders' and their causes (in racism and police-black relations). Little of substance came out of the first of these initiatives for Toxteth (or Smethwick) as such, but the Urban Aid Programme, which, under the Tories, had fallen into disfavour, now received a 'dramatic re-awakening of interest ... as a vehicle for social measures in multi-racial areas', and the CRE, which the Tories had threatened to close down, was open to business again – the business of channelling funds to black 'self-help' groups.** Consequently, 'funding for the total urban programme ... was dramatically increased, against the trend, to a 1982/3 level of £270m.'***

The rise and rise of ethnicity

It was Lord Scarman's report, however, that pointed to a new ethnic

* 'To allege that unemployment or social deprivation is the cause of the "riots" is to pretend that racism is not also the cause of unemployment and social deprivation – among blacks.'¹¹

** Though Section 11 of the Local Government Act of 1966 is the 'major vehicle of ... government support for local authority programmes designed to combat racial disadvantage', 'the Urban Programme is the major source of funding for voluntary sector schemes designed to combat racial discrimination ...'¹²

*** 'Nationally, over 200 new "ethnic projects" have been approved for 1982/3; in the Partnership authorities these are valued at £2m (£0.77m in 1981/2) while Traditional Urban Programme expenditure on "ethnic projects" has increased still more sharply to £7m (£2.7m in 1981/2). It is estimated that £15m is currently being spent on ethnic projects under the urban programme.'¹³

strategy, which was received with enthusiasm (and relief) by Tory and Labour alike.* The foundation for that strategy, however, had already been intimated in the report of the Home Affairs Committee on Racial Disadvantage (1981) – which was itself informed by a whole school of ethnicity that had emerged (at Bristol University's Social Science Research Council Unit on Ethnic Relations) to take on the 'problem' of British-born blacks.**

Whereas multiculturalism, addressing itself to the revolt of the first-generation 'immigrant', diagnosed the problem as one of cultural misunderstanding, the ethnicists, in trying to relate to the ongoing revolt of British-born blacks, connected it with the cultural limbo to which racism had ostensibly condemned them. Neither Asian/Afro-Caribbean nor British but afflicted by both, the second generation was adrift of its moorings and rudderless, caught in a cross-current of emotion in its search for identity – not least, to fight racism with. And in that search, it kept returning to its ethnicity and, redefining it, found refuge therein. Ethnicity refers, therefore, to the creation of a new reactive culture on the part of British-born Asians and West Indians alike. But where Asians tended to go into their cultures to make the new ethnicity, West Indian ethnicity came out of a mixture, a 'creolisation', of Afro-Caribbean culture with the 'host' culture. 'Those who were born in Britain', states Watson, 'are caught between the cultural expectations of their parents (the first-generation migrants) and the social demands of the wider society. Young Sikhs and Jamaicans, for instance, often feel that they do not "fit" in either culture ... Largely in response to racism, these two minorities have begun a process of ethnic redefinition – or "creolisation" ...'¹⁵ Or, in Weinreich's language: 'West Indian boys have conflicted identifications with the general representatives of their own ethnicity and the native white population.' Hence, the 'changes' in the second generation should be seen as 'redefinition of their ethnic distinctiveness'.¹⁶ It is racism, however, according to the Ballards, that has 'precipitated a reactive pride in their separate ethnic identity'.¹⁷ Ethnicity itself, for Wallman, is a 'perception' of difference, a 'sense' of it, something that was 'felt', a clue to identity.¹⁸

By acknowledging the resistance to racism on the part of the second generation only to banish it to 'conflicted identification' and 'ethnic redefinition', the ethnicists deny the connection between race and class

* But then, it was in essence an elaboration of the multicultural strategy initiated by Labour in 1976 – and in hard times, the Tories were not averse to taking lessons from their masters in social control.

** Ethnicity, which became muted when the Unit moved to Aston University under Professor John Rex in 1979,¹⁴ is soon to be revived by Professor Robin Cohen (with Rex) in a five-year (policy-oriented) research programme at Warwick University.

and between racism and imperialism – and reincarcerate the second generation in the castle of their skin. Identity is all. The Home Affairs Committee then takes on the ethnic theme and, making ethnicity official, signs up institutional racism as racial disadvantage – leaving it to Scarman to tie it up with ethnic need.

Like the Race Relations Act of 1976, the main planks of the Scarman report were racial discrimination (direct and indirect) and racial disadvantage. Racial discrimination Scarman, too, was prepared to leave to the ‘existing law’, and presumably the CRE.* But racial disadvantage, which the 1976 Act – steering its way gingerly between the Scylla of institutional racism and the Charybdis of inherent inferiority – had left (undefined) to the vagaries of Equal Opportunity, was in Scarman to be (specifically) treated in terms of special ethnic needs and problems.** And it is here at the point of cure, in the act of applying the ethnic poultice to the ethnic wound, that racial disadvantage begins to smell of inherent disability.

The West Indian family, implies Scarman, is comparatively unstable, ‘doubtless because of the impact of British social conditions on the matriarchal extended family structure of the West Indian immigrants’.¹⁹ For instance, ‘the percentage of children in care and of single-parent families in the black community is noticeably higher than one would expect in relation to the proportion of black people in the community as a whole. Fifty percent of single parent families in ... Lambeth in 1978 were non-white’. Besides, ‘the two wards where the April disorders were centred – Tulse Hill and Herne Hill – contain some 22% of all the single-parent households in Lambeth and 2.1% of the 0-18 group in those wards are in care. Of the 185 children in care of those two wards on 10 September 1980, 112 (61%) were black’. In addition, it was estimated that ‘200-300 young blacks are homeless, sleeping rough or squatting in Brixton’.

Young West Indians, for Scarman are ‘a people of the street ... They live their lives on the street, having often nothing better to do: they make their protest there: and some of them live off street crime.’ Inevitably, they must come into conflict with the police, ‘whom they see as pursuing and harassing them on the streets’.^{***} And this hostility of black youth to the police has ‘*infected* older members of the community’ (emphasis added). The street-corners are ‘social centres’ for old people too, and ‘young and old, good and bad have time on their

* The CRE was under inquiry by the Home Affairs Committee at the time and Scarman would not commit himself.

** ‘The special problems and needs of the ethnic minorities’, is how Scarman put it.

*** By contrast, the ‘chief complaint of Asian leaders appears to be that the police do not do sufficient to protect their community from alleged attacks by racist members of the white community.’²⁰

hands and a continuing opportunity ... to engage in endless discussion of their grievances', so that 'in Brixton even one isolated instance of misconduct can foster a whole legion of rumours which rapidly become beliefs firmly held within the community'.

If this is not as elaborate as Moynihan's 'tangled pathology' of the American 'Negro family',* it is because Scarman's brief was to investigate the 'Brixton disorders' not the West Indian community. But, given his determination to acquit the state of institutional racism, it was inevitable that he should find the West Indian community guilty of inherent disability – and so give racial disadvantage a meaning which even the Home Affairs Committee report on the subject (July 1981) had been careful to avoid. But the committee, since its brief was racial disadvantage as such, also referred to the disadvantage suffered by the Asian community and located it in language, religion, custom and (peasant) illiteracy. (Only the 'East African Asians' were an exception.) Between them, the two reports set out the terms of West Indian and Asian ethnic need and provided the criteria on which the government based its (ethnic) programmes and allocated its (ethnic) funds.

The ensuing scramble for government favours and government grants (channelled through local authorities) on the basis of specific ethnic needs and problems served, on the one hand, to deepen ethnic differences and foster ethnic rivalry and, on the other, to widen the definition of ethnicity to include a variety of national and religious groups – Chinese, Cypriots, Greeks, Turks, Irish, Italians, Jews, Moslems, Sikhs – till the term itself became meaningless (except as a means of getting funds). This 'vertical mosaic' of ethnic groups, so distanced from the horizontal of class politics, then became even more removed by the policies of 'left' Labour councils who, lacking the race-class perspective which would have allowed them to dismantle the institutional racism of their own structures, institutionalised ethnicity instead. And it was left to a handful of genuinely anti-racist programmes and/or campaigns, such as those against deportation, police harassment and racial violence (sustained largely by GLC funding), to carry on the dwindling battle for community and class.

The other cure for racial disadvantage propounded by Scarman was 'positive action', which meant no more than a determined effort at promoting equal opportunity or, more precisely, reducing unequal opportunity for ethnic minorities, but backed up this time by a system of monitoring. And this, too, was taken up avidly by inner-city administrations who, having set up their own race relations units (to administer ethnic programmes and ethnic funds), required now an ethnic

* 'Once or twice removed, it [the weakness of the family structure] will be found to be the principal source of most of the aberrant, inadequate or anti-social behaviour that did not establish, but now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation.'²¹

staff – not least, to keep an eye on jobs for ethnics.*

Underlying the whole of Scarman's report is a socio-psychological view of racism, resonant of the ideas of the ethnic school, which, when coupled with his views on racial disadvantage, verges on the socio-biological. Institutional racism, for Scarman, is not a reality of black life but a matter of subjective feelings, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs. Ethnic minorities have a 'sense' of 'concealed discrimination'. Young blacks have a 'sense of rejection' and 'a sense of insecurity'. They do not 'feel' secure socially, economically or politically. They 'see' policemen 'as pursuing and harassing them on the streets' – and the older generation have come to share this 'belief'. (The 'belief' in the Asian community is that the police do not protect them against 'alleged' racist attacks.) Community 'attitudes and beliefs' (caused by a lack of confidence in the police) underlay the disturbances. 'Popular attitudes and beliefs' themselves 'derive their strength' from the 'limbo of the half-remembered and the half-imagined'. The 'image' of a hostile police force is 'myth' and 'legend'.²²

Equally, if the police force was guilty of anything, it was not institutional racism but racial prejudice – which 'does manifest itself occasionally in the behaviour of a few police officers on the street'. And the breakdown of police-community relations was, on the part of the police, due to the fact that their 'attitudes and methods' had not quite caught up with 'the problem of policing a multicultural society'. Part of the policeman's training, therefore, should be directed to 'an understanding of the cultural backgrounds and attitudes of ethnic minorities'.

Racism, for Scarman, was in the mind – in attitudes, prejudices, irrational beliefs – and these were to be found on both sides of the divide – black and white. Institutional racism was a matter of black perception, white racism was a matter of prejudice. Or that, on the face of it, was what Scarman seemed to be saying – and at worst, it was even-handed, liberal even. But what he had effectively done was to reduce institutional racism to black perception and replace it with personal prejudice – and so shift the object of anti-racist struggle from the state to the individual, from changing society to changing people, from improving the lot of whole black communities, mired in racism and poverty, to improving the lot of 'black' individuals.

It was a plan that the nascent 'black' petit-bourgeoisie, nourished on government (and local government) aid for ethnic need and positive action for ethnic equality, leapt to embrace. By and large, the ethnics were content to fight each other in their quest for office. And it was only when there was a white blockage in the system, preventing them

* The local CRCs were pushed on to the sidelines in the process and the central CRE was left the statutory task of taking up cases of discrimination.

from going up further, that the ethnics turned 'black' and pulled out all their oppressed 'black' history to beat the whites with. Hence the demand for Black Sections in the Labour Party; the rise and fall of the Black Media Workers' Association (BMWA) (the fall coming after the white media made room for them in ethnic slots – since when, they have gone back to being Afro-Caribbeans and Asians respectively); and the emergence of a black trade union aristocracy, the Black Trade Union Solidarity Movement (BTUSM).^{*} None of these give a fart for ordinary black people, but use them and their struggles as cynically as any other bourgeois class or sub-class.

Ironically enough, most of the support for these groups has come from the 'left wing' of the Labour Movement which, having failed to incorporate black working-class struggles and black working-class leadership into its own history and organisation, now feels compelled to accommodate black sects in its vaunted broad church. Taking black out of the context of the struggles in which it was beaten into a political colour, the white left now believes that any self-seeking middle-class group that calls itself black has an automatic right to appropriate that history and is automatically political or progressive. What is even more ironical is that this should be happening at a time when, in the rush for office, even such reconstituted blackness is breaking up into Afro-Caribbean and Asian, with the Afro-Caribbeans claiming a prior right to black history on the basis, simply, of a darker colour – thereby emptying 'black' of politics altogether.^{**} Black Sections are no more representative of black working people than the Labour Party is of white. In fact, black politics has to cease to be political for blacks to get into politics. The BTUSM is no more interested in the lot of the rank and file than their lordships Chapple and Murray were as erstwhile leaders of their unions. The BMWA, in the short period of its fight-to-get-into-Channel 4 existence, never did anything for the lower ranks of black workers or, for that matter, demanded to make political black plays or programmes that would have improved the lot of ordinary Afro-Caribbeans or Asians – unless exposing the foibles and manners of one's own people to white voyeurs, but from the inside this time, can be considered funny or political. But then, an ethnic media can only reproduce the cult of ethnicity. And a culture of ethnicity, unlike a culture of resistance, has no community and has no class.

And to undergird it all, undergird the efforts of the new ethnics to move up and away – up through the white blockages in the system and

^{*} The personnel of one group were frequently the personnel of another, as in an interlocking directorate.

^{**} This degradation of 'black' has now passed into vulgar usage and separated Afro-Caribbeans from Asians – as in 'black and Asian', which is itself a nonsense, as one refers to colour (not politics) and the other to geography.

away from the black communities and their troubles – there is a whole school of thought and enterprise which promises to change white minds and white attitudes so that a thousand black flowers can bloom in the interstices of the white structure. Felicitously, it calls itself RAT (Racism Awareness Training)* and it is to this final degradation of black struggle that I now turn my attention.

The birth of RAT

RAT began life in HAT (Human Awareness Training) on a military base in Florida at the end of the 1960s, when the reverberations of black rebellion in American cities began to resonate in the military installations in the US and Japan and drove the Defense Department to a Human Goals Proclamation upholding individual dignity, worth and equal opportunity in its ranks. The training of human relations instructors at the Defense Race Relations Institute (DRRI), therefore, was meant to inculcate a knowledge of minority cultures and history, together with an understanding of personal racism.

HAT, of course, had formed part of human relations training for some time, but the race relations element came into prominence only after the Kerner Commission (1968) declared that racism in America was a white problem and that it inhered in the very structures of society. ‘What white Americans have never fully understood – but what the Negro can never forget – is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it and white society condones it.’²³ On the face of it, the Kerner report looked like a radical statement (as radical as Scarman appeared liberal), and though it connected racism with white institutions, nowhere did it connect the institutions themselves with an exploitative white power structure. So that oppression was severed from exploitation, racism from class and institutional racism from state racism.

The US Commission on Civil Rights (1970) echoed the Kerner Commission and went on to define racism (which Kerner had left undefined) as ‘any attitude, action or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of his or their color’, adding that an ‘institutional structure was any well-established, habitual or widely accepted pattern of action’ (i.e., behavioural) or ‘organizational arrangements whether formal or informal’ (i.e., administrative). The Commission also made a distinction between ‘overt racism’ and ‘indirect institutional subordination’ (which was to become direct and indirect discrimination in the British context). And combating racism, stated the Commission, involved ‘changing the

* Some RAT practitioners have recently changed the name to TIRA (Training in Racism Awareness); but a RAT by any other name still smells.

behaviour of whites' and 'increasing the capabilities of non-white groups' (which in Britain was to become known as tackling racial disadvantage). But the principal responsibility was 'with the white community rather than within the non-white communities'.²⁴

Following the two reports, a whole host of literature sprang up in education, psychology and the churches, rescuing racism from structural taint and interiorising it within the white psyche and white behaviour – and formulating programmes for combating racism on that basis. The New York-based Council for Interracial Books, Integrated Education (Chicago), the Foundation for Change and the Detroit-centred New Perspectives on Race were particularly active in the educational field. Writing in *Integrated Education*, Paul Goldin formulated a 'Model for racial awareness training of teachers in integrated schools' which 'pushes one (through inter-racial confrontation) into an identification with the minority position'.²⁵ In *Developing New Perspectives on Race*, however, Michigan's school superintendent, Patricia Bidol, advocated a more cognitive approach, emphasising that 'only whites can be racists because it is whites that have control over the institutions that create and enforce American cultural norms and values' – and it is whites who benefit from it. She distinguished, therefore, between overt (Archie Bunker type) racism and covert (unintentional) racism – and defined racism itself as 'prejudice plus institutional power'. And it was Bidol and Detroit's New Perspectives on Race who pioneered in the development of racism awareness training for educators.*²⁶

But the work of the Detroit Industrial Mission – following the burning of the city (1967) and the rise of black militancy in DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) and FRUM (Ford Revolutionary Union Movement) – pointed to the need to create a 'new white consciousness' through both attitudinal and behavioural change. The emphasis hitherto, wrote its Associate Director Robert W. Terry in *For whites only*, had been on changing attitudes to change behaviour or changing behaviour (through law, for instance) in order to change attitudes. But though both attitudes and behaviour were critical and both needed to be changed, 'attitudes will be misplaced and behaviour misdirected if consciousness remains untouched'. For even the most well-intentioned person, argues Terry, taking on from where the Civil Rights Commission had left off,** without being 'personally involved

* Bidol's influence is also prominent in Britain, as for instance in the use of her slide show, 'From racism to pluralism', at RAT sessions run by the Racism Awareness Programme Unit (RAPU).

** 'Even many whites who sincerely abhor racism in principle and openly combat overt racism, sometimes feel themselves resisting clearly anti-racist actions for "intuitive" reasons they do not fully understand. This usually means such anti-racist actions threaten

in overt acts of racial injustice', can perpetuate racism in institutions merely by the way the American 'cultural or belief system ... sets his orientation in the decision-making process'. Hence, it was important to be conscious of cultural (historical, linguistic, etc.), institutional (direct and indirect) and individual racism all at once.²⁸ Cultural racism had to be examined wherever it occurred (language, textbooks, media), 'confrontation' was a good way of challenging personal racism and, for institutional racism, Terry provided a model check list designed by the Chicago Campaign for One Society: 'Inventory of racism: how to look for institutional racism'.*

The elements of the RAT credo were already set by the time Judy Katz came to write her D. Ed thesis: *Systematic handbook of exercises for the re-education of white people with respect to attitudes and behaviours* (1976) – except that by now she could also draw on the Women's Movement for an even more personal interpretation of oppression and the need for consciousness-raising. That perspective would, in addition, also allow her (and her followers) to distort the language, style and analysis of the black movement and further remove racism from its exploitative context and render it class-less.

Racism, states Katz, is indeed a white problem, and white people had better take conscience of it – for the sake of their own mental health. As far back as 1965, she points out, the Commission on Mental Health described racism as the number one mental health problem in the United States. 'Its destructive effects severely cripple the growth and development of millions of our citizens, young and old alike.'²⁹ Even before that, the Myrdal 'report' on 'The American Dilemma' (1944) had drawn attention to the hiatus, the schism, the rupture in the (white) American psyche: between 'American ideals of equality, freedom, God-given dignity of the individual, inalienable rights' and 'the practices of discrimination, humiliation, insult, denial of opportunity to Negroes and others in a racist society'.³⁰ New research had sprung up to show that racism was a 'psychological problem ... deeply imbedded in white people from a very early age both on a conscious and an unconscious level'. And even black commentators, according to Katz, confirmed the diagnosis, pointed to a cure – like Whitney Young, for instance, head of the National Urban League: '... most people are not conscious of what racism really is. Racism is not a desire to wake up every morning and lynch a black man from a tall tree. It is not engaging in vulgar epithets ... It is the day to day indignities, the subtle humiliations that are so devastating ... The Kerner Commission

to reduce certain almost sub-consciously perceived psychological benefits these whites have been gaining from living in a society where they are considered members of a "superior" group.'²⁷

* This same checklist is reproduced in Katz's handbook.

has said that if you have been an observer; if you have stood by idly, you are racist.' Katz even rallies radical blacks like Du Bois to her cause: 'Am I, in my blackness, the sole sufferer? I suffer. And yet, somehow, above the suffering, above the shackled anger that beats the bars, above the hurt that crazes, there surges in me a vast pity – pity for a people imprisoned and enthralled, hampered and made miserable for such a cause.' And more recent black militants, like Stokely Carmichael, taken out of the context of struggle: 'if the white man wants to help, he can go home and free his own people',³¹ or Malcolm X: 'whites who are sincere should organize themselves and figure out some strategies to break down race prejudice that exists in white communities'.³²

Racism, for Katz, is an 'essence' that history has deposited in the white psyche, like sexism is an 'essence' deposited in the male: oppressors oppress themselves.** It is a part of the psycho-social history of white America, part of its collective unconscious. It is in American customs, institutions, language, mores – it is both conscious and unconscious at the same time, both overt and covert. There is no escaping it. And because the system is loaded in their favour, all that whites can be, even when they fight racism, is anti-racist racists: if they don't, they are just plain, common or garden racists.

Hence, any training programme that intends to bring individual whites to a consciousness of themselves should also take conscience of American culture and institutions. And it should be done at two levels at once – the cognitive or informative and the affective or emotional – at the level of thinking and at the level of feeling. The techniques that had hitherto been used in human relations training erred on one side or the other; or, like multicultural or ethnic studies, they were too other-oriented, not self-aware enough; or they were, like inter-racial encounters, too exploitative, once again, of Third World peoples. Only white on white techniques promised any success, and it was on that basis that Ms Katz had devised a systematic training programme which was influenced as much by the shift in psychotherapy towards a teaching role as the shift in education towards a counselling role.*** The point, after all, was not to change attitudes, but to change behaviour – to change the world.

Since then (1976), the Katz technique of racism awareness training – an intensive six-stage programme of forty-eight exercises crammed into two weekends but adaptable 'to many different settings' – has become widely used in the United States, 'in school systems, with

* RAT practitioners in Britain even quote Stokely on institutional racism.

** 'Our sexual and racial essences have an enormous influence on our perspectives and experiences.'

*** Which is why her trainers carry the exotically hybrid name of 'facilitators'.

teachers, counsellors and administrators, as part of Affirmative Action Programmes with managers; at university communities with students, faculties, and administrators ...²³³

Part of its appeal lay, of course, with the American penchant for therapy, but part of it was also due to the political climate in which it grew: the collapse of the Black Power movement into culturalism and theological liberation, the personalisation of power in the Women's Movement and the diaspora of guilt broadcast by Israel in the wake of its imperial adventures.

Taking a leaf out of the Black Power book, Ms Katz defines racism as a 'white problem'. But whereas the white problem in Black Power ideology referred to the white capitalist power structure, in Ms Katz it is reduced to a personal one, a problem of individuals who, because they are white, have power – over non-whites. Having so established white guilt as irreversible, almost inborn, Ms Katz takes infinite pains to warn whites that they should not feel guilty, for guilt is 'a self-indulgent way to use up energy'.* On the other hand, whites suffer from racism – as much as men suffer from sexism. And 'we have learnt from the Feminist Movement that men as well as women are adversely affected by oppressive sex roles'. Her programme of anti-racist sensitivity training, therefore, promises through a 'process of self-examination, change and action that we will someday liberate ourselves and our society'.

It is the sort of psychospiritual mumbo-jumbo which, because it has the resonances of the political movements of its time – capitalists have changed the world, our business is to interpret it – and, by reducing social problems to individual solutions, passes off personal satisfaction for political liberation, and then wraps it all up in a Madison Avenue sales package promising instant cure for hereditary disease, claimed the attention not just of Middle America but of a grateful state. For what better way could the state find to smooth out its social discordances while it carried on, untrammelled, with its capitalist works?

The spread of RAT

It was not, on the face of it, a package that would have appealed to the British 'character', but it seemed the logical extension to the work of a group of teachers and community workers (mostly black) whose campaign against racial symbols in children's books had derived its

* In one of the exercises in the Handbook, Ms Katz advises the 'facilitator' that 'one way to manage feelings of guilt is to emphasise that racism is deeply ingrained in our system and that we are clearly products of our system' – and then proceeds illogically to demand that one changes oneself rather than the system.

message and method directly from the Council for Interracial Books in the US – who were themselves proponents of RAT. Accordingly, in 1978, the group founded the Racism Awareness Programme Unit (RAPU) on the rock of Katzian teaching – and was joined soon after by renegades (mostly black) from the multicultural faith, disaffected by its inability to speak to white racism. In the following year, some of the RAPU people, along with others, set up the National Committee on Racism in Children's Books and began to produce a quarterly magazine, *Dragons Teeth*. The journal's aim of investigating (and challenging) racial bias in children's books, however, was centred around black images and stereotypes. And this, over the next two years, led to a preoccupation with black identity and reclaiming the past – and found its obverse in white identity and RAT.

RAT, by now, had begun to make inroads into the public sector. Some interest in human relations training (including race relations) had been evinced in official circles with the rise of black youth militancy in the mid-1970s. But these, where they did obtain – principally in education, police and probation services – took the form of the occasional conference or seminar or lecture. Industry paid a little more attention to race relations, but strictly for O and M purposes, and was therefore limited, as in the work of the Industrial Language Training Centres (ILTC), to things like difficulties in communication between employers and employees because of language and culture.

By 1980, Nadine Peppard, who as Race Relations Adviser at the Home Office was responsible for developing race relations training, and advising the police, prison and probation services, was arguing for the type of affective techniques that had been developed in the US – at the DRRI in Florida, among others, and by the Council for Interracial Books. Although a more conscious effort, she felt, had recently been made in the 'practitioner services' to include 'the general question of attitudes and the psychology of prejudice', group work techniques, such as role-playing and training games, were still restricted to the industrial field (in the work of the ILTCs, for instance). 'A practical analysis of what is required', urged Ms Peppard, 'clearly shows that those attitudes or beliefs which underlie actual behaviour must be seen as the heart of the matter and that to construct a training scheme which tries to ignore them is to beg the question.'³⁴ An essential aspect of group work, she suggested, was the type of 'sensitivity training', 'consciousness-raising' or 'awareness training' that was 'a standard aspect of training' in the US. As a reference point and guide, she cited the 'experimental training programme' mounted at the University of Oklahoma by Professor Judy Katz.

In education too, the end of the 1970s saw a general shift of emphasis, often within multicultural teaching itself, from imparting information to challenging attitudes. Before students could understand

other people's customs, they would, it appeared, have to be opened up to such understanding, made receptive to it, emotionally and mentally. Hence, a psychological or affective approach was necessary – for the 'affective component "leads" the cognitive in attitude change'.³⁵ Information, in other words, did not change people's attitudes and behaviour. On the other hand, if you changed people's attitudes and behaviour, they would be more receptive to the information. The sociological approach of multiculturalism was yielding to the psychological approach of racism awareness training.

But not till after the riots of 1981 and Scarman did either the official race relations courses or RAPU take off seriously into RAT. For one thing, Scarman had changed the terms of debate from the material effects of racism on poor blacks to the cultural effects on and the job prospects of middle-class ethnics. For another, he had, in his recommendations on local authority spending and police training, provided a breeding-ground for RAT and the reproduction of 'imagined communities'³⁶ and their ethno-psychological struggles for identity against ethno-centrism.*

A flurry of reports, working groups and conferences on local authority strategies to combat racial disadvantage ensued.³⁷ The Minister of State for Home Affairs, declaring that 'it cannot be unfair to give help to those with a special handicap',³⁸ pledged central government support for local authority endeavours. Race relations sub-committees, ethnic advisers, RAT courses – and even (elected) black councillors – began to spring up – in every inner-city borough in London and the conurbations. The GLC, Brent, Haringey, Hackney, Camden, Islington, Lambeth, Newham, Northants, Coventry, Bradford, Nottingham, Leicester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Greater Manchester, Liverpool – they all had their ethnic units and ethnic officers and ethnic projects, their ethnic monitoring units and, above all, as an investment in an ethnic future, their RAT courses, some of them even compulsory for local authority staff, some of them with their own RAT inspectorate. (They were also, not fortuitously, the areas that had 'rioted' or were ripe for 'riot' in 1981.)

And yet, in terms of the material conditions of the workless, homeless, school-less, welfare-less blacks of slum city, all this paroxysm of activity has not made the blindest bit of difference. The GLC Housing Committee Chairman admitted in 1984 that racial harassment on some East London estates was 'on a scale not seen in this country for 40 to 50 years'.³⁹ In the same year, the Policy Studies Institute survey concluded: 'the quality of the housing of black people is much

* Identity is the personalisation of nationalism, ethnicity its group expression – all points in the same continuum.

worse than the quality of housing in general in this country.⁴⁰ And unemployment for blacks, already twice the average for whites at the end of 1982, has worsened considerably.

All that has happened is that the centre of gravity of the race relations industry has moved from the central government and the CRE to the local state – and with it, the black struggle, not for community and class any more, but for hand-outs and position.* And racism awareness, not black power, was the new ideology.

The same tendencies to ethnicising and RATifying racism were observable in education. In 1981, the Rampton Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, though acknowledging racism in the teaching profession, identified racism with ‘a set of attitudes and behaviour towards people of another race which is based on the belief that races are distinct’ and went on to repeat the shibboleths of the American school.** Racism could be ‘both intentional and unintentional’ and ‘a well intentioned and apparently sympathetic person, may, as a result of his education, experiences or environment, have negative, patronising or stereotyped views about ethnic minority groups which may subconsciously affect his attitude and behaviour towards members of those groups.’⁴¹ And Rampton, like Scarman, emphasised ‘the particular educational needs’ of particular ethnic groups – which doubtless helped the National Association of Schoolmasters and the Union of Women Teachers to pass off their ‘negative, patronising or stereotyped’ view of West Indian children for ‘educational need’: ‘many West Indian children suffer from the fact they belong to a sub-culture of British culture with no readily identifiable distinctiveness’ – in contrast, that is, to Asian children who are ‘largely the products of a stable cultural background’.⁴²

But Rampton also gave a fillip to RAT in schools. The Birmingham Education Department even got its ‘multicultural outreach worker’, David Ruddell, to devise its own teaching kit – on Katzian lines, of course, but adapted to British needs (as Katz had said one could do). So that although the basic ‘philosophy’ remained the same (‘white racism is a white problem’, ‘racism = prejudice plus power’ and all that stuff), the reality in British inner-city schools also demanded that some attention was paid to the racist violence of the National Front

* By the very same token, however, a certain black radicalism has moved into the town halls and helped local organisations in the battle against the local state, as witness the Camden ‘occupation’ of the Town Hall in 1984 over the treatment of homeless families (many of whom are black), following the burning to death of a family in a sub-standard bed-and-breakfast joint.

** The report of the Swann Committee, the successor to Rampton, published as we go to press, emphasises attitudes and behaviour as Rampton does – but, unlike Rampton, does not see teacher racism as crucial to black underachievement.

(NF), at whose instigation ('intentional or unintentional') innumerable black kids had been attacked and quite a few killed. But Ruddell gets over the difficulty with his opening salvo. 'One of the barriers to the recognition and tackling of racism today', he writes in his introduction to 'Recognising racism: a filmstrip, slide and cassette presentation for racism awareness training',⁴³ 'is the equating of racism with strong personal prejudice, with violence and the National Front. This is a vision of racism no less widespread among the teaching and caring professions than among the rest of the public. And it is a convenient and restrictive vision, for it allows the vast majority of racist thought and action to go unchecked.' Not all black people come face to face with 'this most extreme expression of racism', but 'all black people suffer the effects of the subtle but endemic institutional racism that permeates our society and our culture'. And then, as though catching himself in the act of too brazenly writing off the experience of a whole class, Ruddell attempts to bring it back through culture – 'cultural racism comes as the luggage of our history, our language and probably our class structure' – but is baulked by the opposing culture of Scarmanite ethnicity and the cult of RAT. From there on, his pamphlet takes off into the higher reaches of psychologism to reach a screeching crescendo in Brenda Thompson's 'I am a white racist – but willing to learn'.

Another school of thought, emanating from the Inner London Education Authority, however, feel that there is an anti-racist element in multi-cultural education which they, as radicals, can exploit. Accordingly, they call themselves the Anti-Racist Strategies Team. But their 'Pilot Course' for teachers, for all its political posturing and anti-RAT rhetoric, has the same RAT outlook and even some of its training methods – such as 'Concentric Circles: an exercise to help participants to get to know each other', 'Simulation Game', 'Brainstorming and commitments to changing institutions and practices – a sharing of ideas' (and this under 'Strategies for Action'!) and 'a heavy video' of Salman Rushdie's 'Viewpoint on Racism' for Channel 4 (which, because it errs on the side of rhetoric, as opposed to analysis, has become meat for RAT courses).⁴⁴

The Language Training Centres for industry, on the other hand, have gone over to psychological and affective techniques without necessarily espousing the Katz philosophy. They have, for instance, moved away 'from a narrow definition of language to one which encompasses all aspects of effective communication training and probes behind the actual words used to the attitudes beneath'.⁴⁵

The churches fell for RAT much more easily and as of second nature: its credo, after all, was no different from theirs: you must change yourself before you can change the world. Racism, in RAT eyes besides, had the look of original sin. And there was a certain set ritual and ceremony about RAT exercises, even a RAT confessional and a

RAT priesthood to facilitate your entry into a raceless heaven, and an aura of piety surrounding it all. But, of course, the different church groups stress different aspects of RAT, as churches are wont to do. The Methodist Leadership Race Awareness Workshop (MELRAW), for instance, speaks of the need for 'becoming aware of the sin of racism and seeking forgiveness so that we can begin truly to work for reconciliation'.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the Ecumenical Unit for Racism Awareness Programmes (EURAP) sees 'Racism Awareness Workshops' as 'designed to help people to get free of the clutter of up-bringing, of misinformation and prejudice in order to be equipped to tackle the abuse of power'. EURAP also stresses the need for periodical assessment 'to see whether effective practices have emerged'.⁴⁷ If tackling the abuse of power is the goal, the churches have the example of the World Council of Churches' material support (albeit short lived) of revolutionary movements in Africa. By comparison, they have had one-thousand nine-hundred and eighty-five years to assess whether or not changing minds changes society. But then, that is why RAT belongs in the church, but not, necessarily, the church in RAT.

Where RAT afforded immediate sanctuary to racism, however, was in the police force. The 1981 rebellions against the police and their state had discredited the police force on all counts and at every level. The Brixton 'disorders', in particular, had shown up the endemic and unrelenting racism of the force in its entirety. Scarman, in rescuing them and the state from such public and universal opprobrium, had let them off with a reprimand for 'racially prejudiced attitudes' (in the lower ranks) and a severe course of multiculturalism and attitude-training. Gratefully, the police accepted the sentence.

They had, immediately after the inner-city 'riots', made a stab at multicultural studies at the Hendon Police Training College – and even appointed a black lecturer, John Fernandes, to carry it off. But, after Scarman, the police were threshing around for a training programme that would change attitudes and behaviour rather than educate and inform. A Police Working Party was set up the following year, but even before it could report (February 1983), the Metropolitan Police Force, influenced by the work of the DRRI in Florida, went off into HAT, with all its attendant simulation games, 'experiential exercises' and role-playing. At the same time it entered into a joint study and experiment in RAT with the ILTC.

Multiculturalism, meanwhile, had died at Hendon: Fernandes' attempt to find an anti-racist strain in multi-culture had brought him up against the hard rock of police racism, both at the recruit level and the senior officers' – and put paid both to Fernandes and multiculturalism. But RAT was waiting in the wings and, no sooner had Fernandes been suspended, found its way into the Police Training

College – through RAPU, whose leading black light was also a member of the Police Working Party and Ethnic Adviser to Haringey all at once. The Fernandes case had, by then, blown up into an important political issue for blacks – leading to a campaign highlighting the racism not only of the police force but of the unions.⁴⁸ But RAPU and its black facilitators gave no thought or mind to dividing black struggle or placating the police with RAT placebos – reputedly for £600 a throw.^{*50} But then, that is the type of commerce that RAT lends itself to.

RAT also abounds in the voluntary sector – among youth workers, community theatres, housing groups, advice centres, community workers, nursery managers, who, because of the sense of vocation and commitment that have brought them to their jobs, are particularly susceptible to RAT potions.^{**51} And lest their commitment should let the voluntary sector stray from their particular briefs, the Home Office has made it a point (through Voluntary Service Unit funding) to corral them into umbrella organisations in Leicestershire, West London and Manchester.

Then there is black RAT for black people – as in RAPU and LRATU (Lewisham Racism Awareness Training Unit), for instance – concerned with recovering black identity and raising black consciousness and, in the stated case of the Lewisham Unit, with enhancing and strengthening ‘practices that lead to power acquisition particularly within the confines of white dominated organizations and society in general’.⁵² Inter-racial RAT (not advocated in Katz) has tended to dwindle of late, but still holds sway in bodies like URJIT (Unit for Racial Justice in Tooting), whose confused thinking and flagellatory rhetoric, as expressed in Tuku Mukherjee’s *I’m not blaming you: an anti-racist analysis*, would border on the risible but for the seriousness with which they take themselves.

Finally, there are the professional RAT operators who appear to have come out of management training and business rather than from an involvement with black issues – and make a business of RAT.

* The police have gone into all sorts of RAT experiments since this, but a recent Home Office assessment on ‘RAT for the police’ has doubts whether RAT fits into the ‘traditional culture of police training’. ‘What the trainers were offering ... were courses bearing upon the relationship between black people and white people. What the participants were expecting were courses dealing not just with this, but with the relationship between black people and the police.’ Clearly, the police did not want to be treated as whites suffering from racism but as police suffering from blacks. And RAT did not seem to be able to help them there, but a revised RAT, it was expected, has possibilities.⁴⁹ The Home Office has, in any case, removed police RAT from private enterprise by setting up the Police Training Centre in Community and Race Relations at Brunel University (1983).

** I am grateful to the workers of the voluntary sector – the discussions with whom at the GLC/IRR Seminars on Racism helped to inform my views.

Foremost among them is Linda King and Associates: Anti-Racist Consultants in Public Relations, Management and Staff Development. Founded by a black American woman, the firm has a leaning towards American concepts and American terminology such as 'internalised oppression', 'peoples of colour', 'parenting', etc. It even has courses for 'parenting in an anti-racist way' – for mixed couples, that is. It also has cut-price courses, and gets written up in up-market (and sexist) journals like *Cosmopolitan*, where you might be surprised to come across words like 'slavery' and 'colonialism', but not after they have been treated to RAT. 'People can't help being racist', Linda King is quoted as saying. 'It is a form of conditioning which comes from our history of slavery and colonialism and present inequalities in the economic structure. But we can unlearn it.' And, of course, you must then 'choose to put into practice what you have learned'.⁵³

The business propensities of RAT have also begun to be recognised in RAPU, the first and true church. Riven by schisms and sects and internal quarrels, its missionary zeal blunted by heresies and tainted by consorting with the police, and disappointed at seeing the money-changers arrive in their temple (when they themselves were being funded by the GLC), RAPU has fallen from grace.* But its (black) high priestess, taking note of the times, has set herself up as 'Affirmata', a 'Race and Sex Equality Training and Consultancy' in the manner of King. White racism, it appears, is no longer a white problem,** but a business proposition.

RAT fallacies and falsehoods

The confusion and fallacies of RAT thinking, as well as its metaphysics, have come through in the presentation. Thus racism is not, as RAT believes, a white problem, but a problem of an exploitative white power structure; power is not something white people are born into, but that which they derive from their position in a complex race/sex/class hierarchy; oppression does not equal exploitation; ideas do not equal ideology; the personal is not the political, but the political is personal;*** and personal liberation is not political liberation.

Some of the confusion arises from the wrong use of terms. Racism, strictly speaking, should be used to refer to structures and institutions with power to discriminate. What individuals display is racialism,

* RAPU's anxieties were particularly noticeable at a seminar held at the CRE to assess RAT (31 October 1984).

** But if white racism is a white problem, why don't black people leave it to them to get on with it?

*** Changing society and changing oneself is a continuum of the same commitment – else, neither gets changed.

prejudiced attitudes, which give them no intrinsic power over non-whites. That power is derived from racist laws, constitutional conventions, judicial precedents, institutional practices – all of which have the imprimatur of the state. In a capitalist state, that power is associated with the power of the capitalist class – and racial oppression cannot be disassociated from class exploitation. And it is that symbiosis between race and class that marks the difference between the racial oppressions of the capitalist and pre-capitalist periods.

The fight against racism is, therefore, a fight against the state which sanctions and authorises it – even if by default – in the institutions and structures of society and in the behaviour of its public officials. My business is not to train the police officer out of his ‘racism’, but to have him punished for it – if, that is, he is meant to be accountable to the community he serves. Nor does changing the attitude of an immigration officer stop him from carrying out virginity tests – but changing immigration law (or merely the instructions from the Home Office) would. Nor can (middle-class) housing officers who have undergone RAT change housing conditions for the black working class, as long as the housing stock is limited. Nor, finally, does disabusing the minds of the owners and editors of the yellow press of their ‘racism’ prevent them from propagating their poisonous ideology of racism (when it sells papers); only a concerted continuing, public and political campaign can do that.

RAT, however, professes to change attitudes and behaviour, and thereby power relations – not in reality, but by sleight of definition: by defining personal relations as power relations.*

That is not to say that RAT does not act as a catharsis – for guilt-stricken whites – or as a catalyst, opening them out to their own possibilities and those of others, leading even to a change in their individual treatment of blacks. (The unit of oppression for RAT is the abstract individual.) It might even, for a rare few, open up a path to political activism, but such people will have already had such a potential, anyway – and all that RAT could have done was to catalyse it. But its pretentiousness to do more is at once a delusion of grandeur and a betrayal of political black struggle against racism and, therefore, the state.

More importantly, in terms of strategy, the distinction between racialism and racism – the distinction between power relationships between individuals (however derived) and the power relationships between classes (however mediated)** – helps to distinguish between

* Multiculturalism, on the other hand, denies power relations by denying the hierarchical structure of society.

** In Stuart Hall’s brilliant and comprehensive phrase, ‘race is the modality in which class is lived’.⁵⁴

the lesser fight (because attitudes must be fought too) and the greater, and allows of different tactics for different fights, while clarifying at the same time the different strands of the same fight – so that the state does not play one against the other.

But then, the use of the term ‘racism’ to mean both (personal) racialism and (structural) racism – influenced partly by the use of the term sexism, which itself arose from the tendency in the Women’s Movement to personalise politics by personalising power (there is no ‘sexualism’ in the Women’s Movement)* – has passed into common usage, itself a sign of the decline of black struggle. And it would be pedantic not to accept it as such – till, that is, struggle again changes the terminology.

In the meantime, RAT has to be hoist with its own petard – it invites that sort of metaphor to explain itself, mixed and confused. Racism, for RAT, is a combination of mental illness, original sin and biological determinism (which, perhaps, explains its middle-class appeal). It is ‘the number one health problem in America’, according to Katz – and if her disciples in Britain have not proclaimed it as clearly for this country (they have had no Mental Health Commission to back up such a view), they have, in their therapy, certainly treated racism on that basis.

Racism, according to RAT, has its roots in white culture, and white culture, unaffected by material conditions or history, goes back to the beginning of time. Hence, racism is part of the collective unconscious, the pre-natal scream, original sin. That is why, in the final analysis, whites can never be anything more than ‘anti-racist racists’. They are racist racists to begin with, born as they are to white privilege and power; but if they do nothing about it, ‘collude’ (consciously or unconsciously) in the institutional and cultural practices that perpetuate racism, then they are beyond redemption and remain racist racists. If, on the other hand, they ‘take up arms’ – or, in this case, RAT, against such privileges – ‘and opposing, end them’, in their own lives, at least, they could become ‘anti-racist racists’. Racists, however, they remain in perpetuity. It is a circular argument bordering on the genetic, on biological determinism: racism, in sum, is culture and culture is white and white is racist. And the only way that RAT can break out of that circle is to acknowledge the material conditions that breed racism. But then, it would not be RAT.

For that same reason, RAT eschews the most violent, virulent form of racism, the seed bed of fascism, that of the white working class –

* The Women’s Movement (in the West) personalised power – legitimately – to mean the immediate, direct and personal physical power of men over women, but then extrapolated it – illegitimately – to black and Third World struggle, which are connected more immediately and directly to economic exploitation and political power.⁵⁵

which, contrary to RAT belief, is racist precisely because it is powerless, economically and politically, and violent because the only power it has is personal power. Quite clearly, it would be hopeless to try and change the attitudes and behaviour of the poorest and most deprived section of the white population without first changing the material conditions of their existence. But, at that point of recognition, RAT averts its face and, pretending that such racism is extreme and exceptional, teaches teachers to avert their faces too. And that, in inner-city schools, where racism affords the white child the only sport and release from its hopeless reality, is to educate it for fascism.* David Ruddell, Antoinette Satow and even blacks like Basil Manning and Ashok Ohri specifically deny the importance of the battles against the NF on the basis that such an extreme form of racism is not necessarily the common experience of most blacks and, in any case, lets off the whites with fighting overt racism out there and not covert racism in themselves, in their daily lives and in their institutions (meaning, really, places of work, leisure, etc.).⁵⁶ But that is because they, like the activists of the Anti-Nazi League, but for different reasons, do not see the organic connection between racism and fascism. Martin Webster, the National Activities Organiser of the NF, saw it, though, when he declared that 'the social base of the NF is made up of the desperate and the dispossessed among the white working class'.⁵⁷

Nor does RAT, because it ignores all but the middle class, make a distinction between the different racisms of the different classes – the naked racism of the working class, the genteel racism of the middle class and the exploitative racism of the ruling class – if only to forge different strategies and alliances to combat the different racisms.

But then, to ask RAT to do anything so political is, as a Tamil saying has it, like trying to pluck hairs from an egg. RAT plays at politics, it is a fake, a phoney – a con trick that makes people think that by moving pebbles they would start an avalanche, when all it does is to move pebbles, if that, so that the avalanche never comes.

And because, in Britain, black people have been involved in this con trick – in introducing it, practising it, reproducing it – RAT has been able to mis-appropriate black politics and black history – and degrade black struggle. For if black struggle in Britain has meant anything, it has meant the return of politics to a working-class struggle that had lost its way into economism, the return of community to class,** the forging of black as a common colour of colonial and racist exploitation,

* Ideas for RAT, as for the 'ideological classes', matter more than matter.

** It was that understanding of community and the resolve not to let it die that brought to the miners the unstinting support of Afro-Caribbean and Asian workers (see Chris Searle in this issue).

and the opening out of anti-racist struggles to anti-fascism and anti-imperialism both at once.

Equally, if black and Third World feminism has meant anything, it has meant, on the one hand, a corrective to the personalisation of politics and the individualisation of power in the white Women's Movement and, on the other, an attempt to forge a unity of struggle between race, gender and class. RAT (which in Britain boasts black women in its ranks, some of them one-time activists) not only works in the opposite direction on both counts, but, in dividing the women on race lines reflects and reinforces the opposing feminist tendency to divide the 'race' on sex lines, and further disaggregates the struggle. Such fragmentation of struggle, while helping perhaps to overcome the personal paranoia that capital visits on different groups differentially, sends them off in search of their sectional identities, leaving capital itself unscathed.

Which is why even if there is no longer a classic working class to carry on a classic class struggle, the struggles of the new social forces must, for that very reason, focus on the destruction of the ruling class – for that there is, under whatever guise or name it appears before the respective movements: patriarchy, white racism, nuclearism, or is conjured up by the 'new marxists': power blocs, hegemonies, dominant factions. And particularly now, when the technological revolution has given capital a new lease of life and allowed the ruling class to disperse and dissimulate its presence – in so many avatars – while centralising and concentrating its power over the rest of us.

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GAYLE PLUMMER

Haitian migrants and backyard imperialism

The issue of Haitian emigration to the United States is not merely another dreary chapter in the catalogue of imperialist abuse. Its deepest meaning lies in what it reveals about the structure of North American domination in the Caribbean, and the intensifying crisis imperialism has engendered as it seeks to block genuine transformation in the area. Appropriately, the story begins with Haiti, the oldest and most experienced of the Caribbean republics.

Phase one: The agrarian reserve in the Caribbean

Haiti's destitution is well known. In 1979 its mortality rate was nearly double that of the United States, and life expectancy at birth totalled only fifty-three years. At the end of an inflationary decade, Haitians, most of whom are illiterate, could account for a gross national product of \$260 per capita.¹ A repressive and corrupt government underscored the limited life chances of the majority of the people. Some among the more ambitious – and desperate – chose migration as an escape, and risked death at sea to get to Florida.* Though Haitians are newcomers

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* In September 1981, the White House announced a radical plan to prevent small craft containing Haitians from landing on the Florida coast. The plan included Coast Guard apprehension of vessels outside the United States' territorial waters in an effort to locate suspected illegal aliens and turn them back. The Reagan administration also initiated a policy of indefinite detention of undocumented Haitians, a programme prohibited by a court decision of June 1982.

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as mass migrants to the US, their travels to other parts of the Americas in search of opportunity and dignity are rooted in the modern history of the hemisphere.

The first Latin American republic, Haiti declared its independence in 1804, when the slave-holding classes still extended their dominion over the colonised world. Haiti, a militantly anti-slavery community, was greeted with predictable hostility. For the first thirty-four years of its national existence, no power recognised it diplomatically. Goaded by European attempts to conquer them, the Haitians at an early date built a national security state against the incursions of the imperialist systems. Slave-holders found that Haiti could not be obliterated, but they made every effort to protect their New World plantations from the ideological and political possibilities of its revolution. Even after the abolition of slavery during the course of the nineteenth century, fear of the Haitian experience persisted throughout the Americas. Where blacks posed a particular demographic threat to colonial society, and where their demands for human rights came in conflict with pre-existing racial attitudes, the spectre of the Haitian Revolution was used to justify repressing them. The histories of Cuba, Jamaica and the US provide classic examples of how racist fears were enlisted in the battle against substantive change.

The policy of isolating Haiti reflected the joint Anglo-American preoccupation with revolutionary insurgency in the Caribbean as a whole. Revolution, no longer seen by US leaders as the foundation for self-determination and democratic institutions, was now perceived as a challenge to bourgeois hegemony. The British, who had withdrawn from an active role in the Caribbean in the early twentieth century, deferred increasingly to US judgement on this question. Washington's policy called for the maintenance of a 'responsible' elite in the Caribbean which could control the population, and create a stable business climate, thus alleviating the need for direct intervention by any imperialist power.

The US's Caribbean policy remained remarkably consistent through the first half of the twentieth century as it supported conservative oligarchies and endorsed economic projects created for the benefit of those groups and their foreign allies. In Haiti, most development was designed to ensure quick profits for a wealthy elite and a small class of foreign entrepreneurs, centred principally in the capital. Rational planning did not exist. The Haitian government employed the rhetoric of popular democracy, but, in reality, a succession of authoritarian, right-wing regimes ruled the country. The ruling class maintained a dedicated interest in preserving the status quo, the bedrock of its own privileges. Private acts of charity did not disguise the continuing popular misery.

Elite Haitians and foreigners alike delighted in describing the

stoicism of the average Haitian, but many of the poor did not accept the notion that they were mystically destined to unremitting toil and early death. They took the route of other islanders who left home to better themselves in the early twentieth century, and sought opportunity elsewhere. The exodus of British West Indians to Panama is well known. It is not widely recognised, however, that Haitians also participated in inter-American labour migration.

Haitians began leaving in 1902 for Cuba's expanding sugar economy. The promise of higher wages in Cuba was not, however, the only stimulus. The rapidly growing Haitian population lived on a dwindling land base. The legal tradition of dividing land among heirs meant that holdings shrank from one generation to the next. People without clear title, and these were the majority, had no protection from urban land sharks. The small cultivator who could not prove ownership often became a tenant or squatter, scratching out a meagre existence on a tiny plot. To these difficulties, the government added forced military conscription. Young men, who might at any time be forced into service for which they were neither paid nor fed, chose instead to emigrate. By 1916 the trickle of sugar workers had become a flood of 20,000 annually.

Haitian labourers in Cuba worked hard for little money. The dollar a day they could make in some of the Cuban fields surpassed the fifteen cents a day at home. Haitian justices of the peace, consuls and other functionaries laid away far greater sums, made by selling passports and collecting fees from workers. Even some veteran canecutters went into the business of labour recruitment.²

Yet emigration did not please everyone. Some officials and upper-class elements saw in the exodus the possibility of losing control over the rural masses. Travel and self-improvement had been prerogatives of the rich, and the newly rising expectations could prove subversive. Haitian authorities also worried about immigration to the Dominican Republic, which became commonplace. The long frontier between the two countries made border crossings difficult to detect, and clandestine movement between the two nations deprived both governments of revenues.

The First World War temporarily overshadowed these concerns. Renewed demand boosted sugar production in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, which opened their doors to aliens on a massive scale to get the labour the plantations required. Consuls, customs officials and recruiters shared in the resultant profits. In 1915 the US invaded Haiti. Civil violence in Port-au-Prince during the summer had left dozens of prominent persons dead, including the president of the republic. Using these disturbances as a pretext for establishing unequivocal US control, Marines remained in occupation of the country for twenty years. Washington forced the hasty organisation of a client

government, and a treaty of unequal relations between the two nations was enacted under duress.³

Haitian peasants unsuccessfully rose against the US presence and the puppet government in 1915-16, and in 1919-20. After the bloody suppression of the second rebellion, 12,000 people left. The emigration movement was now in its second decade, and labourers encountered growing exploitation in the receiving countries. The war's end, a steady supply of workers and the utter powerlessness of Haiti under US rule meant that no particular care had to be taken of migrant welfare. The US claimed it had no jurisdiction over labour traffic, despite its complete authority over most aspects of Haitian civil life. Haitian officials remained generally indifferent to the workers' plight and, in any case, unable to help them. Some only cared about their share of the profits on each labourer shipped out.

Labourers were carefully documented so that recruiters and consuls could collect their fees. Migrants paid the cost of their own tickets, permits and visas. Labour organisers advanced the cash, and later subtracted it from workers' wages, or held mortgages on the migrants' farms in Haiti. The exploitative middlemen, the transport to the plantations on foul, densely packed ships and the backbreaking labour earned the labour recruitment business the nickname of 'the slave trade'.⁴

Once at work, Haitians found themselves the victims of diverse abuse, which included physical assault by Cuban militia. Fraud accompanied violence, as informers, pimps and thieves preyed on newcomers. Behind the criminal element stood the circle of compliant officials and the sugar companies which profited from cheap, demoralised labour. The vicious atmosphere in the Cuban fields retarded the development of protest and organisation among workers.

Post-war prosperity in the 1920s continued to attract migrant labour, and entire families began leaving Haiti permanently. The trend annoyed the US military authorities, who reported a growing labour shortage. They felt that cheap labour, increasingly a prime Haitian export, should be confined at home. Such officials, many of them from southern plantation states, refused to accept the Haitian desire for land ownership and independence. American policy prescriptions left the peasants with few options: they were not to leave their country, nor were they to be the smallholders their ancestors had been.

A few functionaries believed that the solution to the labour problem lay in attracting planting companies to Haiti, rather than in shipping workers out. Corporations avoided Haiti, however. The few that began to clear fields failed to establish profitable enterprises. Some had been stock-jobbing operations to begin with, launched by venture capitalists interested only in fast money. Businessmen claimed that local ignorance and complicated land-tenure problems made

commercial agriculture impractical. Their opposition to a Haitian minimum wage gave encouragement to further emigration.⁵

Conditions changed in the Caribbean economy by the late 1920s. Signs of weakness in the Cuban sugar industry were apparent, and as the world economic crisis intensified, Cuba expelled Haitians from every port. Each harvest witnessed the employment of fewer workers. Despite these problems, the Haitian government lifted restrictions on emigration in 1930. If unemployment was bad in Cuba, it was worse in Haiti, and large numbers of hungry, jobless people meant political trouble.⁶

The safety valve could be opened and shut as needed regarding Cuba, but Port-au-Prince could do little about the thousands who slipped across the border to the Dominican Republic. Dominicans widely resented Haitians, and accused them of driving down wages. The Trujillo dictatorship deliberately fanned the flames of Dominicans' reaction to their neighbours. Open hostility against Haitians erupted in 1937 when Trujillo's army – on his covert orders – mercilessly slaughtered as many as 20,000 Haitian workers. The massacre, an attempt to divert Dominican attention from the critical problems of their own society, merely postponed the inevitable time of reckoning.⁷

In both the Cuban and Dominican cases, Haitian migrant labour served as the agrarian equivalent of an industrial reserve army. Haiti, without an important plantation sector of its own, contributed manpower from its pool of underemployed and unemployed. It thus placed a ceiling on the political power of organised labour in the more developed Caribbean economies. Haitians could be used and dismissed at will, and even killed without serious repercussions.

Phase two: the industrial reserve and backyard imperialism

The account so far of Haitian workers' experience in the Caribbean agricultural sector belongs to an earlier phase of imperialism. The persistence of traditional forms of exploitation can still be readily observed. For example, continual abuse of seasonal workers in the Dominican Republic was highlighted in 1978 by UNESCO's Commission on Human Rights. The Commission's Working Group on Slavery reported the annual sale of 12,000 canecutters to government-owned, privately leased estates, including one operated by an American multinational corporation, Gulf and Western. These workers received meagre food and wages, and were kept in debt by company employees. They lacked sanitary facilities in the crowded quarters they shared with their malnourished children. All attempts they made to organise were repressed. The migrants suffered from 'a variety of preventable diseases, high maternal and infant mortality, illiteracy, and hopelessness'. Allegations that the Duvalier family has profited from

these 'sales' constantly recur.⁸

Nonetheless, traditional forms of exploitation are increasingly yielding to the manipulation of labour under the guise of industrial transformation. American policy-makers and the business establishment have hailed the advent of offshore, export-oriented light industry as an important step in product diversification, industrial skills development and capital accumulation for Caribbean states. Manufacturing, liberally assisted by tax incentives from the receiving countries, has greatly increased in the region during the past decade.

In Haiti, entrepreneurs long considered the low wage scale as the country's greatest selling point. Today's factory worker in Port-au-Prince takes home less than two dollars a day, despite a national minimum wage law adopted for cosmetic purposes. The factories that produce the baseballs, stuffed toys and decorations for the American market are generally confined to the area in and around the capital, though 80 per cent of the population is rural. The raw materials and equipment used in the plants are imported.

Port-au-Prince, a city of a million or more, draws considerable internal migration. It also reflects the centralisation of production, with, in 1980, a per capita consumption of goods and services triple that of the countryside. Seven thousand families (of a total population of five million), who had annual incomes of \$50,000 or more, enjoyed most of the wealth. That group included the 0.8 per cent of the population which controlled 44.8 per cent of the national income. A regressive tax system guarantees these inequities. Staple foods consumed by the majority are taxed, but imported luxuries are barely affected. Certain resident Americans also benefit from this skewed system. Their world of quiet villas with many servants – some of them children – would not be possible in a more egalitarian Haiti.⁹

The wealth promised by light industry benefits a small segment of the people in an area traditionally oriented towards metropolitan business activity. Thus, it represents only an intensification of an old trend, for Haiti's bourgeoisie never adapted to independent industrial entrepreneurship. The repressive regimes that have crippled the country owe much to that fact. Almost everywhere that export-oriented manufacturing has supplanted the local bourgeoisie's attempts to found national industry, dictatorships have enforced the process and curbed the political and economic aspirations of the would-be national bourgeoisie. As in Brazil and the Philippines, the new industrialism has been accompanied by rank repression in the interests of foreigners and their native intermediaries. No viable alternative to comprador domination and dictatorship has been posed by any resident bourgeois stratum in Haiti.

Phase three: marginal in America

By the mid-1970s the use of traditional Haitian labour reserves in the Caribbean sugar industry began to give way to the employment of a low-paid factory workforce to produce for metropolitan markets. A third method of exploitation has also risen to prominence in the past decade. This new form began with mass Haitian migration to the US. The energy crisis and fall-out from the erosion of the American economy triggered acute distress in the satellite economies of the Caribbean basin by 1974. Restrictions placed on Caribbean entry by Canada and the United Kingdom increased migration to the US. Undocumented Haitian migrants sought employment in unskilled agricultural jobs, in the garment industries of New York and Florida, and in the unskilled sectors of the marine and construction industries.

American officials responded harshly to the influx. Routine incarceration of Haitians even included children who arrived alone and unsponsored. As some of them were as young as 6 years old, their journey indicated the desperation of their families. The Reagan administration widely publicised its attempts to develop permanent detention camps in some of America's least hospitable climates. Sites considered included an air force base near Glasgow, Montana, where 'winter temperatures plunge to forty degrees below zero [Fahrenheit]'.¹⁰

Racism played a key role in the American reaction, as the history of American immigration law and the domestic and international record of the Reagan administration will affirm. Yet another reason, more intimately linked to US Caribbean policy, exists for this incongruous response. The establishment in the US of an activist Haitian political community would inevitably challenge the Duvalier regime, and without such a repressive institution, the maintenance of a labour force, whose expendability, permanence and low cost resemble the conditions of slavery, would not be possible. Washington, moreover, sees the dictatorship as a bulwark of anti-communist stability in the region. In so far as stability means the capacity to arrest discontent and facilitate the conduct of business as usual, a country in which most people are hungry and ill can still qualify as stable. Threats to such countries open the door to insurgency, upset the regional balance of power and, to those still steeped in the bromides of the cold war, lead to Soviet penetration and dominance.

The consequent subjection of Haitian newcomers to a maze of punitive immigration policies stemmed directly from US policy-makers' Caribbean objectives. Those Haitians who successfully found their way through the maze, or evaded it, subsequently found themselves confronted with life on the bleak margins of the US economy. In the summer of 1980, several hundred Haitians lived in filthy, overcrowded

shacks while they picked vegetables on the state of Maryland's isolated Eastern Shore. In 1981 Haitian employees of the United States Sugar Corporation in Texas staged a walk-out in hopes of securing better wages. The sugar company broke the canecutters' union by successfully appealing to the Department of Labor for permission to import new Caribbean workers. Ironically, Haitians had been brought in in the first place because of their supposed docility.¹¹

Backyard imperialism in Haiti

For Washington, Haiti remains an exercise in containment and discipline. Dictatorship has so far done an effective job of keeping the lid on in the black republic. The question of human rights in Haiti surfaces with regularity. It has just as regularly been turned aside as the US continues to offer aid to the regime. The pro-Duvalier stance began in the Eisenhower years. The US Marines helped François Duvalier withstand an amphibious guerrilla landing in 1959. In exchange for Haiti's agreement to vote sanctions against Cuba at the 1962 Organisation of American States Foreign Ministers meeting, Washington lent the Haitian government money for airport improvements. Though the State Department discouraged American tourism and investment in Haiti during the early 1960s, it continued to regard the country as an ally in the anti-communist struggle. The Lyndon B. Johnson presidency embraced Duvalier without reservation. Individuals in Johnson's political circle had personal interests in Haiti and played a persuasive role in effecting this change. The Republican administrations of Nixon and Ford followed their Democratic predecessor's footsteps. Presidential envoy Nelson Rockefeller journeyed to Port-au-Prince in 1969 on a visit which was preceded by the execution of 200 leftists, and followed by State Department licensing of private arms sales to the regime.¹²

Jean-Claude Duvalier became president of Haiti after the death of his father in 1971. The Carter administration engaged in considerable rhetoric about human rights in Haiti between 1977 and 1980, but Jean-Claude's government continued to misappropriate the unflinching American aid ostensibly intended for the nation's impoverished majority. Ronald Reagan's conservative victory in 1980 prompted the Haitian state to end its short lived flirtation with press freedom, and reassured it that heavy-handed methods of repression could continue unimpeded.

The United States' Caribbean policy, and its view of Haiti, has not substantially changed, regardless of who occupies the White House. Statesmen assume an official air of reluctant hesitation whenever the question of military and economic support for Haiti arises. They put on a mask of weary acquiescence when the decision is made to continue such assistance. They have no choice, for they want Haiti to continue

providing the cheap labour, ideological conformity and offshore privileges imperialism has come to require. Washington's policies thus give Port-au-Prince a particular freedom, and place it beyond the reach of conventional diplomatic appeals. Like the oligarchies of Central America, the Haitian regime is out of control. US policy-makers respond to the crisis by trying to prevent the development of effective revolutionary challenges to the dictatorship. Fully recognising the unpredictable nature and timing of insurgency, they have attempted to forestall even the remotest possibilities for genuine transformation of the lives and consciousness of ordinary Haitians. This effort includes keeping Haitian immigrants, both literally and figuratively, in their place.

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Indentured labour and group formations in apartheid society

The vast majority of Indians in South Africa are landless, semi-skilled and unskilled workers and, as such, take their place alongside Africans and Coloureds, not only as the working class of the country, but also as the disenfranchised and oppressed. They have shared this position for over a hundred years; yet it is only in the last forty that they have moved towards some sense of 'class' consciousness, and only in the last thirty engaged in common economic and political action. What are the factors that have delayed their coming together and continue, to some measure, to inhibit this solidarity? The answer, at the general level, lies within the mode of apartheid production, in the forces it generates to manipulate attitudes and control social formations; more specifically, it is contained in the resultant dynamics of Afro-Indian relations. An important and neglected feature of these dynamics is the system of indentured labour which spawned the Indian South African.

Indentured labour was introduced into Natal in 1860, a quarter of a century after it had been imported into Mauritius on almost the very day that the last slave, having completed the five-year apprenticeship which marked the transition from emancipation to slavery, fled the plantation. Why did Natal, teeming with an indigenous Black population, import labour? Why did Indians succumb to being indentured?

The colonial explanation (reiterated by its scholars) for importing 'coolies' to Natal was the unwillingness of the kaffir to work – he was

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regarded as spoilt, both by his polygamous habits and by the land settlement made upon him by a dotting British government. In fact, those reserves could only accommodate a third of the entire African population and were specially designed to push them on to the labour market. Sufficient evidence exists to show that when Natal was anxiously negotiating for indentured labour, the African, pressurised by scarcity of land and by taxes, was being remarkably industrious in the white sector of the colony, performing all the required tasks, both menial and skilled. Thus a local magistrate observed in 1852:

On a farm he does almost everything – he herds the cattle, milks the cows, churns the butter, loads it on the wagons, the oxen of which he inspans and leads. He cuts wood, and thatch, digs sluits, and makes bricks and reaps the harvest, and in the house, invariably cooks. There is little that I ever saw a farmer do, but ride about the country. In the town, there are some familiar cases in which kaffir labour is employed to a ridiculous extent: for in what quarter of the globe would male adults be found performing the offices of nurses to infants and children or as laundresses of female apparel.¹

So the problem was not a lack of labour, but a lack of abundant cheap labour, particularly in the labour-intensive area of industrial agriculture. The white colonists, accustomed to slaves and to the semi-slave labour of the Blacks whose land they had appropriated, expected to pay virtually no wages. During the middle of the last century, Africans still retained some land and some cattle. The mode of migrant labour was still in its embryonic stage – the bureaucracy which would control its movement and violate its value was yet to develop. Africans were relatively free to negotiate their terms, and, rather than part with their labour for nothing, or lose most of its value to the hirer, preferred to live on what remained of their productive resources. However, indentured labour weakened the bargaining power of the Natal Africans in the mid-nineteenth century, accelerated their alienation from their means of production – particularly their livestock which, in the absence of wages, they were forced to transform into tax money and transfer to the white sector – stalled their industrialisation and urbanisation and facilitated their conversion into a labour reserve.

Indentured labour became increasingly indispensable to the colonial economy of Natal in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The indentured could be worked up to fourteen hours a day, with the pitiful wages further reduced through excessive fines for minor transgressions. Well after the discovery of gold and diamonds and general industrial development in the country had pushed up unskilled wage rates to £3-£4 per month, Natal continued to have cheap labour, still only paying between 10 shillings and £1 per month for men and 5 shillings for women, a fair proportion of whom were skilled. So precious

was this favoured labour position that it was one of the factors that blocked Natal from moving towards union in 1909.

Indenturing continued until 1911, when it was stopped by spirited Indian agitation, supported by enlightened British interest. By that time, 152,184 Indians had been imported to the country (62 per cent men, 25 per cent women and 13 per cent children) and the Indian population in the colony exceeded the white by 3.2 per cent.

The meaning of indenture for the Indian

Indians had been driven into indenture by the colonisation of their own country. Their world collapsed about 1837 when the *zamindaris*, upon whom they had leaned for respite from taxes in lean years, small loans and, above all, justice, disappeared and were replaced by the British, absentee landlords and prohibitive money-lenders. In Bihar, the United Provinces and Madras the position was further aggravated by massive famines. And these regions became the suppliers of indentured labour which mushroomed on the ashes of slavery. As far as tropical agriculture was concerned, the slaves had been emancipated at the wrong time, just when it was evolving a new phase in production and marketing. Had the system of indenture not come to the rescue, the planters would have been forced to meet the wage demands of the ex-slaves. Instead – and unwittingly – the indentured workers were forced into becoming the international scabs of the nineteenth century.

From the point of view of the planter, indenture was even better than slavery because it was cheaper. Enthused the Company of Gillanders and Arbutnot: 'Their cost is not half that of slaves.'² And indeed it wasn't. The price of a slave at the time of emancipation was between £200-£250 for an average life span of ten years, the first three of which were of low productivity because the slave was put out to season to restore his strength. An indentured worker cost the planter £55 for ten years, inclusive of wages, commissions and passage.³

The marketing of the indentured and the enslaved was similar. European companies engaged the services of the local agents: in Africa the chief, in India the *duffadar* and the *arkatia*. The slaves walked in chained coffles, up to 500 miles to reach the port; the indentured were marched in gangs, sometimes for forty days. Both labour commodities were kept locked and guarded at the ports while awaiting shipment – the slaves in barracoons, the indentured in emigration depots. Since indentured labour went under the subterfuge of emigration, the recruits had to signify acceptance of contracts which they could neither understand nor sign, and appear before a magistrate to register their willingness to be indentured. While slaves were branded before departing, the indentured had a tin ticket hung around their necks or wrists.

The slaves were captured, the indentured were duped into a position

where they became obliged to indenture. Even kidnapping was not a body-snatching affair:

The coolies are recruited under false pretences, in very many instances, for example – I know an Indian woman, a Brahmin, she belonged to Lucknow; through a quarrel with her mother she made a pilgrimage to Allahabad; when there she met a man who told her that if she would work, she would be able to get twenty-five rupees a month in a European family, by taking care of the baby of a lady who lived about six hours sea journey from Calcutta; she went on board and, instead of taking her to the place proposed she was brought to Natal. I know of many similar cases.⁴

Victims were ensnared into traps set by the agents. The most common technique used was to reduce recruits to a helpless indebtedness from which they could only recover through indenture. Observers have recorded the state of dull acceptance into which the recruits were traumatised from the time of their indenturing to the moment of shipping. 'They submit to being cooped up all day in the godown, to walk and sit as their keepers bid them. This feeling that a man who lends money to a pauper obtains a right over his person seems to prevail.'⁵

Natal quickly gained the reputation of being one of the worst depots for indentured labour. Henry Binns reported to the Coolie Commission that he believed the rates paid in Natal to be the lowest of all colonies. Considerable numbers of the indentured were not even paid their legitimate pittances: employers made large deductions for small transgressions, rations were withheld from women and children and though the law laid down a ten-hour working day, fourteen hours were common.

We employ 30 coolies here. Average wages 16 shillings, work from sunrise to sunset, an hour for dinner, rations – seven pounds of mealie meal, seven pounds of rice, four pounds of beans and portions of salt and oil per week. I made a rule that if they were drunk they should be fined two shillings.⁶

Housing conditions were scandalous. The coolie lines of wattle and daub or zinc and stone, contained no chimneys and no toilet facilities of any description. The planters adopted the attitude that the 'coolies' had no use for them. Their living conditions evoked such comments as:

There is much rubbish about the coolie huts together with human excrement. I found the roads, paths, banks of the river, even the river bed itself close to the place where the coolies drink in a very filthy state. The stench ... was sufficient to cause serious illness.⁷

Planters could not accept that labour could fall ill and dismissed practically all illness as malingering. Consequently, the sick rooms and

'hospitals' became lock-ups and prisons. A planter explained:

The hospital is at present used as a store room. Within a week I had a man in the hospital, a suspected case of dysentery. He was put in the room, and the door was fastened by a chain and staple on the outside ... I did not believe he had dysentery and that is why I locked him up. I have sometimes locked up other men in the hospital, sometimes eight or 10 who were shamming. They will not stay unless the door is locked. The room is about 12 sq.ft. and 10 ft. high.⁸

The superintendent of the Department of Railways constituted himself into a judiciary, regularly fining labourers and imprisoning them in the hospital for small transgressions. 'Prisoners' were forced to wear a humiliating garment, a long shirt of mattress ticking, during punishment. The more serious offenders were stripped and put on spare diet and solitary confinement in a six-and-a-half foot square cell. The record book showed 192 convictions in 1883, 194 in 1884. Some typical charges included: '*Rungiati* – obscenity, fined 2/6d and confined to hospital for four days. *Gopeah* – drunk, fined 10/- and locked up. *Seerun* – absent from work, to have good application of mustard and sand [rubbed dry on back]; *Murugaser* – refused to work, stripped and sent to hospital cell for one week.'⁹

The indentured soon learnt that the law and the court and their masters were one and the same and that there was no redress available to them. They stopped taking the trouble to report the atrocities committed against them. Yet according to the planters (in the guise of an arbitrary judicial commission):

The present law is wholly inadequate ... as while it offers itself great protection to the coolie, it is insufficient for that of the masters ... The present system of prison discipline appears rather to encourage than to prevent insubordination and it is not an infrequent occurrence for the coolies to defy their masters on being threatened with imprisonment stating that the hours of work in the jail are less than those on the estate, the work generally lighter and the food the same ...¹⁰

The plight of the indentured remained relatively unchanged up to the end of the indentured system (1911). The indentured could, and at times did, purchase their freedom from their masters, invariably at almost twice the laid-down price, which was the cost the planters had incurred in importing them. In 1884, Chilla paid £20 for his freedom but died before he could obtain his pass. In 1883, Chengadu purchased his wife from her employer and received the following receipt: 'I give this girl Paupu to Shangoroo coolie for the amount of £5. Signed A. Tyson.'¹¹

Formations within the Indian group

The position of the Indians did not change much at the end of their five-year contracts. Many found that they had to continue in their master's service in order to pay off the fines they had accumulated. A master was not only allowed by law to dock wages for absenteeism, but was also entitled to impose a fine of a shilling a day. With few exceptions, the Indians were obliged to reindenture, since there was no free or cheap land available for their settlement and they had to wait another five years to qualify for a free return passage. The labour conditions of the reindentured were often worse than the indentured, since employers drew up their own terms of contract, unrestrained by any protective clauses.

Some did manage to flee indenture and set themselves up on their own account – as small shopkeepers and hawkers, trading with the local Africans and supplying the planters with their coolie rations; as peasant farmers, cultivating small plots, for subsistence and sale, of the poorer lands, leased and sometimes bought from private white owners at three and four times the going price; as skilled artisans, setting up workshops, usually in carpentry, which in a few cases developed into factories. They were joined by the 'passengers', Gujarati peasants who, by paying their own passages, entered the country as free immigrants. They came mainly between 1875 and 1897, at which date their entry into the colony was restricted (to be finally abolished in 1913).

Thus, by 1885 the Indian occupational structure had become somewhat elaborated. While over 95 per cent remained a working class of indentured and reindentured workers, tightly controlled by laws which entitled their employers to exploit them to the hilt, there was a small but growing *petit bourgeoisie*, made up of both the 'passengers' and the ex-indentured. There was, however, no class division; the division was on the basis of the *jaati*, endogamy, which cut across economic and occupational lines.

The plantation, in fact, was not conducive to group formations. The planter was afraid that these would develop into labour solidarities, and workers were forbidden by law to be seen in corporate bodies. But for all that, residential groupings on regional and linguistic bases occurred even on the coolie lines, reconstructing the traditional *jaatis* – endogamies.

The relationship between these endogamies was friendly and co-operative, which is usually the case in *jaati*-structured societies. This interdependence was probably even more pronounced among the indentured due to the relatively high proportion of mixed marriages (i.e., between endogamies), occasioned by the restrictive quota of women (25 per cent of the men). In Natal, one-fifth of the marriages registered

between 1873 and 1886 were mixed.¹² By the end of the century, however, exogamous marriages had declined considerably and the endogamy *jaati* had emerged as the fundamental social formation outside the family.

Nevertheless, a distinction of status emerged early on between the 'passengers' and the indentured workers, the residue of which exists to this day. There were substantial linguistic, religious, educational and economic differences between the two groups. The 'passengers' had independent means at home, had come to Natal of their own free will and were more used to business than the ex-indentured. Between 1870 and 1885, the number of shops owned by Gujaratis rose from one to forty in Durban, while the number of shops owned by the ex-indentured rose only from eleven to twenty-six.¹³ There were, of course, also differences within the indentured, as between North Indian and South Indian, but these did not take on a class form. The distinction between the Gujarati 'passengers' and the indentured workers teetered on the verge of doing so. This became particularly apparent when the Gujaratis attempted to distance themselves from the majority of the Indians, in an attempt to escape their indignities, by setting themselves up as 'Arab'. Had the white colonists accepted them as such, the Gujaratis may well have become co-opted into the white class; but, far from considering this, the whites saw them, above all, as the main threat to white domination: 'We are convinced that much of the insecurity existing in the minds of European colonists against the whole Indian population of the colony has been excited by the undoubted ability of the arab traders to compete with European merchants.'¹⁴

The emergent Indian 'bourgeoisie' had to be curbed, and the position of the Indian fixed to that of the unskilled workers. This was the essence of white domination. It could not be shared with the colonised, either African, Asian, or those Blacks that the whites helped to procreate, the Coloureds. With this in view, white Natal united against the Indians as a class: 'In no colony ... in South Africa is the colour line drawn deeper than in the case of Natal ... the Blacks are ten to one at least ... and yet this vast native population is kept in order ... why? Because the white rules by prestige.'¹⁵

The issue was economic, the dividing line race. All Indians, whatever their status, came in for simultaneous legislative attack. Immigration of free Indians and the issue of licences for trade purposes was restricted, and Indians of indentured origin became liable to a poll tax of £3 (males from the age of 16, females at 12) if they did not re-indenture or return to India. The Indian community responded as one. The two sectors coalesced and recognised their mutual interest. The 'passengers' had no option but to identify with the indentured. The indentured accepted the 'passengers' because they needed the capital and the expertise they brought to the 'struggle'. In claiming the

'passengers', the indentured claimed a share of their wealth and insisted that it be used to build the necessary infrastructure of educational, religious, welfare and other institutions necessary for Indian advancement. This came relatively easily to the Muslims, who were obliged by their religion to spend two-and-a-half per cent of their capital assets on charities.

There is little doubt that the 'bourgeoisie', drawn from both the 'passengers' and the ex-indentured, hastened the conflict between the Indians and their white masters. Their expectations were higher, and under the leadership of Gandhi the necessary ignition was effected. The resultant political formation of an 'Indian class', which occurred between 1894, with the founding of the Natal Indian Congress, and 1913, the launching of the second passive resistance movement and the massive strike of Indian workers which virtually stopped industry in Natal, was remarkably strong. The technique was passive resistance, the aim to expose the injustice and immorality of the racist legislation against Indians; and in this, the struggle succeeded, even though few real changes occurred in objective conditions. Most important, the Indian workers had confronted their white masters on a political plane. The issue had not remained confined to small disputes about small modifications of highly exploitative wages. It had been pushed to a moral demand, for a moral share in the whole system. The 'indentured mentality' in the labour situation ended. From that point on, the Indian was no longer a preferential labour commodity and ceased, in that context, to threaten the African.

***Jaati* and caste**

It has often been said that Indians are too caste-contained to be able to relate to other South Africans, and that they are as contemptuous of the Africans as the high castes among them are of the low castes. But the concept of caste as popularly understood in European circles is not that of the Indians – Indians remain proud of their *jaati*, but *jaati* is not synonymous with caste. Nor does such a view take account of the aspects of *jaati* – the emphasis on communal support and solidarity – that came to the fore in the South African context. The indentured workers, brutally uprooted from their native land, were yet, in a sense, never utterly bereft. There was still *jaati*, the sacred repository of their culture, within which they could preserve a sense of self and community – a defence against their double colonisation.

Jaati has been distorted into caste by British administrators and European scholars and, as such, projected as a heredity trap, condemning its victims to social and occupational immobility. It has been rejected as anti-democracy, anti-Christianity and anti all the fundamental tenets of the equality and brotherhood of man. It is highly unlikely

that this distortion was the result of a colossal misunderstanding, but rather that it was motivated by the dominator's need to justify the exploitation of the dominated. It was the *jaati*, with its elements of local (village-based) and family-based solidarity, not the armies of the maharajahs and the nawabs, that remained impregnable to British domination. And so the *jaati* became the target of a psychological war to relieve the guilt of racism itself, since the latter, by comparison, was so much more preferable, even liberatory.

The Indian experiences *jaati* as a personal and social identity, as the closest social formation holding person, family and community together. The *jaati* is the group within which marriages are arranged, wedding feasts shared, funerals attended, rituals performed. Others may be invited, *jaati* members have a right. Academics have distilled hierarchy out of *jaati* and transcribed *that* into caste.¹⁶ The Indian mind has almost a mythical notion of two extreme points, Brahmin and Harijan, within which thousands of *jaatis* are contained, but it resists attempts to place these in a sort of hierarchy.¹⁷ Such a placing would have little, if any, relevance in a feudal society where people have to do more or less the same work in order to subsist, or in an industrial economy where hundreds of *jaatis* coexisting in a *common* society bring their labour in *common* to a *common* market.

The components of a *jaati* constellation are neither political nor economic, nor do they exist for the exploitative gain of the one over the other. A *jaati* may have its preferred traditional occupation, but it does not constrain occupational choice or mobility – as is shown in British census data compiled since the eighteenth century, which record the highest caste, the 'Brahmins', plying occupations varying from trading to menial agricultural labour, incidentally explaining the fair proportion of Brahmins among the indentured. Ghurye explains that trading, agriculture, labouring and military service were regarded as everybody's occupations; that it was in officiating over rituals alone that the Brahmins had a monopoly, and even that was challenged in a part of Madras where artisans claimed ascendancy over the Brahmins.¹⁸

Jaati has also been deprecated as a divisive and anti-nationalistic force. Yet the records show that villages resisted powerful attacks upon them because of the facility with which their '*jaati*' components combined to offer common defence. Ghurye states:

The various castes, in so far as they contributed their respective services towards the common life of the village, were welded together and interdependent for the purposes of civic life. Interdependence of caste was such a deep rooted principle that it prevented other exclusive aspects, inherent in the system, from getting the better of the idea of a common civic goal and human sympathy for co-residents and hardening into caste-spirit or caste-patriotism.¹⁹

Jaati consciousness, thus, is not only mutually supportive but also prepares its members to coordinate with others in a community of interests.²⁰ Had it been personally and communally destructive, it would have been quickly shed by those degraded by it, particularly the indentured, who were drawn from a very depressed sector of Indian society. The very fact of its restructuring suggests its positive value.

Jaati is the web of privacy within which Indians learn and maintain their identity. Just as each has *jaati*-communal privacy, so have others, but the privacy of none is more precious or more fundamental than that of the other. Indians understand very well the need to maintain respectable and respecting distances, but at the same time they know the value and the necessity for forming larger fraternities when faced with a common danger. So *jaati* consciousness does not undercut 'class consciousness'; in fact, it facilitates such consciousness, having already laid the basis for it in its control of preoccupation with personal status problems.

It is not so-called caste that inhibits Indian assimilation or Afro-Indian solidarity – the inhibitor is white domination, which feeds on Black fragmentation.

Toward a Black class

Whatever the Africans' perception of Indian indentured workers was in 1860, included in it must have been the suspicion, if not the knowledge, that they had been brought in by the white colonist to replace the Africans and to be used against them in ways perhaps not immediately understood. It was in the interest of the white colonist to fan any hostility, for any consolidation of interest between the two labour contingents would have been fatal in a situation where the ratio between white and Black was already in the region of 1:10. Consequently, Indians and Africans were separated from each other, and in separation, projected as dangerous to each other. They were at the same time kept within 'viewing' distance of each other, so that they could be constantly reminded of their strange and different ways. There was the use of African whipping boys on the estates, and the sentencing of a transgressing coolie to the kaffir barracks where he could be terrorised and ridiculed as the master intended; there was the appointment of an Indian overseer over African mill-hands and the use of African police to suppress Indian strikes; and running through it all, constantly reinforced, was the use of stereotypes calculated to present each with an adverse image of the other. Such stereotypes were fabricated, in the first instance, for the peace of mind of the whites themselves, to relieve them of Christian guilt for the humanity they degraded. The degradation was intrinsic to the race – one did not provide latrines for coolies, 'because they had difficulty in carrying out the

latrine systems', it would 'only concentrate their filth which at present is diffused'.²¹ Even a liberal-minded white scholar, writing seventy years later, sympathised with the planters who had to contend with 'inveterate shirkers', with a people possessed with a high degree of 'stupidity, illiteracy, susceptibility to rumours and colossal ignorance'.²²

Up to the Second World War, Indians followed the political orientation established by Gandhi, which was that the South African government through its subsidiary, Natal, had a treaty obligation with the government of India to accord Indians full and equal citizenship rights in the country, and should be coerced into doing so through the moral pressure of passive resistance. Thus, politically, the issue of discrimination against the Indians was separated from that of the other two Black groups and there was a great reliance on India and on representatives of the two governments getting together and sorting things out. There was, however, progressive disillusion with the role of the Indian Agent General, who represented India in South Africa, and a growing awareness that the Indians did not in fact have a different case from other oppressed 'non-whites'. For example, when in 1932 the Natal Indian Congress resolved to launch a further passive resistance campaign, *Indian Views*, one of the then two Indian newspapers, commented in an editorial: 'Success of passive resistance presupposes existence in the enemy of a measure of the milk of human love, of human decency ... The Pirows, the Malans and the back-veld, back-benchers are by no means handicapped with a superabundance of these commodities.' Instead, it proposed Afro-Indian solidarity:

To Britain we say may the curse of an oppressed people drag you to your doom. To India – spare us your sympathy, your delegations and your Round Table conferences, to ourselves – purge yourself of every iota of the snobbery that keeps you aloof from the native African – turn native. In this country you are nothing more and nothing less than the native. Thicker than ties of blood are the ties of slavery – one common destiny, one common tyrant, one common hell of tyranny ordains that the two of you shall merge and give battle to the oppressor as one.²³

There was considerable thinking along these lines in the Indian community. Student and worker talk shops had emerged – the Non-European United Front and the Communist Party began making radical incursions into traditional political thinking. The escalation of industry in Durban, where half the Indian population is concentrated, resulted in the rapid movement of Africans into the urban areas, and in the absence of housing or public squatting land, these began living with Indians, as tenants or sub-tenants, but effectively as neighbours. There were tensions, but above all, there was improved understanding and

relationships. Most important of all, Africans, debarred from trade union rights, were being drawn into Indian trade unions and gaining from both their experience and the success of their negotiations with the employers. Many of the new trade union organisers were drawn from the radicalised Non-European United Front and the Nationalist Bloc within the Indian Congress.

In 1946, the Anti-Asiatic Land Act was passed, segregating Indians into ghettos. The Nationalist Bloc captured political leadership of the Indian Congress and launched the third massive passive resistance campaign against the United Party government. The timing was internationally opportune, and the campaign exploded racial discrimination in South Africa into a world problem. For all the strength and self-confidence it engendered, Indians realised that their 'class formation', to be truly effective, had to include the other Black oppressed groups.

The realisation had come none too soon. The whites had sustained a vicious campaign for the repatriation and, failing that, the segregation of the Indians for almost half a century. As early as 1896, whites had gathered together their Zulu domestics and employees and marched them to the docks to repel the new Indian arrivals, among whom was Gandhi. The campaign had been pushed to a new peak during the 1948 elections, when many candidates used extreme anti-Indian tirades to get into parliament. The Indian was projected as the scapegoat in popular opinion and it was easy to unleash African frustrations – already at flash point due to intolerable slum conditions, scarcity, high prices and low wages – on to them. And then, in January 1949, Africans carried out a violent attack against Indians on the streets of Durban.

At the time, Africans and Indians were living cordially in mixed neighbourhoods and the attack came not from the Indians' African neighbours (who, indeed, as inquest records show, attempted to protect the Indians), but mainly from the dock workers. Single men, imprisoned in compounds at the end of each day's work and housed some eight miles away from the nearest Black neighbourhood, they had virtually no social contact with the Indians. Armies of men, formed in the labour compounds, were allowed to leave their work and to march unrestrained through Durban, attacking and looting, while police did little to hinder them. Was there, perhaps a connection between the police's inactivity, and one politician's (earlier) public statement? Said Senator Peterson: 'Personally, I would like to solve the Indian problem by shooting them, but a man cannot lay himself open to a charge of murder ...'²⁴ Had he, and others like him, taken advantage of a late afternoon scuffle and fanned it into a conflagration?

The Commission of Inquiry, subsequently established, was boycotted by the accredited African and Indian organisations – the Indian and African Congresses, represented jointly by a common council, the

trade unions and the combined Native Location Advisory Board – for they realised it would be racist in orientation. Not unexpectedly, the commission did not confirm the organised nature of the violence – but it did recognise that relations between the two groups had been cordial before the outburst. That cordiality continued as the Indian and African Congresses reaffirmed, in joint statements, that ‘there was no movement afoot of Africans against Indians, that Africans as a whole were not hostile against Indians as a whole’, that there were Africans who had in fact ‘sacrificed their lives for Indians’.²⁵

The riots brought the two Congresses to a sharp realisation that matters had been left to run an unguided course for too long. And it was with the fourth and largest passive resistance campaign that alliances which had already been forged between the African and Indian Congresses took on a far more meaningful momentum. In January 1952, Dr Moroko and Walter Sisulu agreed to inaugurate a campaign for the repeal of six unjust laws – the Pass laws, the Stock Limitation Act, the Bantu Authorities Act, Group Areas Act, Voters Representative Act and the Suppression of Communism Act. In June 1952, the Port Elizabeth Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign began, in which fifty-two people were to be arrested, among them Nelson Mandela. Some three years later, (March 1955) the South African Congress of Trade Unions came into existence, with around 20,000 members. Durban became one of its strongholds, with joint Indian and African involvement. The Nationalist government responded quickly to the Congress Alliance and by 1960 had banned both the political and trade union congresses.

In the 1970s, Black consciousness, which partnered the Congress in formal opposition politics outside the system of apartheid, emerged as the most powerful challenge to white domination and had a significant effect on consolidating a Black class consciousness. Unlike the congress movement, which had worked through ‘racially’ affiliated organisations, the Black consciousness bodies – the South African Students Organisation (SASO), the Black Peoples Convention (BPC), the Black Alliance of Workers (BAW), the Black Community Programme (BCP) – were completely integrated. A large number of other supportive bodies, youth, women, cultural, church, theatre, etc., intensified and spread Black solidarity throughout the country. The massive Durban strikes of the 1970s were reported as African strikes; in fact, they involved a high level of Indian participation, reflecting a Black rather than African consciousness.²⁶

Today, the bulwarks of white domination are the homelands and the group areas, and they are also its nemesis. Created to fragment Black solidarity, they are concentrations of irrepressible Black frustrations which must burst the dykes. Ironically, the security and longevity of apartheid lies not so much in the South African police, but in the Black

government appointees who 'govern' the Black people, and who are projected through an elaborate system of government-controlled media as representatives of their peoples. Take the Kwa Zulu leader, who operates not only through the Kwa Zulu Legislative Assembly but through a second front, the tribally based Inkatha, and has, unsuccessfully, tried to develop a third, the Black Alliance, of Africans and Indians and Coloureds. The intention is to give him a credibility beyond that of the government imposed homeland administration. Inkatha, however, predictably operates as a reactionary tribal force, ultimately servicing white domination.

But little of this appears to deter the 'liberal' establishments, both local and international, from anchoring their hopes in the Kwa Zulu leader. He continues to be seen as a bastion of enlightened capitalism in the face of excessive radicalism. That any radicalising twist given to Black apartheid institutions should come from Natal (where Kwa Zulu is geographically located) is no accident. It is a reflection of the Afro-Indian tangle that has characterised Natal and made each indispensable to the other. However, it is inconceivable that tribal formations can contribute to Black solidarity, they can only sponsor tribalism, inhibit Black class consciousness and preserve white domination, as they are intended to do. The government thus gives large latitude to anti-apartheid rhetoric within the tribal formations, to give it credibility and to confuse the Black masses. The banning of practically all Black consciousness organisations in 1977 left the 'tribalists' in almost complete control, but there is far more to Black class consciousness than audible articulations – there is the whole grinding experience of unfreedom in a social climate which has become highly sensitive to freedom.

The present political onslaught on the government is at least two-pronged from the United Democratic Front and the National Forum. The 1980s saw the emergence of a considerably strengthened Natal Indian Congress and the re-emergence of the Transvaal Indian Congress, which have made common cause with a large number of Coloured and African communities, religious and labour organisations, under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front; while the National Forum is a regrouping of Black consciousness movements.

Conclusion

The system of indentured labour based the economy of Natal on slavery and depressed Black wage rates. The effect of this survives to this day and Natal continues to have the lowest Black wage rate in the Republic. More important, the system laid the basis for economic competition within the labour ranks between indentured Indian and 'free' African workers, the potential conflict being aggravated by cultural

differences. Employers, anxious to counteract the emergence of a labour solidarity between the two labour contingents, exploited the situation further through segregation and projection of adverse stereotypes of each to the other, finally provoking the 1949 riots. Progressive urbanisation, on the other hand, identified Afro-Indian interests, and from the end of the Second World War, these began to be expressed in common industrial and political action, laying the basis of a common consciousness. Homeland and township governments, and the prevailing repression of all Black consciousness, is a direct response to that 'class' consciousness.

The introduction of indentured labour in 1860, and the positing of two labour contingents against each other, complicated the line of conflict between Black labour and white capital. Marxist theorists have looked for and found white workers and Black bourgeoisie and have, on the basis of this, conceptualised a class rather than a race conflict in South Africa. In South Africa, class and race have become exactly superimposed upon each other, so that race is class in the sense that access to resources is finally determined by race. It is precisely because the line of conflict is between two races that any expectation of an evolutionary solution within the apartheid system of the white polity ultimately sharing resources equitably with the disenfranchised or under-franchised Blacks is futile. This is the relevance of the Black consciousness position which uses race, not to dominate, but to liberate the country from race. It must, by the sheer size of the oppressed race, also go a long way towards liberating the country from the domination of resources by a class.

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- 2 Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery* (London, 1974), p. 63.
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- 4 Aboobaker in *Indian Immigrants Commission Report* (Natal, 1885-7), Chairman W.T. Wragg.
- 5 H.J. Stokes, quoted in Tinker, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
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- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 15 'The Chinese Labour Question', Handy Notes Imperial South Africa Association (n.d.), pp. 16-17.

- 16 See, for example, the contributions to A. Reuck and J. Knight, *Caste and race* (London, 1967).
- 17 The official British censor, John Fryer, looked for a hierarchy of castes in 1670 and did not find it: 'As the society now stands ... the place due to each community is not easily distinguishable, nor is any common principle of precedence recognized by the people themselves by which to grade the castes. Excepting the Brahmin at one end and the admittedly degraded castes like the Haleyas at the other the members of a large proportion of the intermediate castes think, or profess to think, that their caste is better than their neighbours' and should be ranked accordingly.'
- Martin, commenting on the 1901 Mysore census, reported: 'The people who assisted me in making up this account, could not with certainty refer each caste to its class, for they never had bestowed pains to enquire concerning the various claims of such low persons' (G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India*, Bombay, 1956).
- 18 G.S. Ghurye, *Caste, Class and Occupation* (Bombay, 1961), p. 13.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 20 Sir Charles Metcalfe, in his evidence to the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company in 1832, stated: 'The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last within themselves where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution, ... but the village communities remain the same. In times of trouble they arm and fortify themselves: ... if a country remains for a series of years the scene of continued pillage and massacre, so that the villages cannot be inhabited, the scattered villagers nevertheless return whenever the power of peaceable possession revives. A generation may pass away but the succeeding generation will return. The sons will take the places of their fathers, the same site for the village, the same position for the houses, the same lands will be occupied by the descendants of those who were driven out when the village was depopulated; and it is not a trifling matter that will drive them out, for they will often maintain their post through times of disturbance and convulsion, and acquire strength sufficient to resist pillage and oppression with success ... all action in union with a common interest as regards the Government, and adjusting their own separate interests among themselves according to established usage' (Ghurye, 1956, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5).
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Racism and the limits of radical feminism

Radical feminism

The modern feminist movement arose at the end of the 1960s with the confrontation between socialism and women's liberation. It grew out of the failures of the socialist movement to deal adequately with the oppression of women, and the sometimes extreme sexism in a movement dominated by men. Feminism started out partly as a reaction against the socialist movement, as a radical feminism reacting against a movement which would subordinate women's struggle to class struggle, as though women's oppression was merely an aspect of class oppression. Against this, feminism emphasised the specificity of the oppression of women and the autonomy of feminist struggle. It began to promote the development of feminist consciousness.

Juliet Mitchell wrote in 1971:

Perhaps in the future, the biggest single theoretical battle will have to be that between liberationists with a socialist analysis, and feminists with a 'radical feminist' analysis. But that future has come too soon. The conflict is premature because neither group has yet developed a 'theory'. The 'practice' which is that theory's condition of production has only just begun. This is not an argument for 'holding our horses' ... But it *is* an argument for the simultaneous necessity of radical feminist consciousness and of the development of a socialist analysis of the oppression of women.¹

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The feminist movement in Britain today is neither wholly radical feminist, nor thoroughly socialist, but lies somewhere between the two, extracting principles from both. Because of this, the feminist movement is in a contradictory position which weakens it, setting it against itself: for socialist feminism and radical feminism lie at opposing poles, and to draw from both poles simultaneously is to draw incompatible and contradictory principles.* This contradictory position becomes most pronounced and is seen most clearly in the feminist movement's perception of racism and of the relation of the oppression of women to the oppression of blacks, which in practice amounts to the position of black women within feminist politics. It is the issue of racism that has highlighted most clearly many of the limitations of radical feminist principles and the contradictions in its practice.

If we take radical feminism as the logical conclusion of a feminism not thoroughly socialist, in its strongest and most consistent expression, we can define its basic principles as follows:

1. *The oppression of women is the most fundamental oppression.* Patriarchy, in other words, is the essential structure of all societies throughout history,** and thus capitalism and the oppression of blacks (racism or 'whitearchy') are by-products of, subordinate to and dependent on patriarchy. It follows from this that the oppression of women, being the fundamental or *primary* oppression, overrides race and class oppression, which are subsumed by the oppression of women by men. Therefore *all* women, despite class or race differences, are bound to each other by their overriding common interests as women. Thus:

2. *The primary commonality of women; or sisterhood.* According to this, a woman has more in common with another woman of a different race and class than with a man of the same race and class.

3. *Patriarchy is totally independent of capitalism.* The oppression of women, that is, is unrelated to the oppression of the working class. The oppression of women has got nothing to do with the economic system, except in as much as patriarchy preceded capitalism and therefore participated in giving birth to it. In any case, the conditions for getting rid of patriarchy in no way coincide with the abolition of capitalism. If anything, it is the other way round – get rid of patriarchy and you'll be rid of capitalism. Capitalism is a subsidiary of patriarchy; the struggle for the liberation of women is separate from the struggle for the liberation of the working class. Capitalism is therefore the result of male (which is to say, biological) traits.

* It will not surprise us to find that at the bottom of this contradiction lies a class antagonism.

** Kate Millet describes patriarchy as a 'universal (geographical and historical) mode of power relationships'.²

4. *Power is personal: of men over women* – severed from its connection to any economic relations.* It is an end in itself. All men, individually, have and wield this power. Thus:

5. *All men are sexist*. Which in turn implies that:

6. *There is an essence of woman and man*. Women, for example, are innately gentle, closer to the body, to nature, are natural mothers, emotional, non-logical, etc.** – though any of these may be deleted according to the exigencies of the moment. (It is necessary sometimes to portray women as strong, rational, aggressive; at times, to stress that all women don't have to be mothers – though at other times, it is claimed that women have the natural, absolute right over their children, born or unborn.) Men are naturally aggressive, dominating, unemotional, etc. Coitus itself is seen to be intrinsically violent, an act of man's power over woman – the penis a weapon. Hence, radical feminism's 'extreme' slogans: 'disarm rapists', and even 'disarm men', since 'all men are potential rapists'. It is all individualised: man is the enemy. (Some radical feminists have even raised the problem that they don't know what to do with their own sons.) Because men cannot, in their natures, co-exist without conflict:

7. *Separatism is the end or goal of feminism* – and with separatism, necessarily, lesbianism (or masturbation).

It might be objected that radical feminism does not necessarily embrace each and every tenet which we have listed, and that there is not, anyway, such a thing as a unitary radical feminism which shares a set of agreed principles. This may very well be true. However, we maintain that these are the necessary conclusions of a feminism which isn't thoroughly materialist, and that for this feminism not to be contradictory, it must adhere to these principles.

All of these principles depend on one another, and the moment one thread of the argument comes undone, the whole of radical feminist ideology begins to unravel. For radical feminism to believe that women's oppression is the primary oppression, for example, it must believe that patriarchy is entirely independent of capitalism (i.e., that the oppression of women has nothing to do with the oppression of the working class). It must believe that the oppression of women is fundamental in order to believe in the primary commonality of women which overrides race and class differences; and, as a corollary, it must believe that race (and class) differences are subordinate to the sexual difference between men and women if patriarchy is to be an all-

* The economic relations of women, we believe, are not only those that take place between men and women individually in the home, but the relation of women (as housewives/mothers and cheap labour) in the general economic system.

** Compare the characteristics attributed to black people.

embracing structure. To believe that patriarchy is independent of capitalism, it is necessary to believe that there is some other, independent, force which is the cause of women's oppression, and this force is supplied by the notion of 'power'. But for this power to exist – whatever the mode of production and social relations – there must be some concept of essence, or human nature. If the sexism of men is due to their essence, all men must be sexist, none can be exempted. If, by nature, men and women must be waging a continual civil war, then separatism can be the only solution.

Radical feminists are often confronted with the limitations of the belief that women's oppression, and thus their unity, is fundamental, as they 'come to terms' with racism. For believing that all men are necessarily and innately sexist by virtue merely of being (biologically) men, it could equally be argued that all whites by virtue of their biological colour are racist.* (To argue that there is an essence of woman must be also to argue that there is an essence of black.) And if oppression (by men and whites) is derived from biology, what is the point of struggling against them? Radical feminism's answer is to call for separation from men.

If radical feminism accepts that all whites are necessarily racist, it can no longer maintain that women's oppression is the fundamental oppression overriding differences of race, since this view makes racism as fundamental as sexism and the unity of black people (men and women) as fundamental as the unity of women. But if this is allowed, the whole basis of radical feminism becomes undermined. The 'requests' of radical feminist groups and organisations for black women to join them and 'teach them' is an embodiment of this unresolvable contradiction.

Ethnicity and 'women of colour'

The struggles of black people in general (expressed vividly in the inner-city rebellions of 1981), and of black women within feminism, suddenly brought the oppression of black people to the fore and, with it, the crisis (of the contradictions) within feminism to a head. The white, middle-class feminist movement realised almost overnight that black women were more oppressed than they were, that black women were right at the bottom of the ladder. And suddenly blackness was everywhere.

Who is black? was the question on everybody's lips. Was black synonymous with 'Third World'? Was it a matter of self-perception?

* The argument that all whites are racist by virtue of being born white is exactly what Racism Awareness Training preaches. It too, like radical feminism, personalises power and asserts that all whites have power over all blacks by virtue of their colour. See A. Sivanandan in this issue.

Was it a matter of skin-colour? Was it a matter of oppression? And if it was a matter of oppression, could one rank oppressions? On the ground, it meant deciding whether Turkish women could attend black women's conferences, or whether Iranian feminists could write on black women's affairs. 'The notion of "black women" as delineating the boundaries of the alternative feminist movement to white feminism', wrote Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'leaves non-British non-black women (like us – a Greek-Cypriot and an Israeli-Jew) unaccounted for politically.'³ One answer was to call such feminists 'women of colour' – a term borrowed from the United States, where it actually had a broader and all-encompassing definition.*

But what was to confound the women's movement yet further was the 'borrowing' or acceptance of the notion of ethnicity. After the 1981 rebellions, where black people overtly threatened the state, policies of ethnicity were elaborated 'to mask the problem of racism and weaken the struggle against it'.⁴ And the unity of black people began to be fragmented as the state practices of ethnicity divided and even put into opposition the interests of the various 'ethnic' groups.

And nowhere was the fragmentation more stark than in feminism. The Cypriot women, the Jewish women, the Irish women, all claimed to be 'ethnic' minorities suffering oppression, all claimed to be equal victims of racism. Anthias and Yuval-Davis had already laid claim to the site of this grey area between white and black by differentiating themselves from black women, but at the same time claiming they were not white and were subjected to racial oppression (see above). They went on to say that although some struggles did concern 'all migrant women', other struggles had to be recognised as affecting only each individual ethnic group. But while accepting that racism differs in its strategies and that resistance to it likewise differs in its specificities, where would such a process of fragmentation on ethnic terms end? Along such a line of argument there is no limit to the divisions that can be made between black people, as each individual is affected (slightly) differently by racism.

Ethnicity was able to make such inroads into feminism precisely because of the dominance of radical feminist ideas in the movement. For as soon as radical feminism sets aside the entire mode of production as of no relevance, it reduces racism to a question of consciousness. And such consciousness (especially when personalised in the way typical of radical feminism) then becomes a matter of culture, colour or ethnicity. In practice, with the introduction of ethnicity into

* In this usage, the term 'women of color' includes Afro-American, Native American, Hispanic, Asian and Third World women in the US.

feminism, the issue of racism was confused, and even lost completely. And partly as a reaction to this, some black radical feminists have begun to assert that racism is a matter of skin-colour and that no one but Afro-Caribbeans has a right to use the term black. They demand that all other 'ethnic' women – including Asian women who have identified themselves as black – use the term 'women of colour'.

But, as Shaheen Haq, Pratibha Parmar, et al pointed out in a letter to *Spare Rib*, racism (and the definition of black) is not a question of lightness or darkness:

Statements such as 'West Indian women suffer the most because the "Blacker" a woman is the more oppressed she is,' create a hierarchy based on skin colour, rather than actual oppression and exploitation which are increased by class differences, sexuality, etc. Statistics show that Asian people are subjected to more racist attacks than Afro-Caribbean people – but again, this shows that skin tone is not a useful measure of oppression, *nor is it productive to quantify oppression* (emphasis added).⁵

Black people are united, whatever their 'colour', not by a common culture, but by their common oppression – even when that oppression differs in degree, or, as so often, seeks to divide them.

Distinguishing between black women and women of colour divides black women. On what basis is this distinction made, when: (i) Black does not designate a colour. Africans are no more black than Eskimoes are white; and people of colour may well be 'blacker' (i.e., darker) than black people. (ii) Black does not designate a culture. Black people may be of Caribbean or English culture, as may people of colour have a culture which is Indian, English or anything else. (Not to mention the fact that never is any 'culture' homogenous.) (iii) Black does not designate a 'race'. A black person or person of colour may be of 'mixed race'.

These gradations and differentiations of colour are, in fact, the *products* of racism. 'Whitearchy', or racism, has produced a hierarchy that reaches all the way up from blackness to whiteness. This hierarchy has less to do with actual skin colour or race and more to do with resistance to white domination. Those who are the most resistant tend to be painted the blackest, and those who are more easily 'integrated' are given a lavishing of white. To choose to be 'of colour' is to choose a no-man's land, or a no black-or-white-land between black and white; it is to accept the lavishing of white and to take one's place in the hierarchy.

Black culture, on the other hand, is created by and through the struggle against racial oppression. Black culture is the culture of resistance and rebellion – whatever form this may take. Black culture has nothing whatever to do with the white concept of ethnicity: it is its opposite. We

have already discussed how the racist concept of *ethnicity* turns what is essentially an economic question about racism into a problem of culture caused by misunderstandings between cultures; and pointed to the divisions that ethnicity creates between people. It is through ethnicity and the ethnic policies of successive governments that a class of collaborators has been created, initially by means of the Community Relations Commission and its local Community Relations Councils.⁶ But there is another aspect of ethnicity – or multi-culturalism – which it is important to discuss and which seems to have escaped mention.

This relates to Fanon's concept of 'cultural mummification'. Why all this interest in (the white perception of) black culture, so that it is not only taught to the police, social workers, black and white children in school, but is even taken up by art and pop culture? Why do the whites, after attacking these cultures for hundreds of years, suddenly want them resurrected – unless it is to mummify them again? For, as Fanon says, the impact of colonialism and racism on native culture is not so much to destroy it as to mummify it. Under that impact 'This culture, once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yoke of oppression.'⁷

Culture must be living, vital, responding to circumstances and changing, unless it is to become a ghost. Multi-culturalism tries to resurrect an old culture, a culture from the past, from a different setting: a mummy to mummify. It takes what it supposes to be black people's culture, separates it from its living historical context, and offers it, like a drug, to black people, to make them placid and inert.

Feminism and racism

Radical feminism, because it does not understand racism as an oppression linked inseparably to certain economic interests (thus personalising, ethnicising and colouring it), is threatened in its very premises by the question of race. Are all whites racist – which would make white women also the oppressors of black women, and imply that racism is as fundamental as sexism; or are all women, regardless of colour, united in sisterhood because the major division of society is the gender division? In the final analysis, and after some contortion (see the debates in *Spare Rib* over the past three years where attempts were made to call all whites racist and, by virtue of skin colour, the holders of power over all black women, regardless of other factors), radical feminism had to make racism subordinate to sexism or else cease to be radical feminism.

Once patriarchy (sexism) or, more plainly, men are posed as the root of all evil – all economic considerations put firmly out of play – the struggle against racism gets diluted, or disappears altogether. The concern is not then with racism, but with the most oppressed *women* in the struggle against, not 'whitearchy', but the rule of men. Black women,

being more oppressed *women* than white women (a stipulation which ignores class differences), are ranked first in the league of oppressed women.

Much of the feminist movement's interest in black women is not a concern with racism, but a proclaiming of sisterhood with all the women of the world – validating the first principle of radical feminism: that patriarchy is the fundamental oppression. It is the same principle that underlies the radical feminist fantasy *Born in Flames*. In this film, women, regardless of their differences of race and class, were fighting together against men. Black women were fighting alongside white women against black men and white men; working-class women were fighting with middle-class women against working-class men and middle-class men. Race and class are overcome in the common and most fundamental struggle – against men.

Was there any racism in *Born in Flames*? Certainly, it contained stereotyped racist images of black women, and, as such, was a white fantasy of black women – but did it *portray* any racism? Not a jot. Black women become the heroines of the radical feminist movement – living proof of the correctness of its theories – and are granted a privileged position. Black women become more than women: they become *superwomen*.

Some feminists, however, do recognise that racism (whitearchy) is as fundamental as sexism (patriarchy). But even they (though not necessarily self-avowed radical feminists), in trying to assert some commonality between white women and black people, end up appearing to associate racism with maleness, thereby letting white women off the racist hook. Thus Hazel Carby, in a generally fine article on the boundaries of white sisterhood, uses the term 'herstory' for the writing of 'the story of women', but calumniates that same story as *history* when white feminists do not account for the lives of their black sisters:

The herstory of black women is interwoven with that of white women but this does not mean that they are the same story. Nor do we need white feminists to write our herstory for us, we can and are doing that for ourselves. However, when they write their herstory and call it the story of women but ignore our lives and deny their relations to us, that is the moment in which they are acting within the relations of racism and writing history.⁸

Thus, when women are racist, they are not really being *white* (women), they are being *men*.

Susan Hemmings goes somewhat further in a key *Spare Rib* article on racism. After 'confessing' that because 'racism is so pervasive, so institutionalized', no 'white feminist can ever say in our lifetime "I'm not racist"', she suddenly turns tail and elects the white man as the problem: 'Feminists have pointed out that in our world, "Man is the

Prototype” – all the rest of us are measured, negatively against Him. But we might just as well say, “white Man”.⁹

A classic example of the tendency to make the white man the archetypal enemy can be taken from Beatrix Campbell. According to her, ‘the feminist movement ... is learning the hard way’ that the notion of people ‘dispossessed of politics’* ‘cannot suppress the differences experienced by black and white, able bodied and disabled, working class and middle class women’.¹⁰ But in the very next paragraph she says, ‘There’s only maybe one thing that they share and that is that they are not like white, able bodied, heterosexual men.’ In the first paragraph Campbell admits to race and class differences (of experience, at any rate), only to thrust them aside in the second paragraph and reassert (in radical feminist fashion) the fundamental divide: that between men and women. So, even though white and black women may have different *experiences* (a term which suppresses the role of white women as *oppressors* of black women), they all share ‘maybe’ one thing, that they are not *white men*, who then, with facility, become the true oppressors (women and black men being rescued and the working-class white man thrown in with the rest).

Subsuming racism to patriarchy, as radical feminism must do, denies the autonomy of the black struggle. It seduces the struggle away from attacking racism and engages it in frivolous arguments and superfluous activities. White women hold a different attitude to black women than they would expect – or countenance – men to take in relation to them. White women are putting black women in positions in relation to them which they wouldn’t dream of occupying in relation to men. Black women are being put forward to *explain* racism to white women! They won’t talk to men about sexism, yet they *expect* black women to talk to them about racism!

Radical feminism, though interested in black women, is not really interested in racism. Nor is it interested in the working class. The working class (the class struggle) becomes identified with men. Prefacing an interview with women involved in the miners’ strike, an editorial in *Outwrite* says:

Whilst we in *Outwrite* celebrate women’s participation in the strike, especially the solidarity that has been built up between women, we are distrustful of those male institutions like the N.U.M. (Arthur the born-again women’s rights champion!), the Labour Party and the left in general, who are glamourising the women’s action. It’s all very well praising the miners’ wives for being ‘at the front line of the struggle’ on the picket lines and keeping the homes and communities together (ie, over-exploiting themselves for the miners’ cause).¹¹

* That is, those she considers outside ‘the means of organisation, the machinery of politics’ of the labour movement.

It is interesting to note (in a paper of generally more socialist than radical feminist tendencies) that instead of applauding women's participation in the class struggle *Outwrite* celebrates especially the solidarity between women; it attempts to deny that the miners' cause is the women's cause (in the interests of their class); and it fails to understand their joint fight for their communities. Listen to the definition of *working class* given in *Spare Rib* (a magazine of predominantly radical feminist tendencies):

All those who work with their hands. People often equate factory work with being working class but factory work isn't the worst paid or lowest status work in our society – homeworkers, farm workers and cleaners, for example, are worse off ... the working class have a strong proud history here. But on the other hand, Black people and many women without men aren't even accepted into the working class.¹²

* * *

Radical feminism grew out of the failures of the socialist movement in relation to women's oppression. If it is to prevent further mutations, the feminist movement must return to the synthesis of feminist consciousness and socialist analysis that Juliet Mitchell spoke of in 1971. It is only when the struggle against oppression and against the capitalist system is seen as a *tri-partite* struggle – against the oppression of blacks (whitearchy), the oppression of women (patriarchy), and the oppression of the working class – that the black struggle, feminism and socialism stand together, autonomous yet inseparable, equal against the common enemy. Racism and sexism would then become irreducible to the oppression of the working class, which depends on them as they depend on each other and on it.

References

- 1 Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 91.
- 2 Cited in Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
- 3 Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Contextualising feminism: gender, ethnic and class divisions', *Feminist Review* (No. 15, November 1983).
- 4 A. Sivanandan, 'Challenging racism: strategies for the '80s', *Race & Class* (Vol. XXV, no. 2, Autumn 1983).
- 5 Letter to *Spare Rib* (No. 141, April 1984).
- 6 A. Sivanandan, 'Race, class and the state', in *A Different Hunger* (London, 1982).
- 7 Frantz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution* (London, 1980), p. 34.
- 8 Hazel Carby, 'Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood', in *The Empire Strikes Back* (London, 1982), p. 213.
- 9 *Spare Rib* (No. 101, 1980).
- 10 Beatrix Campbell, 'Politics, pyramids and people', *Marxism Today* (December 1984), p. 26.
- 11 *Outwrite* (No. 28, August 1984).
- 12 *Spare Rib* (No. 138, January 1984), p. 30.

Notes and documents

Sri Lanka: testimony to state terror

*There are two nations in Sri Lanka, both ruled by the Sri Lankan government – one, the Sinhala/Buddhist South, under civilian rule, and the other, the Tamil North (and increasingly the East), under a military dictatorship. Ironically enough, the cause of this separate dispensation is alleged by the Sri Lankan government to be the fight for a separate state by the Northern (and Eastern) Tamils. That story however, has been told at length in the special issue of Race & Class ('Sri Lanka: racism and the authoritarian state') which appeared in July 1984 on the anniversary of the '83 pogroms. Here we wish to record a few of the 200 affidavits (sworn before justices of the peace) from witnesses testifying to the atrocities of the security forces in Jaffna in the period March – November 1984. (A fuller dossier, from which these documents have been excerpted, is published by the South Asia Bureau. *)*

Document No 3/4

I, T, aged 51 years, of Atchuvvely, being a Hindu, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm as follows:

I am the husband of P (44), who was shot dead at Chunnakam market on 28 March 1984.

I have been disabled due to an accidental fall into a well several years

** Human Rights Violations in Sri Lanka from March to November 1984: a documentation, by South Asia Bureau, (Kiefernstr. 45, 5600 Wuppertal -2, West Germany), December 1984.*

ago and cannot do any hard work. My wife was a plantain vendor in the Chunnakam market. She purchased plantains in bulk and sold them in retail.

On 28 March at about 12.30pm, we heard that there was shooting by air force men at the Chunnakam market. Since my wife had not returned, I sent my son at about 4.00pm the same day to Chunnakam to see what had happened. Y returned after half an hour and stated that he could not go to Chunnakam as there was no public transport.

I sent my son again to Chunnakam at 6.00am on 29 March. He had made inquiries at the Chunnakam market and was told that several of the injured people and bodies of the dead people had been taken to Jaffna Hospital the previous day. My son Y had then proceeded to the Jaffna Hospital where he had traced the dead body of my wife P to the mortuary and had identified it.

The dead body of my wife P was, however, released at 3pm, on 29 March, with instructions that the body should be cremated before 6pm, that no publicity should be given and that not more than twenty-five people should gather at the funeral. When the body was being transported in a taxi, the taxi had been stopped by army personnel who were travelling in trucks and jeeps. Inquiries were made of the dead person. They also wanted the coffin opened. However, on the intervention of a senior officer and on production of the identity card of the dead person, we were allowed to proceed. The dead body was cremated at about 5pm, on 29 March.

Seven dependent children, five daughters aged 22, 17, 15, 13, 11 and two sons aged 24 and 14 years are residing with me. My son aged 24 years is engaged as a casual labourer and does not have continued work. We are in occupation of a colonist cottage and do not possess any other land elsewhere.

I was made to understand that my wife had been shot dead by air force men and that several others too had been shot dead and also injured.

I and the said children were all dependent on the deceased for our livelihood. The untimely death of my wife P has deprived us of our sole bread winner.

Document No 4/7

I, PT aged 59 years, of Urumpirai, being a Hindu, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm as follows:

My son Y (26) was employed in a P Exporting firm in Jaffna as a labourer. He was dumb since birth.

On 9 April 1984 he left home for work in the morning. I received information at 5.00pm the same day that my son Y had been shot dead by the army. It is understood that he had been dispatched by the firm he was working for, to purchase ice cubes.

Since there was tension in Jaffna town, we could not proceed to Jaffna the same day. A relation who was dispatched to Jaffna to collect the dead body, brought it home at 2.00pm the next day. The dead body was cremated at 5.00pm.

I am a conductor in the Ceylon Transport Board and am due to retire in January next year. My wife is living and I have a son who is deaf and dumb and a daughter who too is not normal. My wife too is deaf and dumb.

I was depending on the earnings of my son to supplement my meagre earnings.

Document No 4/11

I, K Mohamed S, 42 years of age, of M Road, Jaffna, being a Moslem, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm as follows:

SM (28), a neighbour of mine, was standing at the Kamal Mosque Junction trying to buy cuttle fish at about 10.15am on 10 April 1984. Simon's Garage, situated close to this spot, was on fire at this time. Army personnel came chasing people down Manipay Road, northwards and turned down Aboobucker Road, and when they [army personnel] were opposite Chelliah's Timber Depot, they opened fire. SM received two shots, one on the hand and the other on the lower abdomen. He fell down, crawled about fifteen yards toward the mosque and fell dead. Army personnel left the area in a few minutes and we removed his dead body to his residence. His remains were cremated the following day.

His family consists of his father, mother and eleven other brothers and sisters. SM was engaged in business on a small scale of purchasing and selling articles and was very useful to the Muslim community. His father was a hawker and SM's earnings went a long way to supplement his father's earning to maintain the large family.

SM's loss is a big blow to the family.

Document No 5/1

I, G, aged 55 years, residing at R Road, Jaffna, being a Roman Catholic, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly make oath and state as follows:

I reside at the above address with my wife and six children – two sons and four daughters. The eldest daughter is 23 years of age and the youngest child is 8 years old. I was a government servant for twenty-one years and retired in the year 1977 prematurely. I am sick and therefore I cannot work now.

On 4 May 1984, about midnight, my house was surrounded by army personnel. Some of them entered the house and searched the premises and questioned each of the inmates regarding the whereabouts of my eldest son, B aged 21 years. During the course of the search they

removed Rs 50/- in cash from a purse belonging to one of my daughters and also a set of handkerchiefs newly presented to one of my children.

My son B was not at home at that time and told that he might be staying with his grandmother at Kilinochchi.

About 1.00am they asked me to accompany them and took me to the army camp at the Jaffna station. At the said camp I was questioned by an officer very rudely for about an hour and was detained till morning.

On the morning of the 5th I was taken in a truck along with six Tamil boys to Elephant Pass army camp. At Elephant Pass camp too, I was interrogated and told to accompany a batch of soldiers who would look for my son at Kilinochchi at his grandmother's, that is my mother-in-law's home.

That day, about 11am, I was taken to my mother-in-law's house at Kilinochchi. My son was not found there. On a search of the premises, the soldiers found the national identity card belonging to my son B. I was brought back to the Elephant Pass army camp and detained there till 8 May, during which period I was questioned daily at length to get information about my son.

On 8 May, I was released and told that my son, no sooner he was found, should be surrendered to the nearest police station. About five days after releasing me, a batch of soldiers arrived at my house at 5.00am in the morning and searched the entire premises, much to the annoyance of the inmates.

As my son's whereabouts were still not known, they took me again to the Jaffna Stadium army camp. I was detained at the said camp till the next morning, and during this period I was questioned about the whereabouts of my son. The officer who interrogated me added that he had given orders to shoot my son at sight.

When I was released, I was told to report at the said camp every other day. For nearly two weeks I had to go to the camp and report to the army officers. On every such occasion, I was interrogated for periods of a minimum of one hour and maximum four hours about my son's absence from home.

After about two weeks, I refrained from going to the army camp to report about the absence of my son. My last such visit would have been about latter part of June '84.

Consequent on these events, I and my family live in constant fear of search and arrest, as even mischief-makers can easily cause a search of my home and arrest me.

Document No 5/2a

I, Paged 19 years, of Chundikuli, Jaffna, being a Roman Catholic, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly make oath and state as follows:

I am a student in the Advanced Level Class of the St Patrick's

College, Jaffna.

On 4 May 1984 at about 4.30pm, I left home with my friend U for Jaffna Bazaar and was returning home via Clock Tower Road and Vembadi Road. When we were crossing the Vembadi Road, Third Cross Street junction, I saw three army vehicles coming in the opposite direction. The first vehicle, which was an armoured car, passed by. As the second vehicle, a jeep, passed us, I heard a command and all vehicles were stopped and we were seized by army personnel. U was immediately assaulted. I too was assaulted and then lifted and thrown into the vehicle. As I fell inside the jeep, I fell against the driver of the vehicle who was seated in the front. The driver immediately got out of the seat and came to the back of the vehicle, removed my platform slippers and slipped me all over the face. I covered my face with my arms to protect me from these blows.

There were three others already stretched face downwards on the floor. U too was then forced into the vehicle and I was lying topmost over the others, and when the vehicle started moving, I was hit with the butt end of the gun on the back and shoulders by the soldiers who were seated in the rear of the jeep. All five of us were then taken to Thuraiappah Stadium army camp where the officer who ordered my arrest, instructed that I be put into the First Room and the other four in another room.

While in the First Room all alone, a few soldiers, who were returning after games, pulled me by the hair, kicked me and punched me and then left. Seven other soldiers then came into the room and questioned me about some youths staying down Martin Road and I denied any knowledge about them. I was then asked to lie down on a bench, face downwards. One soldier pulled my hands from behind and held them together tight. Another soldier seated himself on my outstretched legs, while another held my hair very tightly. I was then assaulted with loaded S/Lon pipes, heavy boots and a broom stick all over my body including my face. My shirt was removed before this incident took place. A python was then brought and its head was thrust into my mouth and its tail into my ears. I tried my level best to prevent it, but failed. My pleadings were of no avail. The python was then put around my neck and it was trying to coil around me and I had to prevent it from doing so with great difficulty. At this time a high official of the army arrived and ordered them to stop harassing me in that manner, and it was stopped.

At 7.00pm that night, I, U and two others were taken to the police station and left there. We were given dinner but I could not eat as I could not open my mouth due to the severe blows I had received. The next morning army personnel called at the police station and we were handed over again to the army.

The punishment I had already received at the Thuraiappah Stadium

was unbearable and my body was aching with pain. While travelling to Elephant Pass in the military vehicle, on the pretence of vomiting, I moved to the rear of the vehicle and tried to jump out. I preferred to die while jumping out of the moving vehicle or be shot by the armed soldiers who were in the vehicle rather than undergoing further harassment at the hand of the armed personnel. However, while trying to jump out, I was caught and severely assaulted.

We reached Elephant Pass army camp at about 11.30am and on arrival all articles, such as wristwatch, money, rosary, cash, disprin, that were in my pocket at that time were taken over. All four of us, along with twenty others, were put into a room. We were not harassed in any form that day (5 May).

On 6 May morning, my mother had come to the Elephant Pass army camp and I was taken to the inquiry room where I was allowed to speak to her in the presence of army personnel. My mother was crying and I pretended that I had not been harmed in any way since my arrest. My mother then left, saying that she would bring me some clothes the next day.

At about 6.00pm on 6 May I was taken with the three others to the inquiry room. One officer made several inquiries from all of us and then we were taken to a room and shown a boy called S who was in another room. I identified him and told the inquiring officer that I knew him for the last ten years as we were residing at Martin Road earlier and S too was residing in the same locality. I was then taken to another room and shown a few photographs and I denied any knowledge of the persons appearing in these photographs. S was then brought in and he stated that he knew me.

I was then taken to a room where I was asked to strip myself completely naked and then made to hold on to an iron bar. Three soldiers came into the room and assaulted me with weighted S/Lon pipes on my back and I would have received about 200 shots. My back was swollen. Unable to bear the pain I cried out that I would tell them all that I knew and the beating stopped. I then told them that I knew nothing and thereby couldn't tell them anything and the beating was repeated.

I was then asked to sit on the floor and stretch my legs on the seat of a chair. While in this position a soldier seated himself on my outstretched legs. Another held me by my hair, while another pulled off my hands which were supporting me and held them tight. Then another hit me with a loaded S/Lon pipe on my protruding feet. All through the act I was stark naked. I was then asked to get up and put on my trousers, but couldn't get up. So I pulled on my trousers while seated on the floor.

An officer then ordered that I be taken to the Muskade [meat stall] and I was dragged to another room. I was asked to remove my trousers and my legs and feet were handcuffed. I was then suspended

on the roof by my legs with head downwards. A soldier standing on a drum hit me on both feet with a loaded S/Lon pipe, while another hit me on the back. The beating was so severe that, while trying to free myself, I broke the handcuffs. Then two handcuffs were used to handcuff my hands and my pants were also used to tied up my hands and the assault continued. Every half hour or so I was dropped suddenly and then pulled up again. I had to protect myself by shielding my head with my hands to prevent my head from hitting the concrete floor.

This continued for about three hours. Unable to bear the pain and thirst, I cried for water and this was refused. One soldier brought a piece of ice and placing it on my private parts started hitting it with his hands and this hurt me terribly. I was then let down but could not get up to walk. Two soldiers then carried me to a bathroom and poured water on me and I fainted.

When I recovered, I found myself stretched on the grass in an open compound and one soldier was fanning me. I asked for water and was given some water. Unable to bear the pain in my private parts, I started rolling on the ground. I also developed severe wheezing which I never had before. I was then taken to the office and was examined by a Doctor who gave me some medicine and coffee.

A little later, I was taken to the common room, where all the others were found fast asleep. It must have been around 3am. I had not been given any dinner the previous night. A Pohora bag [artificial manure bag] stuffed with straw was given as a pillow, while the others were sleeping without even that. Next morning [7 May], I could not even get up and I was feeling giddy and was vomiting some greenish stuff and was fainting frequently. My mother, who had brought me some clothes, was not allowed to see me. The whole of that day, I could not eat and was vomiting frequently. I felt that I was going to die. A few officers came and examined me, and on seeing my condition ordered that I be sent to the army hospital in Colombo.

The same day [7 May], I was taken by Intercity train to Colombo. As I could not get up and walk, I was carried into the vehicle that took us to the railway station and then from the vehicle to the train. While in the train too I was occasionally assaulted. On arrival in Colombo, I was taken to the army hospital where I was examined and given some tablets and kept for about two hours. I felt better.

I was then taken by a soldier to a room where I was asked to pull open a drawer. On opening the drawer with difficulty, I found a naked corpse inside it. I was then ordered to lift the dead body. When I declined, I was assaulted. With difficulty, I lifted the body and I was made to carry the dead body towards the door and bring it back and put it in the drawer. I did this with the greatest of difficulty as the corpse was fairly heavy. Some fluid poured out of the corpse when I was carrying it. I

was then asked to wash my hands and while doing so I fainted and recovered about fifteen minutes later.

From there, I was taken to an army camp and put in a lonely room and was there for about three days and was given drugs and good meals. I was later brought back to Elephant Pass army camp by train. While in the train, I was made to sit on the floor in the corridor with my hands handcuffed and chained to the seats. While seated in this position, all army personnel passing me were kicking and assaulting me.

On arrival at the Elephant Pass army camp I was allowed to see my mother who had come there. After she left, I was taken to a room and again assaulted. The next morning I was released and paid Rs 15/- as bus fare and asked to proceed home.

I have been instructed to report at the Elephant Pass army camp and given dates to report again. When I do so, I am further questioned and assaulted and harassed. I have to report again on the 25 August 1984.

I have no connection with any extremist groups or political organisations.

The mother of P, Mrs RS aged 50 years, has also given an affidavit (Document No 5/2c). She states among things:

He often lapses into a state of unconsciousness and is incapable of performing household chores. He is now nervous and the slightest sound excites him. He is apprehensive of being rearrested and that he would have to undergo the torture and harassment all over again. He does not sleep peacefully and is often disturbed at night. He is extremely nervous when the date of reporting at the army camp is near. He is anxious that he should leave the country for good.

The future of this child has been blasted due to torture and harassment. He still bears the marks of torture on the body. Tell-tale strike marks all over his body have not cleared. He still complains of pains in his heels due to severe beating with S/Lon pipes filled with heavy matter.

Document No 7/1

I, V, age 49 years, residing at Koiyathoddam, Jaffna, being a Christian, do sincerely, truly and solemnly make oath and state as follows:

I am an excise inspector in the Excise Department of the government of Sri Lanka. I have been in government service for the last twenty-eight years and am attached to the Y Station in X at present. I am married and have five children – four sons and one daughter. My third son M, aged 19 years, was residing alone at the above address for the last seven months. The rest of the family was living in X. M was staying in Jaffna so that he might be able to attend private tuition classes in preparation for the GCE Advanced Level.

On 18 July 1984, M was involved in an incident involving Sri Lankan

army personnel. According to eye-witnesses who related the incident to me, M came by his death at the scene of the incident and in the following circumstances.

At about 1.30pm, M was returning home on the pillion of the motor bicycle ridden by IM, a friend of M, who also died at the spot the same day. When the motor cycle negotiated the Grossault Road, Old Park Road Junction, that is coming from Grossault Road and entering the Old Park Road, some army personnel who were waiting at the junction stopped the riders, presumably as the pillion rider was not wearing a helmet.

No sooner than the motor cycle was stopped, two soldiers held the rider I. M, who was seated in the rear holding up his hands indicating that he was not offering resistance, took a step backwards facing the soldiers. As he took a step backwards, M struck himself against the lamp post that was behind him. One of the soldiers kicked, with his booted leg, on the testicles of M. M bent down in pain. A soldier got hold of M by his hair and dashed his head against the lamp post. M then fell face downwards. Two soldiers held him down by the hands. Other soldiers with rifle butts began pounding on the head, while others kicked on the sides of his body. Blood began pouring from his mouth and his body was trampled by several soldiers and after a few minutes was lying limp on the ground.

Meantime, other soldiers assaulted the motor cyclist, I. I, being a Karate expert, began to defend himself against several soldiers, who finally bayoneted him down to the ground. A blow with a rifle on his legs felled him. When both the bodies became limp, the soldiers dragged the bodies and threw the bodies into their vehicle and went away.

I was informed of the incident and came to Jaffna from X. I arrived in Jaffna by about 12.30pm on 19 July 1984. When I arrived home, I found that my residence had been searched by army personnel. They had broken into the house and searched the premises in the absence of its occupants, i.e., myself and my family. Besides damaging a wash basin, glass panes and tiles, I found the following items missing: one National pocket radio, one Kodak camera, two electronic calculators, one chess board with pieces, one kitchen knife used for chopping, one drawer from a dressing table, one passport belonging to my late son M.

M, my son, was reported dead and his body was released to me at 9.30pm on 19 July 1984 by the General Hospital, Jaffna, after a post mortem. I was informed by the police that the post mortem report would not be released to me and that the body was being released under the following conditions: that there should be no funeral procession, no funeral oration, no publication and that the body should be buried before 12.00 noon the next day, i.e., within fifteen hours of the release of the body to me.

In the official news release published in the newspapers, it was

reported that both M and I had taken cyanide on being arrested by army personnel, which I believe is a falsehood, considering the several eye-witness accounts that I have received. One newspaper even reported, referring to the incident, that the police had found the bodies of two young persons who had come by their death under tragic and mysterious circumstances and that their bodies had been handed over to the General Hospital, Jaffna.

To the best of my knowledge my son M was not involved in any organisation or movement directed against the state.

Document No 8/1

I, G, of Valvettiturai, age 18, student, studying GCE (A/L), being a Hindu, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm as follows:

On the afternoon of Saturday, 4 August 1984, the Sri Lanka army soldiers announced over a mobile public address system requesting the parents of Valvettiturai to bring their sons between the ages of 18 and 25 with their national identity cards to the Valvettiturai junction for inquiry and immediate release. Accordingly, I went to the V junction at about 5pm, with my identity card.

At the junction I was made to stand along with the others and a check was made one by one. After the check, I was put into a military truck along with the others and taken to the Palaly army camp. On reaching the camp, we were taken to a school adjoining the camp, I was given a blow on the back of my head. At the school we were asked our names, what we were doing, etc. All of us, numbering about 500, were kept in the small school building. I slept on the floor without any pillow or mat. At about 4am on 5 August, I was assaulted and ordered to get up. The soldiers made me kneel down and whilst on my knees abused me. I was forced to answer a call of nature at the point of a gun. I was not allowed to sleep peacefully. I found it difficult to stretch out as the hall in which I was sleeping was overcrowded.

On 6 August, I was photographed. On the 7th, at about 2pm, I was put into a bus and was told that I would be taken to V. In the bus I was ordered to lie down on the floor board between the seats. Till I reached Mankulam, no water or facilities to answer a call of nature were made available to me. They abused all the boys in the bus. The bus reached Anuradhapura jail and we were locked up in the jail. We were told to drink the water that was used to clean the toilet here.

At about 3pm, on 8 August, I was again put into a bus. My hands were tied with a rope tightly. Because of this, my hands were paining. While travelling from Anuradhapura, we were abused, frightened and humiliated in foul language by the soldiers who were guarding us. They told us that we would be tortured and killed. The soldiers assaulted me with their helmets. At about 6 pm, the bus arrived at a place, which I

learnt later was the Welisare Gemunu regiment camp. Again I was put into a bus and the tied hands were further tightened. This time, I was told to sit on the floor board of the bus between the seats. During the journey, the soldiers trampled me often with their boots.

On 9 August, at about 9am, the bus reached the Boosa camp. All those brought were kept in three halls. We were served meals at 12 noon and 5pm, and the quantity served was very small. For the first three days, I had no bathing facilities. At Boosa, I had to purchase tooth-powder and soap with the money the boys had with them. From the three halls students and sick boys were separated and put in a different hall. I was taken alone to a separate room and questions were put to me in a terrifying manner. I was threatened that I would be kept in jail for twenty long years. On 19 August, along with fourteen other boys, I was sent to Colombo. From Colombo I was taken to Jaffna by train. At Jaffna my parents took charge of me.

Document 8/25b

I, V, Jaffna Tamil, presently of T, Adampan, aged 65 years, Hindu, police pensioner, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm as follows:

Deceased C, aged 26 years, is my younger son (one of the twins). He was employed as a night watcher at the MPCS Ltd, from 6pm to 6am.

On 24 August 1984 at about 5pm he left home for work . . . and I was sent in the jeep to Mannar hospital. There I identified my son's body at the hospital mortuary. I found shot injuries: (a) left arm bandaged, (b)(c) shot injuries on both hands, (d) head, (e) left chest, (f) right side upper abdomen. Blood stains all over the body and black marks all over. He was wearing a gold ring 1/2 sovereign and a 'Mondiya' wrist watch when he left home, but they were not on the body and were missing . . .

Now I learn, from a suspect who was released from the camp, that when my son was taken there with an injury in his hand only, he had been tortured and murdered at the camp. Another injured suspect, who was taken in the jeep with my son, was admitted to the hospital at about 7pm, but the body of my son was taken to the mortuary only at about 10.30pm.

My pension is hardly enough for me, my wife and my grandson who is with me.

Document No 9/1

I, C, aged 65 years, of S, Manipay, being a Hindu, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and state as follows:

I went to attend the wedding of my grandson which was on the 31 August 1984 and was staying with them at X Road, Point Pedro.

On 1 September, after lunch, I was seated on the verandah at about

12 noon. My grandson T and his bride too were seated on the verandah. A jeep and a truck, both military vehicles, were passing the house. As the truck passed the house, a soldier standing inside the moving truck opened fire in the direction of the house in which we were seated. One bullet struck the wall damaging the wall. Both my feet, which I had stretched out while being seated, were shattered by bullets. I was promptly admitted to Manthikai Hospital where both my feet were amputated, leaving only the heels. I was transferred to Jaffna General Hospital, which is closer to my home, on 20 September at my request, for further treatment.

My husband V, who is now 78 years, is old and feeble. He was never in any permanent job and was not entitled to any pension or gratuity. I have a son who is asthmatic and vast sums of money have to be spent on him. He too is not working. Added to all these suffering, I too have been made a cripple and will not be able to move about and perform my household chores.

I request that some sort of relief be provided monthly.

Document No 9/11

I, Mrs SK, aged 52 years, of Y Road, Vaddukoddai, being a Christian, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly make oath and state as follows:

On 10 September 1984, I boarded the VIP Bus Co. private passenger coach at about 8.00pm in Colombo Fort, along with my daughter S, two grand-daughters and daughter-in-law's sister. The passenger coach made two halts for refreshments.

About 10-15 minutes after the coach had left the second halt, the bus was stopped and five men boarded the bus. These men were armed. One of them wore a small beard and appeared to be their leader. All men wore khaki long trousers with banians or T-shirts. One of the armed gang said in Sinhala: 'You are enjoying a film on the TV and you are not aware what has happened in Mullaitivu. We are going to kill you all.' We were then taken six or seven miles on the Mannar Road and the bus was stopped on the orders given by one of the gang, who was behind the driver. Passengers were taken out of the bus, about ten to twelve at a time. Gun shots were heard, followed by desperate death cries, 'Aiyō', 'Ammah', etc.

When a middle-aged lady wearing a saree, myself and those who accompanied me were inside the bus, one of the armed gang who was guarding us removed my daughter's gold chain (two sovereigns) and cash Rs 1500/- and my chain (two sovereigns). I left my bag with all my clothes when I got off the bus with the others. The armed man who was guarding us then ordered us to run away. I, my daughter, two grand-children, my daughter-in-law's sister and the lady in saree who was with us fled together from the place of the incident in one direction. We had run a long distance when we met six youths who too had escaped, and we stayed together in the jungle till day-break.

At day-break, we saw a hut at a distance and walked all the way to the hut and obtained water to drink. From the hut we walked to the Main Road, where we boarded a bus which passed the place of the massacre. The coach in which we had travelled was still there. Dead bodies lay scattered around the bus.

A passenger, on coming to know of our plight, gave me Rs 100/-with which I was able to pay my bus fare and refresh children till we arrived at Vaddukodai.

Document No 9/17

I, NT aged 23 years of Karaveddi, being a Hindu, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm as follows:

On 15 September 1984, I and my wife K, aged 19 years, went to bed as usual at about 8.00pm. At about 9.30pm, I heard an explosion on the roof of my house and saw sparks falling through the roof. My wife was bleeding from an injury on the head.

I screamed for help and my brother NS, who was in the house opposite mine, came running. I also felt a pain on my shoulders and found that I too had been injured on both shoulders, on the collar bone, on the right foot and right leg. My wife was unconscious at that time. My brother NS brought a van and rushed my wife and me to Manthikai Hospital. My wife was given first aid and then rushed in the same van to General Hospital, Jaffna.

My wife K passed away at about 12.45am.

I was detained at Manthikai Hospital for two days and received outdoor treatment later. I received treatment from a private practitioner subsequently, and three pieces of shrapnel were removed from my foot and one from the collar bone. I am still under treatment.

I am a cobbler by trade. I have no children but my wife at the time of her death was in the family way. Post mortem was held, but the results of the inquiry have yet to be released.

The explosion was not something like a bolt from the blue. It was known by several in that area that the navy was shelling coastal areas and the immediate hinterland. My house is situated about 1-1 ½ miles from the shore. I am sure that the missile which wrecked my home, killed my wife and injured me severely was one fired by the Sri Lankan navy. The empty shell of the explosive device was later picked up and handed over to the hospital authorities. The 24 pieces of shrapnel collected were handed over to the magisterial courts.

Document No 11/5

I, KS, aged 31 years, of Kodikamam, being a Hindu, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm as follows:

I am a branch manager of X shop at Chavakachcheri.

On 1 November 1984, after my lunch at 4.00pm, I left home for work. When I was close to the old Post Office at Meesalai, there were three boys decorating the roads with black flags and coconut leaves.

Indira Gandhi, the prime minister of India, had been shot dead the previous day. The Yarl Devi train, on its return journey to Colombo, was approaching in the opposite direction. Rifle fire was heard from the train. Army personnel in uniform were seen firing from the moving train in our direction. All those about the place fell flat on the ground and I too did the same.

When the train had passed this point and gun fire had subsided, I tried to get up but couldn't do so. I found a lump of flesh protruding from my left thigh. I was also bleeding from my right leg. A person known as S, who resides close to the spot, removed me promptly to Chavakachcheri Government Hospital where I was rendered first aid. I was then despatched to Jaffna General Hospital the same night.

According to the hospital authorities, I had sustained three bullet injuries on my right leg and one injury on my left thigh. There is also a suspected fracture of the right leg. I am now an inmate of the Jaffna General Hospital.

I came to know later that one S too had been shot and injured close to Meesalai Railway station by army personnel on the Yarl Devi train.

Document No 11/3

I, AS, aged 27 years of age, of Jaffna, being a Hindu, do hereby solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm as follows:

I am in business with my father at Jaffna.

On Friday, 9 November 1984, at about 12.00 noon, I reversed our Toyota Hiace van, which was parked in front of our business establishment, along towards KKS Road, Stanley Road junction. T, a salesman, was seated by my side. As I reversed into Stanley Road, I saw an army vehicle halted facing the junction. As I took the turn to proceed towards Manipay Road, the green army vehicle fired at my van.

The van received sixteen bullet shots damaging the vehicle. I sustained an injury on the right side back of the chest and started bleeding. As I could not control the steering wheel of the van, salesman T grabbed the steering and took control of the vehicle, when he too received a bullet injury on his upper arm and shoulder. The vehicle was then steered towards X Stores and both T and myself, jumping off the van, ran into X Stores. After the army vehicles had left the locality, those at X Stores took me and T to Dr Y's nursing home, where we were rendered first aid and then despatched to the General Hospital, Jaffna.

I am now in the General Hospital, Jaffna. Three broken pieces of the bullet are embedded in the injury on the back of my chest. It took eight stitches to close the wound.

There had been two bomb incidents a few minutes earlier near the supermarket and the army started firing at the people on the road. Through fear that they may set fire to the van, I removed the vehicle to take it home. At no time was I stopped by army personnel when driving the vehicle, and do not know why they had fired at our vehicle.

Book reviews

Out of the locker: poetry of the British miners' strike, 1984-5

Against All the Odds

Edited by M. JONES and W. ROSS (published by Spark 84 for the National Union of Mineworkers, Sheffield, 1984). 52pp. £1.00. (Available from 10 West Street, Worsbrough Dale, Barnsley, Yorkshire.)

The 1984 miners' strike has brought with it massive creativity and determination. It has proved again and again that the working people of Britain are still its bedrock and its hope. Reading the poems in *Against All the Odds* is like reading again the poems of the Chartists in their journals and broadsheets. There is the same mass indignation put in the simplest and most accessible forms, the same rhythms of struggle and underlying humour, the same direct and popular language immediately understood by all those taking part in the struggle and those whose solidarity and empathy goes out towards them.

The Strike as Seen by a Wife

Heartache, feelings,
You've nay sin nowt like,
Have wen me hubby was on strike.

He's a miner that works at Bold.
Of picket line duty his tales he can unfold,
Up Bickershaw Sidings, thru rain and sleet,
With just cheese sarnies to last aw neet.

It's aw reet fer sum,
With big houses and income,
Parties and blare,
They'd nay giv miners a stare,

They don't care a jack, let um be,
More money fer Tory.

With rent in arrears,
Me hubby's fears –
To be turft out
And miners in rout.

But as he ses,
Thatcher's had her days,
She's not reckoned wi miners,
Their determination and strife,
To giv aw ar young 'uns a better life.

To hell wi dole –
Giv em their pits
– And they'll get yond coal.

J. Davies

Poems such as this express the lives of ordinary people involved in an extraordinary process. Men and women discovering a sense of transformation in their lives through their total immersion in a fight which is theirs but which belongs to all of us because it so vitally affects the future of all of us.

There is an astonishing poem by Tommy Early about a scab miner who is saved from death by a miner on strike. The injured man wakes up in hospital and sees his rescuer visiting him by his bedside:

Then the scab, he nearly died again,
This was the face he'd seen,
'Twas the face of a flying picket
Who'd been battered on Orgreave Green.

Gil Foers, in the poem *A Memory of Mine*, remembers a father who always came home from his shift with some sandwiches in his snap tin left for his children. In an evocation of his family history, told with a rending poignancy, the poet continues:

My ebony Dad would go into t' house
While we dug our own pits outside,
He'd wash off his muck, while we put our muck on,
And open his snap tin with pride.

Sat at the table, faced with our tea,
And we weren't hungry a bit.
It wasn't a patch on the snap that we'd had,
The sandwiches brought home from the pit.

Many of these poems first appeared in *The Miner*, the newspaper of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and the book has been

compiled by its editor, Maurice Jones, and striking miners themselves, like Bill Ross, who contributes two poems. *The Miner*, of course, has become a common sight all over the country during the months of the strike as an antidote to the dark *Sun*, and almost every edition has contained a poem, demonstrating again the signal role of culture in such a struggle.

One of the poems, *Echoing Footsteps* by Bill Ross, a tribute to miner David Jones who died on the picket line during the first phase of the strike, provoked a lively discussion in our East London school staff-room when it was first published in *The Miner*. In describing the accidental death of a miner underground, the poet uses the word 'porrected', as if the 'broken body' of the dead miner is being offered as a sacrifice. Not one of the English teachers in our school either knew the meaning of this word or had encountered it before, and in the end, after each of us had proffered an interpretation, we had to resort to the Oxford Dictionary in the school library. The miner-poet was teaching the teachers, which is, of course, the way it should be. Unfortunately, his originality even tested the typesetter of *Against All the Odds*, as the word is transcribed as 'protected'!

Echoing Footsteps (A Tribute to David Jones)

Echoes of footsteps through the night,
 Bent backs, faces gaunt and white.
 Coughing and heaving from the chest,
 Lungs of dust being laid to rest.
 Work to do, the burdensome tasks,
 Teams of men, with ebony masks.
 Nerves and solidarity the day demands;
 Coalition of brains and sinewy hands.
 The work's routine, the relief is slight;
 Feelings hidden, lamps shining bright.
 Colliers cutting at the earth's womb;
 Foetus position, deep entombed.
 Strata broken, bloody gash;
 Screams of pain as bones are smashed.
 The dust has settled, the way is clear
 Mates are clawing with abject fear
 To free their comrade from his cairn;
 Porrected, such is their prime concern
 As the broken body comes into sight,
 They realise they've lost the fight.
 The pit has claimed another life,
 Grief for a mother, a son, a wife;
 Still footsteps echo through the night.

Some poems in the collection recall a sense of embattled history and

tradition: Tolpuddle, 1926, the death of George Jackson – a Scottish miner killed fighting for the International Brigade in Spain 1938. They are a profound expression of the participation and enormous commitment to the struggle of the women of the mining communities, of a common destiny and the anticipation of a common victory alongside the men. As Maurice Jones says in his foreword, dedicated to the poets and those whose struggle they express: ‘Against all the odds – media and mounted policemen, Government, courts and Coal Board – you have shifted the very centre of social gravity.’

And a deep and dynamic shifting it has been, for many people in many places. From all over the world. A Chilean exile on the picket line at Orgreave comments: ‘These police do the same things that the police do in our country. It is as if there is no difference’: an imprisoned Grenadian trade unionist fighting extradition to the US asks his first question to an English visitor, ‘How the miners doing?’ And in East London a 13-year old Caribbean boy defiantly writes in his classroom:

The Miner

I must be a living dead man
 That’s all that’s in my head.
 My lungs are as black as tar
 My life is hanging on a string
 When I cough I feel so dizzy
 It’s like I would faint.
 But when I get out of the mine
 My back is arched
 And my head is swollen
 And I think I’ll die.
 But I am a miner
 And I must survive.

Sean Cummings

The struggle of the British miners has shifted consciousness everywhere its waves have reached. Now the words of this book will shift it further.

For the poems in *Against All the Odds* manifest again the foundation poetry has built with the act of work and the act of struggle from whence all culture comes. The makers of our industrial wealth are also the makers of our language and they will have neither removed from their grasp. That is why poetry emerges with such force and passion from the blood and brain of the mining communities. It is a force of life, love, organisation and beauty that MacGregor and Thatcher, who in the miners’ poems take on the prime symbolism of destruction and barbarism, could never understand and never defeat.

Maxim Gorky observed many times that culture itself is the creation of the labour energy of human beings, and that revolutionary culture

involves the conversion, as swiftly as possible, of 'vast quantities of physical energy into intellectual energy'. Great political and social changes are processes of 'summoning new creative forces into being'. As he wrote in 1934 in his essay *Proletarian Humanism*, from inside the massive transformations he saw around him in his own revolution:

For the first time in the history of mankind, genuine human love is being organised as a creative force; it sets itself the aim of emancipating the hundreds of millions of toilers from the inhuman and senseless power of an insignificant minority; it tells the hundreds of millions of physical labourers that it is precisely their labour that created all the treasures of culture, and that, utilizing these treasures, the working class must create a new, universally human, socialist culture, which will firmly establish fraternity and equality among the working people of the world.¹

Now there is something similar, in a much smaller and inchoate form if compared to Gorky's experience, happening within many of the mining communities of Britain, and the poems in *Against All the Odds* crystallise this. Small and predominantly white villages in Yorkshire, Wales, North-east England, Kent and Scotland are suddenly at one with the struggling people of the world. A new empathy has been forged through a rapid transformation in consciousness and social love. These villages are the recipients of money, food, gifts of solidarity and support from the organisations of other working people all over the world. From France, Belgium, Hungary, the Soviet Union, Australia, the US and many other peoples, all this has arrived. Anyone regularly reading over the last year the 'Back the Miners' page of the *Morning Star*, which has effectively become the daily bulletin of the strike, would have read of a catalogue of world solidarity with a section of the British working people which is probably unsurpassed in the country's history. With the development of highly organised infrastructures of mutual support through the NUM branches, Miners' Support and Women Against Pit Closures groups and the mobilisation of entire communities in self-activated sustenance, it is almost as if these mining villages became liberated areas under constant besiegement by the centralised forces of state repression, very close in spirit and will to a people struggling for national liberation.

There is this remarkable story, told in a December 1984 edition of the *Morning Star* under the headline 'Embattled black South Africans send donation'. It signalled a new recognition for a part of the British working people, a vibrant new empathy with distant allies fighting the most grotesque system in the world:

A striking North Staffordshire miner has returned to Britain with a donation from Black South African mineworkers in support of the NUM struggle.

It is believed that that this is the first time that a British trade union in dispute has received money from South African workers. The donation came from miners who are earning only £25 a week and have only just finished a strike for better pay and conditions.

Roy Jones, who brought the donation back, said in London yesterday that the two strikes were linked. They were both facing a common enemy.

Banks like Barclays, which were making mass profits out of the National Coal Board, were also making huge amounts of money from the exploitation of black South African miners.

Mr Jones also warned that British scab miners were harming the situation of black workers in South Africa. He said that those emigrating to South Africa were stopping black South Africans from being able to take on skilled jobs.

At a press conference, organised by Coventry South-east Labour MP Dave Nellist, he gave a damning indictment of the situation facing black South African miners.

'I've never seen such disgusting working conditions in my life. The mines are the deepest in the world, but hydraulic props and roof supports were unknown in the mines I visited.'

He added: 'In the hostels, there is just no privacy – up to twenty men in a room, freezing in winter and stifling in the summer. Food is often so short that the shift which has just finished will go hungry.'

In two areas Mr Jones found boycotts organised by the miners of shops and taxis which were taking advantage of their captive markets to charge exorbitant prices. Even after the miners had won their victory, 'the boycott is continuing as a warning to the management and their stooge shopkeepers, that the miners are not for messing with.'

He said that despite their conditions the black South African miners were totally 'unbowed', adding: 'The feeling you get when you walk into their meetings is like watching a hundred cup finals at Wembley. The singing, the dancing, the celebration of the union and of its onward march, is unrestrained.'

These South African workers know well the international record of Ian MacGregor, chairman of the National Coal Board. While he was chairman of the US transnational corporation, Amax, and endeavouring to crush the US miners, the company amassed large investments in South Africa as well as purchasing 29 per cent of the Tsumeb Copper-mining Complex in Namibia. For such services he was awarded the Rand Gold Medal of the America Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum Engineers, as well as an honorary doctorate at the University of Angola in 1970, during the dying years of Portuguese Fascist rule.

There is also the internal solidarity of the harassed black

communities in Britain reaching out to the striking miners. In June 1984, a group of 50 Asians from Southall took £1,500 in cash and food to Tilmanstone Colliery in Kent. Under a beaming group photograph the caption reads:

The day, which included a visit to the pit, ended in a dance – the Asians brought several dozen samosas.

‘It was two communities who know what oppression is meeting together. Within minutes we were all friends’, said Kent miner Cyril Rogers yesterday.

When the strike is all over the Tilmanstone miners will make the return trip to Southall to see the Asian mosques. The miners will take the refreshments.³

In November (and but a few days after the assassination of Indira Gandhi by Sikh separatists), a delegation of the Glasgow Indian Workers’ Association and Sikh Temples jointly sent £2,000 of groceries to the mining families of Ayrshire, Scotland. As the *Morning Star* recounted:

Indian Workers’ Association Secretary Mohan Singh said Glasgow’s minority communities ‘regard themselves as part of the working class, and the miners’ fight for jobs is the same as ours.’

Sikh Sabha Organisation Vice-president Gurdev Singh Virhia said: ‘We love to help the miners because they are a very important part of the same community we belong to.’⁴

There is the same process of connection beginning from another point in the struggle. Other working people in Britain, black and white, are also realising that there are something like 3,000 black miners in the country. When three of these men, from the Bentley pit near Doncaster in South Yorkshire, arrived in London to raise funds for their comrades, one of them, Clifford Brown, observed to a journalist of the *Caribbean Times*:

Talking to people in Brixton and to students at the colleges we visited, all three of us were surprised that many Londoners were unaware that there are so many black miners in England and Wales. In fact, we found it difficult to convince many that we were miners.

Never before have any of us seen black workers’ groups and their hostile position. In Bentley, white and black are together ... we have always been treated as miners. If anything, the strike has brought us even closer together.⁵

The experiences of the black communities of London and those of the Yorkshire miners, white and black, elide with their encounters with the Metropolitan Police. As another black miner from Bentley recounted:

Once or twice, six or seven of us black lads have been walking along and the Met Police are the only ones to have abused us and told us to 'go back to Africa' and that sort of thing.

The police from outside South Yorkshire call this strike the Gold Mine Strike – because of the extra pay they are getting. Often they wave money in our faces.

Sharing these experiences of the armed state, and as a result of the process of understanding set in motion between the two communities through the repression being heaped upon both, it was not a surprising consequence that one of the few organs of the British labour movement to opt for greater black political representation within the Labour Party at the 1984 Labour Party Conference, should have been the delegation from the National Union of Mineworkers.

Thus the poetry in *Against All the Odds* is testimony to a section of the British working people at this time of rapid organisational growth and heightened consciousness, and this is being expressed through the force of their culture, and specifically through their use of poetic language. For the working class has never deserted poetry, and poetry has never deserted the working class. The words of working people, the dialectal and figurative energy, take on new, confident accretions by poets reclaiming their language and meanings for themselves, as they claim their right to work and sustain their livelihoods.

As I write, the strike is now in its tenth month, and as its poets, old and young, men and women, are more and more profoundly involved in creating the genius and stamina behind its survival and success, they are also forging the words of strength and beauty which describe it. As the poet-pickets assemble in the winter dawns, another Yorkshire poet has been made 'Poet Laureate' and has made a fast start by writing a poem for the christening of a new royal baby. Ted Hughes, the new government-sanctioned choice, comments: 'The Crown is the symbol of spiritual unity of the tribe. When that's outmoded so will be the Poet Laureate.' Then he adds, 'I have drunk far too much champagne to try to recite anything at the moment.'⁶

So here are the poets of the working class, of progress and of hope, who with their labour create all culture and give birth every day to language, and here is the bogus bard of the 'masters of culture', appointed to protect and enshrine the leaders of the 'tribe'. As miner-poets cover the country, performing the poems of their movement and claim for dignity at union meetings, rallies, miners' clubs and fund-raising concerts, the *Sunday Telegraph* approvingly quotes Hughes' four-line Jubilee piece of 1977 that was displayed outside his West End publisher's house:

The nation's a soul
 A soul is a wheel
 With a crown for a hub
 To keep it whole.

Who makes the wheel? Who moulds the hub? Who creates the force to make the wheel turn? Who lubricates it, maintains it?

Such questions are not real to those who can afford to treat the wheel as metaphysics or the experience of poetry as a subconscious flight. In the same *Sunday Telegraph* article on the new Poet Laureate, we read:

Today poetry is a private activity: each poet has his own personal voice. When the Laureateship was founded, a poet thought of his inspiration as a descending muse, an external agency. Today's poet dips into his own subconscious and is surprised sometimes by the strange things he scoops up.⁷

This is the poetry of the appropriators of culture and language created by the centuries of effort of those who have worked incessantly by hand and brain. It is the poetry of the individual parasite raised to honour and title, yet, as so brazenly admitted, still the poetry of tribalism and barbarism. To challenge it comes poetry like that anthologised in *Against All the Odds*, written by men and women with the human force and spirit expressed by Bill Ross, who now tells the story behind his poetry. For it again evinces that the experience of the working people of the world is the soil in which all that we call culture takes root.

'I left school at sixteen, and living in the west end of Glasgow, there was no way that I could tell any of my friends that I was a poet. I wrote secretly, mostly about the poverty and injustice that I saw around me. I wrote about the "Ban the Bomb" marches that I went on in those days and I spoke a lot to people who had experienced more than me, people older than me with more maturity. I was always looking for knowledge, searching for knowledge all my life.

'There was a lot of work around then. You could say to the gaffer, "Wrap my cards up for Friday, I'm finished!" and you'd find another job for the following Monday. So I found a job in the merchant navy as soon as I left school. I left school on the Friday and I was at sea on the Monday. Going all around the world, I had a lot of time on my hands and I wrote a lot of poetry, mostly about various working-class aspects of life. There were just one or two close friends to whom I used to show my stuff.

'Then, by the time that I left the navy, Scotland started a decline, particularly around the Strathclyde Valley. The jobs started to go in the shipping industry, the fishing fleets and the merchant navy. So to

get security for my wife and family I joined the army, no less! I had no formal qualifications, so when I went through the army system, I was putting in for almost every educational course I could think of.

'I wrote poems about sergeants, corporals and the working-class people who get a bit of authority and leave the rest of the working class behind. I used to give quite a lot of recitations in the canteens to my mates. I'd pick out army characters and try to mimic them in the poems, and put in some actions too. Then one day I looked at us all there in the barracks, saying the same things, going the same way, doing everything the same with the same haircuts and I suddenly felt that this couldn't be for me.

'But by that time I was in Northern Ireland, stationed aboard the *HMS Maidstone* in Belfast Docks. They called it a modern army and we were sleeping four on top of each other! It was a prison ship originally and we wondered now who were the prisoners.

'I began to reject the brainwashing. They showed you three cards, one white, one a yellow card and the other red. You were the referee, you were playing with life. A white card was "Halt!" The yellow card was "Halt or I'll shoot!" and then the red card: "Halt, I'm prepared to shoot now!" There was no way I was going to do that. I had relations in Ireland and many of our Scottish families are related to people over there from way back to the '45 rebellion or before. So in the end I was court-martialled, after 260 days in prison.

'Then I worked on the St Ninian Central in Scotland, the biggest storage rig in the world. There were that many trade unions there, but no single one had overall trade union power. That was how the employers worked there – through divide and rule. And the lack of safety – it was terrible! Things were dropping on you all the time. I was in the AUEW-CEU, the Constructional Engineers Union, and we were the first to bring the plant out through lack of safety. As a consequence I was sacked. I had been working 360 feet below sea level in a concrete dome, with water seeping in all the time. It was real damp conditions and I had a bad chest. The doctor prescribed Benylin, which is a heavy drug and dulls all your thoughts and makes you tired and sleepy. He also gave me a 24-hour rest. So after that, when I turned up to work, the foreman said, "Where have you been yesterday?" I said I was at the doctor's and here's the certificate. So he says, "If you want to go sick you come and see me first!" So I said, astonished, "Why should I go to see a foreman to tell whether I'm sick or not?" So he told me to pack my bags. The lads came out for me and I won my case for unfair dismissal. But after that I couldn't get another job in Scotland, even though I applied for over 300 vacancies.

'Then one day I walked past a great big notice – "National Coal Board: There's a Career for You!" So I applied and got interviewed for the Yorkshire Selby Complex. They'd agreed to take me on before

they realised that I hadn't got any underground papers. So I was sent on by the Selby manager to the Maltby Colliery engineer in 1979, first as a fitter and later as a face worker.

'All this time I wrote my poems. I read them out to my mates and got the feedback that what I was writing was the type of poetry that working-class people understood. They were always asking me for copies and taking them home. So I started to send them out to various magazines and newspapers. Ironically, it was the *Coal News*, the NCB journal, that first published my work!

'I'd written a lot of poems before the strike started. I'd always been able to write for the working class, and with feeling too, because I'm a working-class lad. I wouldn't have it any other way. I believe there's a message in poetry and you can get more out to our people by using a single poem than a politician can by making a 45-minute speech.

'There's some extraordinary things happening in this struggle, and I'm trying to find the time to write constantly, every day. You can get volumes and volumes of the stuff, just writing about the things our people are doing and saying, the witticisms and imagery that they're making. There were hundreds and hundreds of poems sent into *The Miner*, from which we chose the poems in *Against All the Odds*, from coalfields all over the country.

'My poem in the book, *Echoing Footsteps*, contains the word "porrected", which is an exception from the simple, easy language of the people in which most of the other poems are written. I was always searching for new words. When I took up a day-release course in Sheffield about three years ago, I felt I was a wee bit inadequate in vocabulary, so I used to prepare myself by learning at least three new words every night from the Oxford Dictionary. Then I came across this word "porrected". I wrote it down because I thought it was a good image and I might use it in the future. Then, when I was writing *Echoing Footsteps* three years later, the word just came straight back into my head. Other words too, that I had learned way back in the past but not used since, have come flying out of my head again as I have been writing poetry about this strike. All the movement and intensity of the struggle forces this to happen, and suddenly someone says something to me and somewhere it strikes a chord and I find there's a load of words or a rhyming couplet or an image coming out, and I make sure that I write them all down.

'But I also make sure that my poetry is written in ordinary people's language. I deliberately put that word "porrected" into the poem, and I'll tell you why. I was going a little survey in my head: "Does anybody really read any of Bill Ross' poetry? Then I'll use the simple words but I'll also stick "porrected" in. Then I'll know if somebody's read the work, because if they have they'll come up to me and say, "What does "porrected" mean?" Then I'll know if they have read *Echoing*

Footsteps.” And a lot of people have asked me, so it proved my point. I used the word a little like a thermostat.

‘I was up before the stipendiary magistrate for so-called “indecent behaviour”. What I’d done was I’d dared to question a policeman about why my mate was being arrested on the picket line. “He’s done nothing, why are you arresting him?” “All right”, he says, “we’ll arrest you as well!” Legal aid was withdrawn, so I had to defend myself against three police witnesses by making reference to the contradictions between their notes and the testimony they actually signed later on. Then I said that I’d no character witnesses, all I had is what I write, so I read *Echoing Footsteps* and he dismissed the case and told me that the poem showed a lot of talent!

‘There are times when this language of the people comes out in speeches or in the poetry with such intense emotion. I’ve heard Arthur [Scargill] speak many times and Peter Heathfield. Sometimes you might think, “well, I’ve heard it all before”, but the feelings of the people come out with such force in the construction of the language. Sometimes when I hear these speeches I’m standing close and shedding tears myself. Everybody is finding new ways of saying things. The vocabulary of the women and the poetry that they are producing is amazing. Through the conflict people are crying out with the truth: “This is me! This is my son! This is the way we see it! This is how my daughter is suffering! This is how my family is suffering! Mr MacGregor, do you understand? Mrs Thatcher, do you really know what’s going on?” That’s what they’re saying, but they’re saying it all in a new way, with new sharpness.

‘There are writers in this book that would never have thought of writing a poem before this strike. All this creativity is like a dam bursting, the articulation is amazing. Children’s imagery too. What’s going through their heads, what’s changed them? Before it was Cops and Robbers, now they play Police and Pickets on the street. And other creativity too. In my pit there’s another lad who works on the same shift, the same face as me – and he’s an exiled Scot as well: Dave Brennan. He does the cartoon strips for the *Yorkshire Miner*, but is also touring the country raising funds with his exhibition of paintings and sketches of pit life, past and present. This is how culture is bringing mining communities all over the country closer together. When a busload of miners came from Maltby to hear me read my poems in Sheffield and I’ve been with them the same day in the soup kitchen or on the picket line, I know we’re even closer through the poetry when I write about *them*. They feel that involvement through the poetry, through the imagery, through an art form. And in other things too – like badgemaking, for example. Miners are thinking up and making all these different badges themselves, just like it’s *them* that are making the poetry books, printing, collating, stitching and trimming them themselves.

'I don't know how it's all happened. I grew up shy about showing my poetry to anybody, and now I'm on a platform reading it to hundreds of people! Now situations that I predicted in my poetry years ago have actually happened. And our people are *listening* carefully – hundreds of them, 700 last month at City Hall in Sheffield. Normally, miners and their wives have been very difficult audiences for poetry at clubs, for example. They were always clinking their glasses, talking and never listening. Now it's all different – you could hear a pin drop in every venue we've been. It's a different experience for working people, they're coming out at the end of a recitation and giving me poems to read or to publish, their own, handwritten poems.

'So we're seeing real working-class poetry now, the people are standing up with their own poetry, their own experiences, their own feelings. The cage is broken now, they're getting out, they're free! The way I was for years, a locker poet, that's finished. It's open now, it's out, there's a sense of freedom, it's overflowing, we're out of the locker now. We've got that bit between the teeth and I don't think it will ever end.'

Sheffield, December 1984

CHRIS SEARLE

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In Search of Answers: Indian women's voices from 'Manushi'

Edited by MADHU KISHWAR and RUTH VANITA (London, Zed Press, 1984). 288 pp. £6.95 paper

Some months ago, the BBC did a programme on female circumcision in Sudan. My phone was busy for days with female friends expressing their horror: I had lived in Africa, so I must know about it – what could be done? It is not meant as a reflection on their concern that it made me uneasy. For people unfamiliar with Africa (or anywhere in the Third World) as an everyday reality, a practice such as female

circumcision can only too easily become part of an image composed of images, many of them deriving from, and ultimately recuperable by, racist myths. For it seems that there is always a danger that reports of the oppression experienced by Third World women aimed at a first world audience will be read as consonant with racism. If such reports propagate an image of black women, not only as helpless victims, but as victims of what can be interpreted as barbarous native customs, then they are as likely to divide women in different cultures through racism as to strengthen the bond of sisterhood between them.

If female circumcision is one such delicate issue, the publicity given to the victims of dowry deaths in India is another, evoking memories of 'O'-level history in which *suttee* was one of the fifteen outlandish reasons for the Indian mutiny. But how, then, are we to know of the experiences of women in the Third World? how understand their situation, let alone begin to share their struggle against it?

One important answer is to listen to the words of those women themselves, and this book provides us with such a valuable opportunity. *Manushi* is India's leading women's journal, and *In Search of Answers* is a collection by two of its founders and editors of articles, editorials and letters from the journal, dealing with those issues which press most severely upon the lives of Indian women, and to which they are in the process of seeking solutions. Here are Indian women speaking to each other, not only about what oppresses them, but about their own collective struggle against that oppression.

As is made only too clear by Madhu Kishwar in her introduction, and by the book as a whole, the sources and forms of this oppression are manifold: overwork, undernourishment, landlessness, isolation, imprisonment in her family, economic and ideological undervaluation. A large central section of the book is devoted to examining the types of violence perpetrated against Indian women. Here, it is important for western readers to note that the dowry deaths are but one of the shocking manifestations of violence against women in India. Class, caste and police violence – assaults and rapes – are other and related forms, both providing an ideological context for domestic violence of the worst sort, and cooperating materially to ignore or even connive in it.

As well as experiencing the poverty and powerlessness of the class and caste structures of Indian society, women suffer also *as* women. The most shocking evidence of this is the relative decline in the ratio of women to men in the country, as a result presumably of 'the steadily deteriorating life and conditions of women since Independence'. This gives the lie to any notion that the history of women under capitalism is one of evolutionary progress: on the contrary, women's oppression today is far more the product of capitalism itself than of any relics of feudal or pre-colonial societies, and any freedoms we have in contemporary societies have been fought for by women themselves.

In Search of Answers, as its title suggests, is much concerned with this struggle, giving wide evidence of the revolt that Indian women, against all the odds – and there are many – are engaged in. *Manushi* itself is evidence, albeit inevitably dominated by middle-class women, by virtue of their literacy alone. But *Manushi* is published in Hindi as well as English, reaches a national readership and is concerned with a variety of problems faced by women of all classes and castes, with institutional and political oppression, as well as that arising from family structures, and with the connections between them. Above all, it is concerned to end women's isolation, to demonstrate that only in coming together can they struggle effectively; as the inaugural issue's editorial put it:

We struggle on alone. We have not yet discovered the strength that comes from struggling together. That strength can come only if we do not treat our problems as 'personal' or 'private'. By doing this we trivialize them. We have to realise that our personal problems are social and political problems. We have to 'politicize the personal'.

That the personal can be politicised is nowhere more vividly demonstrated than in the collective struggle against private domestic violence. Where the law had refused to act on behalf of murdered brides, women took action together to publicise the crime, to shame the guilty husband and even to secure legal action against him. Through participation in this struggle, bereaved women found not only hope, strength and understanding, but a new self-respect and political awareness as women.

Grim and shocking as is the picture of Indian women's lives as it emerges from the pages of *Manushi*, this collection does not leave one wondering what can be done, because it's also clear that the struggle is well under way.

Canterbury

MARGARET MARSHMENT

Class and Communalism in Malaysia: politics in a dependent capitalist state

By HUA WU YIN (Zed Books, in conjunction with Marram Books, London, 1984). 230 pp. £5.95

W.Y. Hua is a Malaysian political economist and author of several works on Malaysia and Singapore. This is his first major study. His particular concern is with imperialist domination in the neo-colonial state. Although described in the blurb as a 'Marxist analysis', this book might be seen as being more marxian in character, without the rigid

and sometimes crude economic oversimplifications usually associated with marxist writers on the subject – to the author's credit and the book's benefit. *Class and Communalism in Malaysia* displays careful analysis based on extensive documentation, consisting in part of official colonial records only recently made accessible to the public under Britain's 30-year rule on secrecy. (Since Malaysia's independence was formally declared in 1957, there may be more classified material still to be made available.)

Hua shows how colonial policies have shaped current imperialist domination and state repression, in order better to serve the extractive and exploitative ends of metropolitan capital. Emphasis is placed on how the modern Malaysian state implements class rule through communalism (the ideology and manipulative practice of racial differences, in the name of racial pluralism, as a measure to divide the masses across the country). The book also deals with how the state appeals to the Malay (racial) community, particularly the petty bourgeoisie, for electoral support – predictably, along communal lines. This occurs against the backdrop of actual state policies which benefit only a tiny minority of Malays and the commercial non-Malay bourgeoisie. Class rule is thus translated into the language (or rather, practice) of racial opportunism to serve class ends. The internal contradictions of the state, ruled since independence by a coalition of communal parties dominated by the Malay faction, are also well illustrated.

The book rejects all categories of the 'dependency theory' thesis, without fully explaining why, along with the mechanistic marxism associated with Warren, and sees such items as the Poulantzas-Miliband debate as little more than general theoretical guides to the subject in question. The author deplors both the loose liberalism of pluralists and the 'narrow economism' and 'crass opportunism' – in conceding parts of the state's communalist ideology – of some Malaysian 'leftists' and 'neo-marxists', often English-educated members of the non-Chinese communities. A case in point concerns their rejection of Merdeka University, a project advocated largely by the Chinese community as a means of providing higher education to sections of the non-Malay population who would otherwise be denied such access by government policies favouring the Malays. He is also critical of Weberian and Trotskyist analyses which vary from the inaccurate, through the irrelevant, to the incoherent. Hua acknowledges the importance of social divisions (like racial or religious consciousness) other than class, but argues that these are in the final analysis determined by class rule. Here is a characteristic passage:

It is incorrect to counterpose communalism against class division. Neither the cultural determinism of the pluralists nor the economic and mechanistic interpretations of these marxists have properly

integrated class and ideology. Marxist analysis must take into account the significance of social divisions other than class but determined by class oppression, in all capitalist societies. Communal division in Malaysian society is a material reality and is utilized by the state, especially during periods of acute class struggle.

He calls for a 'National Democratic Revolution', which would combine racial unity with class struggle. A necessary initial component of this would be the fight for equal democratic rights for the non-Malay communities. Stress is continually laid on the need for political and cultural equality of the races as a requirement of such a revolution, but nothing is said about the form which the revolution might take. All throughout, there is no definition, explanation or even description of the sought-after (socialist) 'democracy' often alluded to. Many in Malaysia will be confused, for it is still widely held that the present government, whatever its faults, does preside over a (parliamentary) 'democratic' system. Clarification on this point is essential, particularly if the apparent appeal in the word 'democratic' is to be retained.

There are other faults. Some sections or chapters of the book are either misnamed or over-ambitious for the present work: for example, Chapter 4, entitled 'Class Conflict and the National Democratic Revolution', says little about class conflicts (covered at least as much elsewhere in the book) and virtually nothing at all about revolution. The index and bibliography are incomplete in parts, and a certain lack of care is evident at times concerning the presentation of data – for example in referring to 'last year' (in notes) rather than giving the precise year. The book could have benefited from closer proof-reading, with typographical and other errors that recur. There is also an inexplicable miscasting of Raja Abdullah in the last century as a foe of British imperial designs, when in his earlier, more prominent years at least, Abdullah served as a pawn of British ruling interests.

However, the merits of this book far outweigh its drawbacks. It reaches its high point with the final chapter entitled 'Social Classes and Communalism', which is really the heart of the book's concern, including as it does, sections on 'neo-colonial development', and 'state repression and communalism'. There is much that can and needs to be said about each of these vital areas, and in this sense the book is only a beginning. Nonetheless, this is perhaps the most intelligent and cogent analysis of race and class in Malaysia so far available in a single volume. Its strength lies in its originality and its sophistication – apart from its wholesale rejection of all variants of dependency theory. The communalist dangers examined here could be read as a warning to societies in which different racial groups are pressing for political separatism. It should be of importance not only to Malaysians and students of politics in the Malay archipelago, but also to the citizens of

every class-divided society in which communalism is or can be a problem. And that could mean all of us.

Leicester

BUNN NAGARA

Death Row

By MARIO HECTOR (London, Zed Press, 1984). 111 pp. \$3.95 paper

At the age of 17, Mario Hector was wrongfully arrested on a charge of murder, kept waiting for trial for two years, convicted and sentenced to death. He served eleven years – some of the time on death row – during which he wrote this book. On his release, he dedicated himself to working with prisoners. Some months later, in August 1984, he was gunned down – why is not known – even as this, his autobiography, was in press. But the book remains, a stirring testimony to his passionate fight for justice, not only on his own behalf, but on behalf of all those caught in the savagery of a penal system still run on colonial lines where the final decision over life or death still resides in the appeal courts of the former imperial power, some 5,000 miles away.

It was on December 26th 1974, that Mario Hector took part in Jamaica's first-ever prison rebellion. Prisoners awaiting execution on Death Row broke loose from their cells and took a warder hostage. They demanded, and were granted, an interview with Prime Minister Michael Manley, securing in the process a special commission of enquiry, the Barnett Enquiry, the first and only one of its kind in Jamaica's history, to examine their grievances. The actions of these prisoners provided a vital spark. But the spark was 'fuelled and fanned into a flame' which in turn was 'fanned by the collective anger of prisoners across the penal system into a raging fire of militant protest in all the major prisons' in Jamaica.

Death Row is a remarkable account of that first ever prison revolt, from its embryo stages, to the formation of PULL (Prisoners United Liberation League) to keep the struggle alive and unify prisoners with common objectives. It is also a bitter tale of everyday prison humiliations and the search for a collective human dignity amidst the 'forced degradation and animalization', the 'systematic deculturalization and accumulated frustration' of Babylon.

But Babylon is not a place or a person. 'It is a socio-political system that enables the ruling class within the society to dominate, oppress and exploit the weaker class by reason or force.' When Christopher Columbus 'intruded' upon Jamaica in 1492, he did not find a single jail there. But with the advent of colonialism, county jails and prisons, as well as the gallows and the hangman, sprang up all over the country.

Later, the white man came to rationalise his barbarism by establishing that capital punishment was a necessary deterrent.

In fact, just seven years after emancipation, in 1852, the largest slave market on the island was transformed into one of Jamaica's top security prisons, the General Penitentiary. Another prison was the dying wish of one of the island's biggest slave-owners – his vision of the future was such that he bequeathed his fortune specifically for jail-building. On these sure colonial foundations, was Jamaica's penal system built.

A slave can only wait . . . wait . . . wait . . . writes Hector in one of his darker moments. But he knows full well that the slave creates his own story, at the point at which 'oppression finally invokes collective resistance'.

One day five 'goons' come to 'mash up' a prisoner. Baker is the prisoner's name. They enter his cell and start to beat him systematically. Suddenly, a murmuring of dissent begins to form on Death Row. Soon, the murmurs turn to shouts – 'Hands off Baker' – and the shouts travel up and down the block till all hell's let loose. Then, spurred on by the anger of his fellow inmates, Baker attempts the impossible. He crawls off the floor, and fights back. Momentarily, the warders are shocked. They are not programmed for this – why doesn't Baker beg, grovel and crawl; why aren't the other prisoners terrorised into submission? A few days later, the 'goons' attempt to 'mash up' another prisoner on Death Row. This time, when the 'goon' enters the cell, the prisoner kicks over his shit-bucket. If the 'goon' wants to brutalise him, he's got to walk over his excrement to do so.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want;
 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures . . .
 He restoreth my soul . . .
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I will fear no evil.

The words of the twenty-third psalm ran like water through Mario's mind that day of his sentencing. He never killed the man . . . Surely the jury knows . . . Surely justice will prevail. Watching the mockery of the wiggled judges, the court orderly shouting 'Oyez; Oyez; Oyez; God Save the Queen' (but the Queen was safe and secure thousands of miles away), and the other participants in this real life drama, the condemned man sweats and fidgets, praying for justice. But justice does not prevail. It never does, until, that is, the slave finds the courage and the daring to fashion and forge it himself. Gradually 'I lost faith', writes Hector, 'I vomited the notion of religion from my mind. From then on I wouldn't depend on anyone Upstairs. I had one chance and I would go it alone. My future is mine.'

Civil Liberties 1984

Edited by PETER WALLINGTON (Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1984). 379pp. £6.95

Quite by chance, 1984, Orwell's *annus horrendus*, was also the fiftieth anniversary of the (English) National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL). This book, described by the editor as 'a collection of assessments of the state of civil liberty in 1984', was commissioned to mark that anniversary. So it can, one presumes, be taken as a semi-official NCCL account of the 'state of the nation'.

Various subjects are covered: freedom of speech, policing, privacy, immigration law, women, gays, youth, mental patients, nuclear power and Northern Ireland. Surprisingly, there is nothing on prisons, although British prisoners are systematically denied access to even the most basic civil liberties. Even more surprisingly, there is virtually nothing on racism, though former NCCL general secretary Patricia Hewitt says in her chapter on 'The NCCL fifty years on' that 'institutionalised racism continues to be one of the most profound civil liberties issues'. It is obviously not so profound that it requires anything more than the most superficial treatment in this book.

With few exceptions, the treatment of the subjects covered is pedestrian, unanalytical, ahistorical and dull. Many chapters bear the signs of being rushed and ill-considered, and none really manages to convey either the depth of the crisis of civil liberties or the urgency with which the rot has somehow to be stopped. The three chapters on policing, for example, consider their subjects as though in a vacuum, away from what actually happens in practice, unable or unwilling to realise that it is in that practice that the terms of such issues are set, and that it is the police who, ideologically and practically, set them.

Other chapters are scarcely more exciting. Peter Wallington provides a run of the mill account of the formal constraints on freedom of speech, but doesn't, except in passing, deal with the more important *informal* constraints and self-censorship which were clearly illustrated in the media's handling of the Falklands war and the war in Northern Ireland. In the same way, James Michael's chapter on privacy manages to depoliticise the whole question of surveillance and is solely concerned with the absence of any legal right to privacy. Similarly, although Ian Martin's chapter on immigration law – reprinted from a textbook on the subject – does provide a concise and convincing account of how British immigration controls are racist, it does not go further to explain the politics behind the law.

The shortcomings of the individual chapters cannot be put down to constraints of space. Rather, they lie in the way in which subjects have been conceptualised. The authors examine their subjects through legal spectacles: what matters for them is what happens in the courts, law

reform committees and law books. Rarely is the world in which the law operates, and which gives it form and meaning, allowed to intrude. Politics, the question of power, is completely shut out, in the hope that, if ignored, it may go away.

Indeed, this emphasis on the law and legal system is something of which the NCCL is proud. In her chapter, Patricia Hewitt says that a large part of the NCCL's work is concerned with 'justiciable rights, those amenable to being established in a court of law', although she does not explain why this should be so. Indeed, it is possible to read both Hewitt's chapter and that by Jeremy McBride, on the European Convention of Human Rights, as illustrating the severe limitations of such an approach, particularly when it ignores the political context in which it is pursued.

Ultimately, this book is less important for what the individual chapters say (most of which, in any case, is easily available elsewhere) than for what it says about the NCCL and its conception of civil liberties. Paradoxically, this can be illustrated by consideration of a question which is not examined in the book: the question of racism.

The omission of racism is not a matter of the omission of another 'issue'. It is a failure to realise that racism is central to the drift towards authoritarianism which has been taking place in Britain at least since the late 1960s. One need only look at some of the issues which have faced black people to see the truth of this: the policing of black communities by a racist police force, wholly unaccountable and seemingly beyond control; the collusion between the judiciary and the immigration authorities in their treatment of immigrants; the process of criminalisation, particularly of black youth, by the police, courts and prisons. Most important, one need only turn one's thoughts violently to the present as it is (as Gramsci once put it) to see the use of popular racism as a means of explaining and resolving political and social crisis.

In other words, the attack on civil liberties, in the broadest, most correct sense of the term, has in many cases begun with black people. And because black people have, in the main, been left to fight such battles on their own, unaided by groups such as the NCCL, the erosion of the liberties of white people has been all the easier with this first, front line of resistance broken.

All this appears to have been lost on the civil liberties 'movement', which has been unable or unwilling to understand the black experience and to take appropriate lessons from it. But then, that would require the development of a political analysis of civil liberty and the state, and the fashioning of a political response (which might include a legal strategy where appropriate). As this book shows, NCCL has no intention of taking that road. The struggle for civil liberties will have to be waged elsewhere.

London

PAUL GORDON

Only the rivers run free. Northern Ireland: the women's war

By EILEEN FAIRWEATHER, ROISIN McDONOUGH and MELANIE McFADYEAN (London, Pluto Press 1984). 343pp. £5.95

On almost every statistical scale of suffering, Northern Irish working-class people emerge as the most deprived in the UK, often in the whole of Western Europe. The rates of infant and maternal mortality, physical and mental handicap, and poverty-related illness are all very, very high. Food is more expensive in Northern Ireland than in England . . . electricity prices are 33 per cent higher than in England and gas is 50 per cent. Fifty per cent of Northern Irish dwellings are classified as 'unfit for human habitation' . . . The number of women in mental asylums in Northern Ireland is 2.82 per thousand, in England it is 1.90

The ultimate horror of such living conditions is demonstrated in the fate of a 9-year-old girl, an inhabitant of Belfast's Divis Flats, who 'was prescribed Roche 5 after she woke up one day with two rats gnawing her finger'. Like the rats, the British soldiers are no respecters of youth. A 5-year-old boy is taken into a saracen tank and questioned for two hours. At 5 years? Handicapped teenagers on a minibus outing are searched and beaten up. A crippled boy is hurled from his wheelchair and his leg broken. From the ghetto, these children will graduate either into a paramilitary organisation or into the criminal 'Hoods'. If the Hoods are caught by the RUC, they are turned into informers; if by the IRA, who police the ghettos, they could face the ultimate sanction of kneecapping.

This first chapter, 'When you're in the ghetto nobody cares' (in a book of interview and commentary), lays a firm foundation for the second, 'My son is dying on the blanket (1975-81)'. It goes a long way to explain how an 18-year-old can go on the dirty protest to demand Special Category Status rather than submit to being classed as a criminal. For these people, by virtue of being Catholic, are classed as criminals from their birth – 'how desperate do people have to be before they fight back with the one weapon remaining to them – their own bodily waste'.

Teresa Sullivan describes her son's life and his living death in Long Kesh. The Sullivans were given fifteen minutes to leave their home or be burnt out. Teresa's brother ignored the threat and was shot dead. They were rehoused in Coleraine, where the RUC harassment of her 10-year-old son, Patrick, began. Two years of stopping and questioning him, going home from school, going into town, culminated in his first arrest at 12 years old. He was interned when 16. At 18 he was sentenced to fourteen years for alleged IRA membership and possession of an armalite rifle. The fact that he had no weapon and the police

offered no evidence as to possession is immaterial. For Patrick 'is just one of the ... [estimated] 80 per cent ... convicted in the Special Courts on the basis of statements alone'. 'At 21, Patrick had spent the last four years naked and in solitary confinement ... it is four years since Patrick has seen natural light or breathed fresh air.' Books, papers, anything that would provide mental stimulation, are banned. In the concrete, sound-proofed cell, lacking even a bed, Patrick's only activity is flicking maggots under the door to annoy the screws. But in four years he has managed to read nearly half of Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*, minutely transcribed on to sheets of toilet paper smuggled in to Long Kesh in his mother's vagina.

The role of the Catholic church in Ireland's freedom struggle has been ambivalent. Catholicism in Ireland was the suppressed religion of an oppressed people, leading to a coincidence of the struggles for social, political and religious freedom. However, the chapter 'Handmaidens of the Lord' describes the other side to this coin – how women suffer because of the Church's attitude towards them. Sexual ignorance, physical shame, unwanted pregnancies, illegal abortions and male brutality to enforce the woman's place as secondary to the man's: 'For the "healthy" Catholic living which the Church promotes – with man as woman's "head", and her body owned by God and her husband – all too often means that, in reality, women's lives revolve around pain, violence and exhaustion.' But the power of the book begins to dissipate here, the interviewers becoming more intrusive. And when, in 'The road to Armagh', the interviewer begins to dwell on the tears *she* weeps with her interviewee, at that point the book loses the power to make *us* weep.

Throughout, we learn much about the way in which women have fought in Northern Ireland's war. They do not simply support their men in the Maze. Internment meant that many families and communities were being run by the women alone. Women set up the Relatives Action Committee, 'the political status campaign which is unique in nationalist history in that it was the only mass organisation started and led almost exclusively by women'. They also engaged in street protest and demonstrations: women in Armagh jail went on the dirty protest and on hunger strike, and women fight in the Republican paramilitaries. But there are, of course, Protestant women in Northern Ireland, and the authors say that they too have a place in the war. But where? Unable satisfactorily to answer this, Chapter 6 vacillates between their Protestantism and their oppression as women. The wife of a Protestant paramilitary is regularly beaten and raped by her husband brutalised by his own fascism. Mrs Paisley is interviewed to no real purpose, but simply to present a cameo of Ian Paisley stamping into the room and looking suspicious. Yet even this chapter is saved at the end by the story of Suzanne and Ronnie Bunting, Loyalists turned

Republicans who suffered at the hands of an assassination squad in 1980. Ronnie and a friend were killed, Suzanne seriously wounded.

I went on my hands and knees to try and cough up the blood, and then I saw Ronan screeching in his cot, he was fifteen months at the time, and I felt so helpless because I couldn't go to him . . . Then the two girls came from their bedroom behind me and I was spitting something out, I didn't realise at the time that it was my teeth. The girls were crying, but Fiona, who was only seven at the time, she was so sensible, she said, 'Mummy, what will I do to help you?' I tried to tell her but with all the blood she couldn't really understand me. She climbed over her father's body and went for the neighbours.

The army or the RUC are suspected of collusion in this killing since they left the Donegall Road barriers unlocked and the assassins had an easy escape route. The press, too, dipped its fingers in the blood when they tried to take the baby Ronan back into the house. 'We're wanting a photograph of him in his cot', that was the cot he'd been in when it happened, they wanted to put him back into the blood-soaked room where Noel was shot only inches from his cot . . . even now he won't sleep in that room, he goes into convulsions if I take him in there.'

The power of this book lies in the voices of the women who cry out from its pages against the injustices that they and their families have suffered as an impoverished colony of Britain. But this strength is sadly fragmented beyond the first two chapters and thereafter rises up only occasionally, being dispersed in a muddled and intrusive commentary, and a sentimental feminism. The failure of the book as a whole may lie with the tripartite authorship, or the lack of cohesion between its feminist and socialist perspectives. Nevertheless, it should be read for the anger that informs at least some of its pages, for its outraged indictment of a nation that rules Ulster with an army of occupation, crushing its people with poverty and brutality.

London

ANGELA SHERLOCK

The Salt Eaters

By TONI CADE BAMBARA (London, Women's Press, 1982).
295pp. £3.50

Gorilla, my love

By TONI CADE BAMBARA (London, Women's Press, 1984).
177pp. £3.95

The writing of Toni Cade Bambara first became available to readers in Britain in 1982, when the Women's Press published her novel, *The Salt*

Eaters. It is about the politicisation of black America in the 1960s and 1970s, from the civil rights movement, through Black Power, to the stalled incoherence of the Carter era. It is about fragmentation, and the loss of unity and direction, with the shattered psyche of the central character, Velma, symbolising the centrifugal energy unleashed by the fission of political groups – a destructive, frenzied energy, nourished on disillusion, with a locally-made apocalypse right around the corner.

Shortly before she wrote *The Salt Eaters*, Bambara had visited Cuba and Vietnam, and shed what she called her 'miseducation'. She had immersed herself in community organising and we sense that, like Velma, she 'thought she knew how to build immunity to the sting of the serpent that turned would-be cells, would-be cadres into cargo cults. Thought she knew how to build resistance, make the journey to the centre of the circle, stay poised and centred in the work and not fly off, stay centred in the best of her people's traditions and not be available to madness.' But the centre does not hold, and Velma goes mad. *The Salt Eaters* chronicles her plumbing of the depths and precarious ascent towards health in the Claybourne, Georgia, infirmary, built and maintained for a century by black people. Outside its walls, adrift in the great American emporium, activists get bought off and otherwise maimed, organisations get smashed, and those that remain must find ways to stave off despair.

After Claybourne, Georgia, the New York City of her earlier work, *Gorilla, My Love*, seems like a calm backwater. Although these short stories were written between 1959 and 1972, during the time of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X which she looks back to in the *The Salt Eaters*, there are only a few echoes here of black political struggles, and grass-roots activism. These never appear as more than an aside, from which the narrator keeps an ironic distance. In the most memorable of these stories, we see the world of the urban black neighbourhood through the eyes of a street-wise girl of 10 or 12 years, who is too high-spirited and determined ever to become a bystander or a passive victim: 'ain't nobody gonna beat me at nuthin.' We see her flinging herself at life in that fragile moment when she senses her own worth, and has not yet learned that it is futile to dream. As she grows older, we see her shedding her tough solitariness and getting on the wavelength of another person – inevitably a sister, because men betray women sooner or later. Jewel, the adult actress in 'The Survivor', finally leaves behind the protective moorings of neighbourhood and, like *The Salt Eaters'* Velma, ends almost in pieces, a reflection of America's destructive fragmentation.

By contrast, the street world of the child, though violent and often lonely, is also home. Its horizons end at the barriers of white America. Only in 'The Lesson' are the limitations of that world demonstrated to ghetto children. They are taken beyond the barriers to another planet,

a downtown toyshop, to learn that they are part of a society 'in which some people can spend on a toy what it would cost to feed a family of six or seven' – a lesson which overwhelms the child narrator who thought she had comprehended the dimensions of the possible. In a few other stories whites intrude into the black world, as bearers of the American ethic, selling either a brand of 'democracy', a new food stamp programme, or buying an old blues singer's songs. In 'The Hammer Man', they materialise as the jailers, the police who patrol the borders between black and white worlds, and who shoot down anyone who threatens their notion of how an underclass should behave. When the solitary Manny, playing his imaginary basketball game, goes 'into his gliding thing clear up to the blackboard, damn near like he was some kind of very beautiful bird', they watch with a transfixed fascination – and then haul him off to a mental hospital, where, presumably, he will learn to know his place.

The stories of *Gorilla, My Love* are vividly written and never dull. Bambara's style is more tightly controlled here than in *The Salt Eaters*, partly because she seems happier with the short story form, and partly because she is attempting much less. In these stories, one can see the early stirrings of the author's political consciousness; its later target – the America lying beyond the child's horizons.

London

NANCY MURRAY

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