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Evan Smith

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1968—Too Little and Too Late? The Communist Party and Race Relations in the Late 1960s[1]

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This article examines a turning point in the relationship between the black communities in Britain and the British labour movement, focusing upon the role of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in this relationship. While 1968 saw a great wave of industrial militancy and cultural radicalism, during which the CPGB was quite influential, this upsurge in radical activist politics did not translate into major gains in the struggle against racism in Britain. 1968 saw the tightening of immigration controls and a Labour government intent on the 'integration' of black immigrants, coupled with an increase in racist agitation on the right by Enoch Powell and the fledgling National Front, which caused problems for Britain's black population. The CPGB, one of the largest leftist parties and with a history of anti-colonial and anti-fascist activism, had the potential to be an important agent in the anti-racist movement in the late 1960s, but any appeal to black workers was subsumed by the wider industrial struggles of the period—a phenomenon that was replicated throughout the British labour movement. The inability of the trade unions and the British left to effectively address the grievances of black workers led to autonomous black political organisation, inspired by the ideas of black power and the Marxism of the national liberation struggles. This division between the (primarily white) labour movement and black workers was widened by the events of 1968 and would further consolidate throughout the 1970s. The purpose of this article is to portray how the schism between the traditional organisations of the British working class and the black communities developed, significantly demonstrated by the failure of the heightened radicalism of 1968 to produce tangible benefits for black Britons, and how the potential of the CPGB to undertake an important anti-racist role was diminished by its focus on militant labourism.

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[1] The title of this article is taken from a line from an International Socialist (IS) leaflet calling for leftist unity against Enoch Powell: 'The Communist Party, despite its many individual militants, responded to the racism too little and too late.' 'The Urgent Challenge of Fascism', IS flyer, in David Widgery, *The Left in Britain: 1956–1968* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 411–412.

When large-scale black immigration to Britain commenced in the 1940s and 1950s,[2] many black workers, having been trade unionists or politically active in their home countries, looked to the Labour Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) as viable political organisations. However by the mid-1960s, it had become increasingly apparent that the organised white labour movement, both the aforementioned parties and the trade unions themselves, had not effectively represented the interests of black workers, which resulted in the establishment of autonomous black organisations, partly inspired by 'black power' in the US and Marxist-Leninist (or Maoist) organisations in the 'Third World'. The trade unions, although the Trades Union Congress (TUC) had made declarations on paper to combating racism in the workplace, did not take specific actions on the behalf of black workers. The Labour Party, after its election victories in 1964 and 1966, had not repealed the immigration controls passed by the Conservatives under the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act and had in fact tightened the restrictions on black immigration in a 1965 White Paper. The MCF's role as an effective agent against racial discrimination in Britain was limited as it was essentially an anti-imperialist pressure group, which focused on international issues and relied on building international alliances, rather than locally based anti-racist activism. Although overshadowed by Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech and the rise of the National Front (NF), the more immediate and long-lasting event in British race relations history in 1968 was the Labour government's amendments to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which divided Commonwealth citizens into 'patrials' and 'non-patrials'. The Act effectively limited entry into Britain to 'patrials', those who could demonstrate that a recent ancestor was born in the United Kingdom, which meant that most hopeful black immigrants from the Commonwealth were now restricted from entry. Despite introducing Britain's first legislation against explicit forms of racial discrimination, the Labour government was seen by many to be pandering to racist elements in British society, by accepting the notion that the immigrants themselves were responsible for 'problems' within British race relations. With the credibility of the Labour Party and the TUC diminishing amongst black British workers, the Communist Party, as the largest organisation to

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[2] The word 'black' is used in this article to describe both Afro-Caribbeans and Asians as in most of the literature from the period studied, this is the term used, although it is recognised that the use of this term does not allude to a homogenous community between non-white Britons. See: Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in England* (Aldershot: Gower, 1987); Kalbir Shukra, *The Changing Pattern of Black Politics in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1998); Satnam Virdee, 'England: Racism, Anti-Racism and the Changing Position of Racialized Groups in Economic Relations', in Gareth Dale and Mike Cole (eds), *The European Union and Migrant Labour* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 69–89.

the left of the Labour Party and an influential body within the trade unions, had the potential to capitalise upon this disillusionment and become and important force in the anti-racist struggle.

However the CPGB was itself losing its black members during the 1960s as the Party was seen to emphasise the immediate issues of class-based industrial politics before fighting racial discrimination. 1968 was an important year for the CPGB, with the Party gaining considerable influence through the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) in the heightened industrial militancy of the late 1960s, as well as witnessing a significant explosion of cultural radicalism and the rise of new social movements, sparked by student radicalism, women's liberation, anti-Vietnam War protests, gay rights and anti-racism. On the other hand, 1968 also witnessed an increasing divide between the white labour movement and black workers and activists, with the CPGB caught in a balancing act between its traditional allies in the Labour left and the trade unions on one hand, and potentially straining its relationship with Britain's black communities on the other. The purpose of this article is to redress the historical focus of race relations in Britain in 1968, from just observing the impact of Powellism and its divisive influence to examining how the labour movement treated its black members, the role of the Communist Party in this relationship and the monumental shifts that occurred in 1968.

By 1964, the Communist Party had recovered from the mass exodus of members in 1956, with 34,281 members, recovering from 24,670 in February 1958.[3] The strategy of the CPGB's post-war activities was outlined in *The British Road to Socialism*, first published in 1951, and then republished in 1958 and 1968. *The British Road to Socialism* envisaged the transition to a socialist society coming through the parliamentary system and gaining support for the socialist cause by democratic means through co-operation with the Labour left. The process for gaining this support within the Labour Party for a Labour–Communist alliance was through the trade unions, described by the CPGB as the 'decisive force' in the Labour Party.[4] Therefore trade union work and industrial militancy, as both a long-term strategy and as an immediate measure for the protection of working-class rights and living conditions, was given the most importance by the Party. From the economic boom of the late 1940s until the introduction of the Social Contract in the mid-1970s, militant labourism was the major focus of CPGB policy and strategy.

The strategy outlined in *The British Road to Socialism* was based around a 'strong Communist Party working in full association with the Labour Party, trade unions and

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[3] 'Communist Party Membership', CP/CENT/ORG/19/04, National Museum of Labour History, Manchester (hereafter NMLH). Between February 1956 and February 1958, over 8,000 members left the Communist Party. This was in reaction the CPGB leadership's unwillingness to discuss its uncritical support for the Soviet Union during the Stalin era and then after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November 1956, as well as the dismissal of the Minority Report on Inner-Party Democracy at the 25th National Congress in April 1957. Membership figures taken from 'Communist Party Membership', op. cit.; Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism, 1920–1991* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), p. 218; Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile* (London: A&C Black, 1975), p. 193.

[4] CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism* (London: CPGB pamphlet, 1958), p. 29.

Co-operative movement',[5] which meant collaboration with the Labour left in the trade unions and in the electoral process. In elections, the Party stated it would 'always work for a Labour Government against the Tories', but it also pursued an independent electoral presence, fighting for 'Communist representation in Parliament and on the local councils, in order to strengthen the whole working class'.[6] Commitment to this strategy in the industrial and electoral fields was the beginning of what was described by CPGB historian Willie Thompson as the attempt to build a 'mass party'.[7]

Building a 'mass party' around this strategy saw the CPGB attempt to build alliances with the Labour left within the trade unions, while opposing the right-wing of the Labour government. The failure of the Communist Party in the electoral field in 1964, and then again in 1966, contributed to a shift in emphasis towards industrial opposition to the Labour government. The decade of heightened industrial militancy began in 1966 as Labour attempted to introduce a Price and Incomes Policy, which Harold Wilson called 'a necessary condition of maintaining full employment'.[8] Economists generally felt that the only way this legislation could be implemented was by 'outfacing the trade unions on some big national wage struggle'.[9] In June 1966, the CPGB supported the seamen's strike against this incomes policy, when Harold Wilson denounced the Communist Party union leaders as a 'tightly knit group of politically motivated men . . . determined to exercise backstage pressures . . . endangering the security of the industry and the economic welfare of the nation'.[10] In September 1966, the LCDTU was formed to connect the CPGB's industrial activists with non-communists in the wider labour movement, who were opposing the incomes policy legislation. The CPGB's broad left strategy brought it influence in a number of the larger unions, supporting both communist and sympathetic non-communist officials, generally opposed to the Labour government's attempts to control wage increases and union activities.

In reaction to Labour's attempts to establish state intervention in regulating strike activity, the trade union movement mobilised massive strike action and the LCDTU was used to co-ordinate this industrial action against the proposed legislation. This action against the Labour government and the apparent influence of the CPGB within the labour movement was viewed as an 'Indian Summer' for the Communist Party, where it became 'briefly a national political force'.[11] However the reality of left unity in the labour movement was that communist union leaders were frequently forced to compromise with the non-communist unionists and industrial action became more concerned with defensive measures against restrictive legislation and in favour of

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[5] Ibid., p. 30.

[6] Ibid., p. 13.

[7] Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, op. cit., p. 133.

[8] Address by Harold Wilson, in Scottish Trade Union Congress, *STUC Annual Report*, 1966, p. 405, STUC Archive, Glasgow Caledonian University Archives.

[9] 'Make or Break?', *The Economist*, 15 January, 1966, p. 163.

[10] *Hansard*, 20 June, 1966, col. 42–43.

[11] Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, op cit., p. 218.

wage militancy than any progressive or radical measures. The Party leadership's reluctance to upset their fragile broad left alliances prevented the proposal of any major radical or socialist reforms. This would have a heavy impact upon the Party's anti-racist activities and any efforts to promote an anti-racist agenda within the trade union movement. 1968 was a defining year for race relations in Britain and the British left, with the CPGB caught in the middle of an industrial militancy it did not control and its standing in the black communities diminished by the rise of autonomous black political organisation.

The 1968 Race Relations Act

The British Road to Socialism proposed using the institutions of the state, in particular parliamentary democracy, to transform Britain into a socialist society. Although the ideological and repressive state apparatuses were seen to maintain the capitalist system, the Communist Party rejected insurrectionism and advocated the use of these institutions to achieve power from within, through co-operation between the Party and the Labour left, trade unions, progressive organisations and all others oppressed by monopoly capitalism. In the struggle against racism, the Party proposed the use of the state to combat racial discrimination and to prevent the racist violence and intimidation of the fascist far right. The CPGB was supportive of the Race Relations Act that was passed in late 1965. However the Act was far too weak to effectively combat racism and the Party continually campaigned for it to be strengthened. The Act was amended in 1968, but this coincided with the Labour government placing further restrictions on black immigration into Britain. The Party viewed Labour's policies on race relations as hypocritical and contradictory. *The British Road to Socialism* attempted to extend democracy and work within the capitalist state system to implement the transition to socialism, but during the late 1960s, the institutions of the state were becoming increasingly repressive, which led to a schism between the strategies of the Communist Party and black activists.

The Communist Party described the 1965 Act as 'marred by weakness which represented a dangerous concession to the most reactionary and racially prejudiced of the Tory Party'.[12] Tony Chater claimed that the Act worked as a 'barrier against prosecution for incitement to racial hatred' as it relied on the Attorney General to initiate any proceedings.[13] Conciliation machinery was viewed as 'very desirable, but only within the framework of criminal proceedings', not as a substitute for legislation.[14] 'If such machinery becomes a substitute for legislation against racial discrimination', warned Harry Bourne, 'then full licence will be left to the racialists to carry on their foul work.'[15] Kay Beauchamp emphasised the weakness of the Act in a 1967 *Marxism Today* article:

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[12] 'Political Committee Statement on Race Relations Bill', CP/LON/RACE/01/02, NMLH.
[13] Tony Chater, *Race Relations in Britain* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1966), p. 62.
[14] Ibid., p. 63.
[15] Harry Bourne, *Racialism: Cause and Cure* (London: CPGB pamphlet, 1965), p. 12.

> The Race Relations Board recently reported that out of 309 cases referred to it, 224 referred to matters outside its powers, including 97 on jobs and 23 on housing. Of the remaining 87, 17 had been settled out of court, 2 had been referred to the Attorney General and 31 were being looked at.[16]

Throughout the Communist Party's campaign to support the Race Relations Act, there was the acknowledgement of the limitations of legislation without wider education and efforts made at local grassroots level. 'No one would pretend that such legislation, by itself alone, would be sufficient to wipe out colour-bar practices', wrote Kay Beauchamp, 'let alone to rid people's minds of the racial ideas which more than three hundred years of capitalist rule have plated there.'[17] But it was hoped that the Act 'deter those who at present practice racial discrimination' and 'restrain those . . . who deliberately incite racial hatred', as well as preventing 'the more open forms of their insidious propaganda'.[18]

The CPGB continued to call for the 'amending of the Race Relations Act to make it more effective against incitement to race hatred and against discrimination, particularly in housing and employment'.[19] It also proposed that 'it should be easier for a victim . . . to have recourse to law without having to seek the Attorney General's intervention'.[20] However as the Act was strengthened by the Labour government in 1968, this happened as more severe restrictions were placed on black immigration in Britain.

The Race Relations Act was amended in November 1968. It extended the legislation to cover property and housing, employment, including hiring, training, promotion and dismissal, as well as the provision of goods, facilities and services in areas, such as banking credit, education, entertainment and travel.[21] The workings of the Race Relations Board were revised, but the responsibility of enforcing the Act was still given to 'weak quasi-governmental bodies', with their ability to combat racial discrimination 'severely limited'.[22] Although the areas covered by the Act had been extended, which was seen as one of the major reasons for the weakness of the 1965 Act, the CPGB still saw that the government bodies established to deal with complaints of discrimination were 'without "teeth", severely restricted in effectiveness'.[23]

The CPGB pointed out that there were still 'considerable weaknesses' in the amended Act, with conciliation still preferred by the government to fines and criminal punishment, along with the fact that 'only the Race Relations Board can take

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[16] Kay Beauchamp, 'Racialism in Britain Today and How to Fight It', *Marxism Today*, (July 1967), p. 203.

[17] Kay Beauchamp, 'Colour Bar', *Comment*, 11 January 1964, p. 22.

[18] Ibid., p. 22.

[19] Beauchamp, 'Racialism in Britain and the Fight Against It', op. cit., p. 617.

[20] Bourne, op. cit., pp. 12–13.

[21] Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain* (London: Paladin, 1992), p. 219.

[22] John Solomos, *Black Youth, Racism and the State: The Politics of Ideology and Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 39.

[23] Joan Bellamy, 'Racialists are not Appeaseable', *Comment*, 27 July 1968, p. 467.

legal proceedings'.[24] The Party also took issue with the fact that the bodies established by the Act had appointed members only and made 'no provisions for coloured immigrants . . .[or] trade unionists to serve on them'.[25] The Act was seen as a 'modest step in the right direction', with the Party warning that it would 'need constant care to see that it is operated properly'.[26] The Communist Party objected to the fact that despite incitement to racial hatred being criminalised by the Act, Enoch Powell after his 'Rivers of Blood' speech, had no action taken against him, declaring that it was 'disgraceful that leading Tory politicians have repeatedly flouted the law in blatantly racialist speeches'.[27]

The government had also passed an amended Commonwealth Immigrants Act in February 1968, with greater restrictions over entry into Britain for black immigrants from the Commonwealth. In a statement on the Race Relations Bill prepared by the International Department, the Communist Party stated that 'Government policy operates in two conflicting directions'.[28] Along with strengthening the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the government also amended the Race Relations Act, solidifying Labour's attempt to integrate the black population in Britain, while restricting entry of more black immigrants at the same time. The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act reiterated the belief of the government that black immigration was undesirable and a problem, while the Race Relations Act attempted to integrate these immigrants. 'No wonder that coloured people are regarding all government-sponsored efforts to improve race relations as suspect', declared Asquith Gibbes in a report to the CPGB's Executive Committee.[29] The fact was that the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act remained and now had greater restrictions in place. This, according to the CPGB, had 'undermined confidence in the Labour Government's sincerity towards coloured people', claiming there was now 'widespread disillusionment' amongst Britain's black population.[30]

A controversial clause of the 1968 Race Relations Act concerned racial discrimination in employment. Complaints against discrimination in employment were not investigated by the Race Relations Board, but through the Department of Employment and Productivity. The reason for this, the CPGB noted, was because of collaboration between employers and the TUC, who both 'declared against legislation on the grounds that they were against interference in industrial relations'.[31] The TUC had an increasing interest in integration and an unfavourable reaction to proposals to legislative control over discrimination in the sphere of employment, 'a reaction that at times verged on outright opposition'.[32] The TUC favoured voluntary conciliation

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[24] Joan Bellamy, 'Race Relations', *Comment*, 30 November 1968, p. 756.

[25] Joan Bellamy, *Homes, Jobs, Immigration—The Facts* (London: CPGB pamphlet, 1968), p. 13.

[26] Ibid., p. 13.

[27] Bellamy, 'Race Relations', op. cit., p. 755.

[28] 'Memorandum on the Race Relations Bill', April 1968, CP/LON/RACE/02/01, NMLH.

[29] Asquith Gibbes, 'Racial Discrimination in Britain', *Comment*, 6 April 1968, p. 215.

[30] 'Memorandum on the Race Relations Bill', op. cit.

[31] Bellamy, 'Race Relations', op. cit., p. 756.

[32] Robert Miles & Annie Phizacklea, *The TUC, Black Workers and New Commonwealth Immigration, 1954–1973* (Bristol: SSRC Research Unit on Ethnic Relations, 1977), p. 21.

rather than legislation and feared that legislative control 'might allow bodies outside the trade union movement to pursue issues in an industrial situation, for which they had no responsibility'.[33] This stemmed from the traditional hostility of the TUC towards legislation being used in industrial matters and as Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea noted, the TUC 'feared that legislation to control racial discrimination in industry was the thin end of the wedge'.[34]

This lack of support for the 1968 Act by the TUC, disputed Trevor Carter, 'cannot be put down simply to traditional ... union resistance to workplace matters being resolved through the intervention of the law'.[35] For Carter, racist feelings and fears that immigrants were abusing 'the system' were 'not untypical in black peoples' experience', both outside and within the labour movement.[36] The CPGB feared that if the union movement failed to take the issue of racism seriously, black workers would 'feel that British working-class organisations are irrelevant' and this would lead to black workers joining black power organisations, 'who pose the solution as the successful struggle of all coloured peoples against all white peoples'.[37]

Despite the hostility to legislation at the executive level of the trade unions, the Communist Party still saw the labour movement as vital to the struggle against racism. The unions were important in resisting attempts by employers to divide black and white workers to make it 'easier to resist demands for better wages and conditions and make higher profits', Joan Bellamy explained.[38] However this anti-racism was still viewed within the wider struggle for socialism, based on a 'Marxist understanding of the racial question'.[39] While it was important to fight to 'end all discrimination and win equal rights and opportunities irrespective of race, colour and religion', this was part of a wider 'social and economic fight requiring the unity of all working people in bringing an end to the social and economic inferiority imposed by capitalism'.[40] This position was viewed by some black activists as having a negative effect on black workers, with Carter writing:

> My impression was always that the left was genuinely concerned to mobilise the black community, but into *their* political battles. They never had time to look at *our* immediate problems, so it became futile to refer to them. So blacks ended up in total isolation within the broad left because of the left's basic dishonesty.[41]

There were doubts amongst the anti-racist activists within the Party that the struggle against racism would be taken up as wholeheartedly as the industrial struggles at the

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[33] Ibid., p. 22.

[34] Ibid., p. 24.

[35] Trevor Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), p. 79.

[36] Ibid., pp. 79–80.

[37] Gibbes, op. cit., p. 216.

[38] Bellamy, *Homes, Jobs, Immigration*, op. cit., p. 14.

[39] Gibbes, op. cit., p. 216.

[40] Ibid., p. 216.

[41] Cited in Carter, *Shattering Illusions*, op. cit., p. 140. Italics are in the original text.

time. As Asquith Gibbes explained, 'If we cannot win our industrial members to take up this struggle as a workers' struggle, defending coloured workers and cementing the unity of the working class, then we shall not be able to win the movement as a whole for a correct attitude.'[42] The failure of the labour movement to effectively take up issues of racism in the workplace was further demonstrated in the 1970s, at Mansfield Hosiery Mills and Imperial Typewriters.

Still declaring that Labour-Communist unity was 'the key to advance on the road to socialism',[43] the CPGB's position within the militant labour movement put it in confrontation with the Labour government. The government's use of the repressive apparatuses of the state was in opposition to the Communist Party's view of the state playing a positive role in the struggle against racism. Although it had long been acknowledged that legislation was not enough to successfully combat racism, the shortcomings of the Race Relations Act saw extra-parliamentary activity being given more prominence in the Party's anti-racist strategy. As Joan Bellamy wrote, 'This is not a time for concessions to racialists and their sympathisers . . . but a time for a vigorous counter-attack through legislation, social measures and the education of public opinion.'[44]

While the CPGB still saw itself as a revolutionary party, its post-war programme proposed working within the capitalist system to implement socialism through a gradual and democratic process. This was extended to the Party's strategy within the anti-racist struggle. The Communist Party had looked to the Labour government to provide a positive role in combating racial discrimination through the Race Relations Act, welcoming the role of the state as prosecuting perpetrators of racial discrimination and racial incitement. However the Labour government's restrictions upon immigration controls, providing the groundwork for the Conservatives' 1971 Immigration Act, demonstrated that it accepted the major party consensus that the immigrants themselves were the 'problem', which offset the legislation against explicit forms of racial discrimination in public society.

The Issue of Immigration Controls

The emphasis of the Labour government during the 1960s was on the notions of 'integration' and 'absorption' of black immigrants, but the government believed that integration could not occur without immigration controls. Labour MP Roy Hattersley summarised this by declaring that 'without integration, limitation is inexcusable; without limitation, integration is impossible'.[45] The 1965 White Paper, *Immigration from the Commonwealth*, proposed that the problem was how to 'control the entry of immigrants so that it does not outrun Britain's capacity to absorb them'.[46] The result of

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[42] Gibbes, op. cit., p. 218.
[43] CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism* (London: CPGB pamphlet, 1968), p. 25.
[44] Bellamy, 'Racialists are not Appeaseable', op. cit., p. 467.
[45] Cited in Robert Miles & Annie Phizacklea, *White Man's Country Racism in British Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 57.
[46] *Immigration from the Commonwealth* (London: Cmnd. 2739, HMSO, 1965), p. 2.

this Paper was that consensus had been reached that black immigration from the New Commonwealth was undesirable and threatened social cohesion in Britain. As Roy Hattersley stated in Parliament in March 1965, 'I believe that unrestricted immigration can only produce additional problems, additional suffering and additional hardship unless some kind of limitation is imposed and continued.'[47] Speaking as 'a passionate opponent of the [1962] Act', Hattersley now claimed that 'with the advantages of hindsight, I suspect that we were wrong to oppose the Act'.[48]

The Communist Party always maintained its opposition to racially biased immigration controls and from 1962 onwards, called for the repeal of each increasingly racist amendment to the legislation. However, on the principle of immigration controls, the Party's line was much more populist. This was defined in 1965 in a Party statement on the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act:

> Every government, whatever its character, and whatever the social system, will naturally make regulations concerning immigration and emigration. This is an understandable exercise of its power by any sovereign government. The Communist Party has never stood for general unrestricted immigration, but has always opposed racialism and racial discrimination into Britain.[49]

In a statement on the 1965 White Paper, the Party declared that 'Every government makes regulations concerning immigration and emigration' as this was 'an understandable exercise of its sovereign rights'.[50] But as Harry Bourne wrote in a CPGB pamphlet published at the same time, this right was 'not a cover for the practice of racial discrimination'.[51] The CPGB called for the repeal of the 1962 Act, because it was 'not an Act introduced for normal immigration purposes but designed to introduce an element of racial discrimination into the system of immigration'.[52]

The Labour government's policy of integration featured heavily in the White Paper, which created tighter restrictions on black immigration, alongside the introduction of the first legislation against racial discrimination. Labour believed that immigration control and the Race Relations Act would ease the process of integration for black immigrants from the Commonwealth into the 'British way of life'. This process of integration, reinforced by legislation against the most overt forms of public racial discrimination, would help 'stamp out the evils of racialism'.[53] However as Peter Alexander wrote, 'Immigration control was expected to reduce racism. The reverse happened. And with increased racism came further controls.'[54]

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[47] *Hansard*, 23 March 1965, col. 380–381.
[48] *Hansard*, 23 March 1965, col. 380.
[49] 'Draft Statement on Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962', 1965, CP/LON/RACE/01/10, NMLH.
[50] 'Immigration', 1965, CP/LON/RACE/01/09, NMLH.
[51] Bourne, op. cit., p. 9.
[52] Ibid., p. 11.
[53] David Ennals, 'Labour's Race Relations Policy', *Institute of Race Relations Newsletter*, (November/December 1968), p. 437.
[54] Peter Alexander, *Racism, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Bookmarks, 1987), p. 34.

In 1967, the Kenyan government passed a law under which these British citizens of Asian descent could reside and work in Kenya only on a temporary basis. This created an increase in migration to Britain and a response from sections of the media and Conservative MPs, such as Enoch Powell, demanding that restrictions be applied to these Kenyan Asians.[55] Powell claimed that the number of Asians arriving from Kenya would be around 200,000, but the reality was a much smaller 66,000 out of a potential 95,000, with 29,000 already settled in Britain by February 1968.[56]

In late February 1968, the Labour government 'steamrollered through Parliament in three days of emergency debate' the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act with the 'sole purpose of restricting entry into Britain of Kenyan Asians holding British passports'.[57] According to the Act, British citizenship was determined if a person or one of their parents or grandparents were born in Britain. This effectively eliminated the Kenyan Asians, or any other black citizens of the Commonwealth, from being deemed British citizens. Despite the rhetoric of the 1968 Act remaining impartial and not racially biased, the practical reality of this amendment was the Labour government's intention to prevent further black immigration into Britain.

Zig Layton-Henry described the 1968 Act as the 'logical outcome of appeasement that the Labour government had adopted in order to achieve the bipartisan consensus with the Conservatives and to reduce the electoral salience of the issue'.[58] However this was more than just a pragmatic issue of 'appearing weaker than the Conservatives on the issue of immigration controls',[59] but part of a longer reassessment of British nationality after the collapse of the Empire. The long-term effect of the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was to create a distinction between the predominantly white British citizen who could claim lineage within Britain and the predominantly black Commonwealth citizen who could no longer claim to be 'British', which in turn barred the Commonwealth immigrant from entering Britain. As Paul Foot wrote, 'One of the most constant rules in the history of immigration control is that those demanding controls are encouraged, not silenced, by concessions.'[60]

The Labour government had won an increased majority in the 1966 General Election, which gave them the necessary influence to implement more significant social legislation. However the restrictions on immigration remained in place. Kay Beauchamp wrote in *Marxism Today* in 1967, 'some people thought that the Labour Government would modify their racialist policy and at least relax some of the regulations against immigrants' after increasing its majority in the election.[61]

[55] John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2003), p. 60; Hiro, op. cit., p. 213.

[56] Alexander, op. cit., p. 36; Hiro, op. cit., p. 214.

[57] Fryer, op. cit., p. 383.

[58] Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, 'Race' and 'Race' Relations in Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 79.

[59] Ibid., p. 79.

[60] Paul Foot, *The Rise of Enoch Powell: An Examination of Enoch Powell's Attitude to Immigration and Race* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 111.

[61] Beauchamp, 'Racialism in Britain Today and How to Fight It', op. cit., pp. 202–203.

However 'the opposite has been the case', stated Beauchamp and Labour, having 'pandered to the racialists', restricted immigration to 'an extent which has been harmful to Britain's economy'.[62] The two demands made by the Party during the late 1960s were strengthening the 1965 Race Relations Act and repealing the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, but the emphasis placed upon the labour movement was in the context of transforming the Labour Party through the trade unions, rather than simply campaigning for the existing government.

Vishnu Sharma described the 1968 Act as the 'White Passport' Act in the CPGB weekly, *Comment* and blame was directed at the Labour government, especially Home Secretary James Callaghan, for the 'first incontestably racialist law to be placed on the Statute Book'.[63] Joan Bellamy called the Act a 'capitulation to racism', claiming that some Labour MPs were worried about losing their seats 'if they become identified as "immigrants" candidates'.[64] 'The answer', Bellamy argued, 'is not capitulation but struggle'[65] against racial discrimination. Continuing on this theme in another *Comment* article in the following months, Bellamy asserted that 'racialists are not appeaseable' and that it was 'not time for concessions to racialists and their sympathisers',[66] which the Communist Party claimed the Labour Party had made. Calling for a 'vigorous counter-attack' to the upsurge in popular racism, Bellamy emphasised that while the CPGB would continue to call for changes to be made to legislation, it was much more important to fight racism through the trade unions and the 'need for grass roots campaigning to fight for the hearts and minds of the people', through 'social measures and the education of public opinion'.[67] While the Labour government came under intense criticism for the passing of the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the initial pressure came from Conservative MPs and the entire issue of race relations and immigration was dominated in 1968 by the racism of the Conservatives, primarily Powell after his 'Rivers of Blood' speech in April.

By the time of the National Congress in December 1969, racism was again primarily associated with the fascist organisations and the Conservatives, particularly Enoch Powell. By 1969, the focus of the CPGB's anti-racism had changed from marching against the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act and Powellism to apprehension about the intentions of the Conservatives after the 1970 General Election. The Communist Party was anxious over the continual tightening of controls as both Labour and the Conservatives made tougher proposals. As John Hostettler wrote, the Labour government was 'trying to show it [was] not to be outdone by Mr Heath who [was] trying to show he [was] not far behind Mr Powell'.[68]

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[62] Ibid., p. 202.
[63] Vishnu Dutt Sharma, 'The "White Passport" Act', *Comment*, 4 May 1968, p. 281.
[64] Joan Bellamy, 'Shutting the Door on British Citizens', *Comment*, 9 March 1968, pp. 147, 149.
[65] Ibid., p. 149.
[66] Bellamy, 'Racialists are not Appeaseable', op. cit., p. 467.
[67] Ibid., pp. 467–468.
[68] John Hostettler, 'Immigrants, Race Relations and the Law', *Comment*, 12 July 1969, p. 438.

The issue of immigration controls for the CPGB was one of the most difficult facing the Party in their struggle against racism. The fact that immigration was such a volatile topic and shaped by popular racism within British society put pressure upon the Party to propose an argument that would dispel both the economic and social fears of large-scale black immigration. The CPGB consistently opposed the immigration restrictions established by the British government because the Acts were 'in purpose and practice racially discriminatory'.[69] However, this did not prevent the Party from agreeing with the principle of immigration controls, if they were free of racial bias. The CPGB's position was therefore distinct from both the far left's call for total opposition to immigration controls and the major institutions of the labour movement to the right—the Labour Party and the TUC—who supported controls and integration. Like the Party's wider struggle for socialism, the CPGB was in a position of compromise with, and dependence on, the Labour left and trade unions to implement its policies. However the campaign against racist immigration controls was made difficult because the CPGB's traditional allies in the labour movement supported these restrictions. Therefore the Party was caught in a balancing act between alienating either the black communities who suffered the very real racial discrimination of immigration controls or the wider labour movement who were crucial to defeating racism within the white working class.

Trade Union Racism and Powellism

The CPGB saw the trade unions as vital organisations to combat racism, which would form the 'basis [for] the fight against all victimization, discrimination and exploitation of working people in Britain irrespective of their race, colour or creed'.[70] However, the unions were reluctant to take up the issue of racial discrimination at the shopfloor level, as it was the general view that immigrant workers needed to assimilate, with the TUC constantly reiterating the 'themes of "integration" and opposition to any special provision' for black workers in its race relations policies.[71] The focus on the labour movement as the primary vehicle to combat racism by the CPGB led to the Party being 'abandoned in large numbers by black activists' and as Trevor Carter wrote, 'the stubborn class-before-race position of the party during the fifties and sixties cost the party dearly in terms of its members'.[72]

Black workers had been marginalised by the official working of the trade union movement since the mid-1960s, when Asian workers in Southall had first taken autonomous industrial action against racism within the workplace at Woolf's rubber factory in 1965, with this autonomy continuing into the mid-1970s. At the same time as black workers were organising to 'resist the racist exclusionary practices that served

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[69] CPGB, *The British Road to Socialism* (1968), op cit., p. 41.
[70] Bourne, op. cit., p. 14.
[71] Miles & Phizacklea, *The TUC, Black Workers and New Commonwealth Immigration, 1954–1973*, op. cit., p. 16.
[72] Carter, *Shattering Illusions*, op. cit., pp. 62–63.

to exclude them', there were some white workers 'being mobilized by racist politicians to consolidate further divisions' in the labour movement.[73]

In April 1968, Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech caused major controversy, with Powell being dismissed from the shadow cabinet. However Powell's speech tapped into existing feelings of popular racism and exploited it for a general shift within the Conservatives to the right, as 'a significant section of Tory opinion sympathized with him'.[74] Powell's exploitation of popular racism generated much support for him with a Gallup Poll in May 1968 revealing that '74 per cent of those questioned agreed in general with his views and 24 per cent said they would like him to be leader of the Conservative Party if Edward Heath retired'.[75]

In the week following, a series of strikes occurred across Britain, most prominently amongst London dockworkers, in support of Powell, either for his racist views or his right to free speech. The response by the Communist Party was to emphasise who Powell was and what his politics were, stating that Powell was a 'diehard Tory who has never done anything to help working people' and a 'declared enemy of the trade unions'.[76] At the executive level of the labour movement, where the CPGB held significant influence, the *Morning Star* reported on official motions of opposition to racism by the trade unions,[77] but at the shopfloor level, the Party's presence was less prominent. John Callaghan has described the Communist Party members on the docks, who distributed leaflets denouncing Powell and 'bravely addressed hostile mass meetings', but acknowledged that the support for Powell demonstrated how marginal the Communist Party's influence could be.[78] With its members on the docks put 'clearly on the defensive' by the Powellite strikes,[79] CPGB and LCDTU member Danny Lyons organised for a Catholic priest to address the dockworkers. While this action was felt to be misguided by other communist dockworkers, any further action against Powell by CPGB members turned out to be very limited.

Tony Cliff, in his autobiography, highlighted the influence of the CPGB in the dockworkers' union, but claimed that the Party 'declined to use it to fight Powell', describing the use of the priests to appeal to the workers as a sign of the 'little confidence' the Party had in the dockworkers.[80] The Party's narrowing influence on the docks at rank-and-file level and its dependence on the CPGB's broad left allies in the labour movement are stronger reasons for Party's limited response to the

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[73] Satnam Virdee, 'Racism and Resistance in British Trade Unions, 1948–79', in Peter Alexander & Rick Halpern (eds), *Racializing Class, Classifying Race: Labour and Difference in Britain, the USA and Africa* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 136.

[74] Cited in Anthony M. Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 108.

[75] Miles & Phizacklea, *White Man's Country*, op. cit., p. 64.

[76] Bellamy, *Homes, Jobs, Immigration*, op. cit., p. 3.

[77] *Morning Star*, 25 April 1968, p. 1.

[78] John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951–68* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2003), p. 112.

[79] Fred Lindop, 'Racism and the Working Class: Strikes in Support of Enoch Powell in 1968', *Labour History Review*, 66:1 (Spring 2001), p. 91.

[80] Tony Cliff, *A World to Win: Life of a Revolutionary* (London: Bookmarks, 2000), p. 91.

Powellite strikers than Cliff's implication that the CPGB was intentionally apprehensive towards anti-Powell action. The strikes revealed the level of popular racism still existing within the organised labour movement and the difficulties faced by the CPGB in the struggle against racism.

Powell's 'ultimate impact' on the issue on black immigration was to shift the consensus 'further to the right'.[81] After the Conservatives regained power at the 1970 General Election, Powell's rightwards shift on immigration influenced the government to introduce the 1971 Immigration Act, which 'stopped all primary (black) immigration dead'.[82] In the late 1960s, the Communist Party saw Powell as the 'most reactionary influence in British politics' and feared that Powell 'believes he can come to power as the leader of a semi-fascist, racialist government'.[83] The response to Powell by the far right and the pro-Powell organisations established after his 1968 speech saw the potential for a mass movement based on popular racism and not tarnished with the neo-Nazism of the fledgling National Front and British Movement. Despite this potential, 'Powellism did not take on a stable or lasting organizational form'[84] and the eventual inheritors were the Monday Club, the NF and Margaret Thatcher. The CPGB reported in the *Morning Star* in February 1974 that Powell had retreated from the public eye, but his legacy was the rightwards shift in British politics, seen in 'the polarising of forces, the growing authoritarianism of the government, [and] the fielding of 54 candidates by the National Front'.[85]

Millions of workers had taken part in industrial action during the 'British upturn'[86] between 1966 and 1974, but few had been involved in any anti-racist activities, with most remaining indifferent to the concerns of black workers, while some, such as the Powellite strikers, had even supported racist politics. The reluctance of the unions to tackle the problems facing its black members led to black workers organising autonomously, a strategy that continued throughout the 1970s. During the early 1970s, several incidents of industrial action by black workers had been hampered by racist attitudes within the trade union movement, most notably the strikes at Mansfield Hosiery Mills in 1972 and Imperial Typewriters in 1974, where striking workers received little assistance, or outright hostility, from local union leaders. The reluctance of the unions to take up the issues of these strikes, often seen by the union leaders as unorganised and hastily assembled, led to what the Race Today Collective described as a 'divide between the organised white labour movement and the organised independent struggle of an Asian workforce . . . one from which there was no return.'[87]

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[81] Messina, op. cit., p. 107.

[82] A. Sinanvandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), p. 27.

[83] George Barnsby, 'Wolverhampton and Powell', *Comment*, 12 July 1969, p. 442.

[84] Martin Durham, 'The Conservative Party, the British Extreme Right and the Problem of Political Space, 1967–83', in Mike Cronin (ed.), *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), p. 89.

[85] *Morning Star*, 20 February 1974.

[86] Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (London: Bookmarks, 1988), p. 226.

[87] Race Today Collective, *The Struggle of Asian Workers in Britain* (London: Race Today Publications, 1983), p. 22.

The Rise of the National Front

Alongside Powell's attempts to foster a popular racist sentiment within the Conservatives' traditional support base, the late 1960s also saw a rise in racist agitation on the fascist far right. In February 1967, the League of Empire Loyalists and the British National Party (BNP),[88] along with several smaller anti-immigration groups, merged to form the National Front. The National Front was 'an attempt to synthesize the mass politics and economic and political programme of the BUF with the ferocious anti-semitism and racial populism of Arnold Leese', presented in a 'more respectable and seemingly rational guise'.[89] With A.K. Chesterton as its chairman, the NF tried to appear as a legitimate political party, although divided between Chesterton's elitism and support for mass politics. Chesterton saw the NF as 'a pressure group, rather than as a potential mass movement', while others, such as those who had joined from the BNP and the Greater Britain Movement, 'insisted that the NF's sights be set on a mass membership, a nation-wide and popular movement'.[90] Membership numbers were hard to define throughout the existence of the NF, but it is estimated that it had around 1,500 members at its inception.[91]

Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech allowed the National Front to exploit popular racist attitudes as Powell 'brought the language and arguments of the neo-fascist political fringe into the heart of the establishment'.[92] 'There can be little doubt', Richard Thurlow wrote, 'that the NF would not have survived if Enoch Powell had not unwittingly given it such a helping hand in its infancy'.[93] Powell's speech gave the NF a massive boost, with it claiming 10,000 members in April 1968, although *Searchlight* editor, Gerry Gable[94] estimated that it was probably around 7,000 'fully paid up' members.[95]

The formation of the National Front in early 1967 largely escaped protest from anti-fascist forces, with Nigel Copsey explaining that 'opposition to the NF in the late 1960s was mainly restricted to a small amount of militant anti-fascists who followed the pattern of covert activity undertaken against the NF's immediate predecessors'.[96] This covert anti-fascist strategy, as well as the National Front's relative obscurity,

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[88] This is not the same British National Party of today, which was established by former NF chairman John Tyndall in 1982 after the defeat of the National Front at the 1979 General Election.

[89] Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History 1918–1985* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 277.

[90] Martin Walker, 'The National Front', in H.M. Drucker (ed.), *Multi-Party Britain* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 188.

[91] D.S. Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931–1981* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 248.

[92] Thurlow, op. cit., p. 276.

[93] Ibid., p. 279.

[94] *Searchlight* was an anti-fascist journal that was published briefly in the early 1960s by anti-fascists involved in the 62 Group before it was resurrected in 1975 as a monthly magazine. Two of its co-founders, Maurice Ludmer and Gerry Gable, had been CPGB members. Gable had left the Communist Party 'over its apparent reluctance to tackle organised fascism', which the 62 Group did through direct confrontation on the streets in the early 1960s, but also in regards to the CPGB's official opposition to Zionism. Matthew Collins, 'Smashing Against Rocks', interview with Gerry Gable, *The Australian/Israel Review* (February 1999), p. 12.

[95] 'Rightist and Fascist Developments', 2 May 1969, CP/CENT/SUBS/04/16, NMLH.

[96] Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 116.

meant the Communist Party was not particularly involved in anti-fascist action against the NF. The CPGB, symptomatic of the left in Britain as a whole, was 'more concerned about the racial populism of Enoch Powell than the National Front'.[97]

Countering Powell's appeal to popular racist attitudes, the CPGB stated that the 'real enemy of all working people' was capitalism and the 'Tory and right wing Labour Governments [who] keep the system going'.[98] Powell was described by Joan Bellamy in a 1968 CPGB pamphlet as 'a diehard Tory who has never done anything to help the working people', but this did not mean he was a fascist.[99] However, by using the racist language normally associated with the fascist far right, Powell had 'deliberately chose[n] to use words that would fan the flame of hatred, words that help to create an atmosphere in which people no longer listen to rational argument and facts'.[100] Joan Bellamy stated that, 'Leading fascists were quick to recognise what Powell was doing', noting that British Movement leader Colin Jordan and Oswald Mosley were in public agreement with Powell's argument.[101]

The NF attempted to distance itself from Powell's Conservatism to some extent, but what really characterised the NF during the period from 1968 to 1974 was its use of Conservative opposition to black immigration and its extreme position on traditional Conservative ideas. A May 1969 internal CPGB memo on 'Rightist and Fascist Development' claimed that the 'most serious and dangerous organisation appears to be the National Front ... trying to take over right groups' and able to 'mobilise people quickly'.[102] However, for the CPGB, Powell was still considered 'the most reactionary influence in British politics today', with the Party declaring to its members that they must 'redouble [their] efforts to defeat Powellism'.[103]

The association between Enoch Powell and the National Front continued throughout the early 1970s. In a flyer distributed by the Westminster CPGB branch, it announced that 'fascism is on the march again', warning that it 'wears the "respectable" face of Enoch Powell', as well as appearing in 'its most naked form in the National Front'.[104] For the CPGB, the NF were 'working to strengthen the capitalist system', blaming black immigrants for the problems of capitalism and despite any appeal to the interests of the working class, 'racialism plays into the hands of the capitalist class'.[105] The aim of the NF was 'to smash the trade union movement and make it servile to the state in the interests of state monopoly capital', with 'racialism ... only the most obvious of their anti-working class policies'.[106] Essentially

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[97] Ibid., p. 116.

[98] Bellamy, *Homes, Jobs, Immigration*, op. cit., pp. 2–3.

[99] Ibid., p. 3.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] 'Rightist and Fascist Developments', op. cit.

[103] George Barnsby, 'Wolverhampton and Powell', *Comment*, 12 July 1969, p. 442.

[104] 'Westminster Communists Say ... Outlaw the Racists', CPGB flyer, London, n.d., CP/LON/EVNT/03/07, NMLH.

[105] 'Don't Be Fooled By The National Front!', CPGB flyer, London, n.d., CP/IND/KAY/03/05, NMLH.

[106] Trade Union Committee Against Racialism, 'National Front—Election Campaign Notes', CP/CENT/CTTE/02/05, NMLH.

this was viewed as the same agenda as Enoch Powell, who Joan Bellamy described as 'a declared enemy of the trade unions'.[107] The consensus was that Powell's speech had given the fledgling NF valuable exposure that allowed the fascist fringe to exploit popular racism and anti-immigration sentiment. '"Enoch is Right" became the slogan of everyone from the Tory Monday Club through the National Front out to every tinpot little nazi sect', Bob Campbell wrote in the *Morning Star* in 1973.[108] While there were differences between the various elements of the far right, 'what unite[d] all the elements of the ultra right in Britain', Campbell wrote, 'is the racist campaign on the question of immigration, and against black people as a whole'.[109]

The Rise of Black Militancy

In Britain, black immigrants had initially drifted towards the Communist Party, the Movement for Colonial Freedom and elements of the Labour Party, but support for the problems facing black immigrants 'turned out to be very limited'.[110] By the late 1960s, a black militant position had started to emerge—the idea that 'black people needed to redefine themselves by asserting their own history and culture to project an image which they would develop without white people'.[111] Although, as Kalbir Shukra noted, black power was a 'diffuse political identity', often leading to 'constant conflicts, splits and new formations' within the black militant movement.[112] Black militancy, which included both black separatist organisations and a Marxist-inspired black radicalism, 'captured and reactivated many of the disaffected activists'[113] that had been neglected by the labour movement or felt compromised by working within official race related bodies. The existing black communities, both Afro-Caribbean and Asian, came to have an important function and recognition of the importance of social ties rather than political, although as Trevor Carter states, 'the dividing line is difficult to draw'.[114] For the emerging black organisations, the Communist Party's subordination of 'race' beneath the class struggle was rejected in favour of an active acceptance of the political and cultural definition of 'race', the basis for black militancy.

The importance of black militancy for the CPGB was that it had shown black activists that there was a way to organise outside of the Communist Party.[115] The Party demanded 'absolute equality' or 'no special privileges' in co-operation with

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[107] Bellamy, *Homes, Jobs, Immigration*, op. cit., p. 3.

[108] Bob Campbell, 'Who are the Ultra Right? Pt. 1', *Morning Star*, 22 February 1973, p. 2.

[109] Bob Campbell, 'Who are the Ultra Right? Pt. 3' *Morning Star*, 1 March 1973, p. 2.

[110] Eric Huntley, 'The Left, Liberals and the Police', *Race Today*, (February/March 1982), p. 71.

[111] Kalbir Shukra, 'From Black Power to Black Perspectives: The Reconstruction of a Black Political Identity', *Youth and Policy* (Summer 1995), p. 6.

[112] Ibid., p. 6.

[113] Carter, *Shattering Illusions*, op. cit., p. 62.

[114] Ibid., p. 63.

[115] Trevor Carter, interviewed by Mike Squires 21/2/2000, CPGB Biographical Project, British Library, C1049/26/01-09, tape 09.

black militants.[116] However black militancy, as expressed in *Black Liberator* (albeit a 1970s publication), was concerned with the white left's 'pervasive need to "integrate" the Black class struggle under their organizational/political domination'.[117] As Avis Brown wrote for the influential *Race Today* journal, black militancy was 'subsumed to the white working class strategy' because of the 'confused historical position in which black people find themselves in white capitalist society'.[118] 'The capitalist exploitation of blacks is veiled by racial oppression', wrote Brown and the result is a contradictory consciousness, 'as a class and as a race'.[119]

For the Communist Party, black power was 'seriously compromised by the lack of class analysis implied in the concept'.[120] The Party was also suspicious of black militancy due to its revolutionary approach outside the established trade union movement and its inclusion of violent revolutionary rhetoric. In an internal document prepared by the International Affairs Committee, the Party lamented the various black groups who 'expressed their opposition to integration within the British community and advocated ... more militant action against white racialism'.[121] The Communist Party saw the links between black militants and Trotskyist and Maoist organisations as 'strongly anti-Communist' and associated 'black power' with 'the "thoughts of Mao tse Tung", with the writings of Che Guevara and with confused versions of Trotskyism'.[122] The Communist Party was criticised in *Black Liberator* for its 'primary expression of Labourism', where the CPGB continued to support voting for the Labour Party, 'whilst patiently "raising class consciousness" and "politicising" the masses inside this labourist hegemony'.[123] On the other hand, the Communist Party stated that immigrant organisations 'advance ... on the basis of genuine unity' that could only come through 'close co-operation with the Labour and progressive movement', with black militancy, seen to 'embark on the dangerous path of "all blacks against all whites" and could lead to serious consequences'.[124] In a letter from Jack Woddis to the Party's Press and Publicity Department, it was proposed that in CPGB literature, black power organisations should not be mentioned by name, instead broadly stating that 'immigrant organisations themselves have an important role to play'.[125] However these 'immigrant organisations' mentioned by Woddis almost certainly meant the progressive-liberal and race relations bodies that the CPGB approved of and not the revolutionary groups with connections to the far left or black separatism.

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[116] Willie Thompson, 'Black Power', *Cogito*, n.d., p. 2, CP/YCL/21/01, NMLH.

[117] A.X. Cambridge & C. Gutzmore, 'The Industrial Action of the Black Masses and the Class Struggle in Britain', *Black Liberator*, 2:3 (1974), p. 199.

[118] Avis Brown, 'The Colony of the Colonized: Notes in Race, Class and Sex', *Race Today* (June 1973), p. 169.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Thompson, 'Black Power', op. cit., p. 4.

[121] International Affairs Committee, 'Racialism and "Black Power"', 10 May 1968, CP/LON/RACE/02/01, NMLH.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Cambridge & Gutzmore, op. cit., p. 199.

[124] International Affairs Committee, 'Racialism and "Black Power"', op. cit.

[125] Letter from Jack Woddis to Nora Jeffrey, 30 April 1968, CP/LON/RACE/02/01, NMLH.

In a 1969 article, Willie Thompson acknowledged in the Young Communist League journal *Cogito* that what justifies black power is 'power to combat persecution' because the 'racial line represents certain social facts'.[126] This constituted a significant step within the Communist Party's attitude towards issues of 'race' after coming into contact with the rise of black militancy, that despite its falsity as scientific fact, 'race' was a political and social classification that formed a necessary partner in the struggle against exploitation and could not be ignored. This was seen in the rise of new social movements, such as women's liberation, youth politics, gay rights and anti-racism, which generated a cultural radicalism that differed from the industrial militancy that was also on the 'upturn' in 1968. The potential of these new social movements would have an enormous impact upon the Communist Party during the 1970s.

Anti-Racism as a New Social Movement and the CPGB

The new social movements were not rejections of class struggle or without trade union support, but worked outside the organised labour movement and demanded immediate actions to redress inequalities and discrimination within the capitalist system. The move by those radicalised in the late 1960s away from what John McIlroy described as the 'old axis of the unions, Labour Party and CP' did not mean that class-based activism had become invalid.[127] However there was a perception among the younger radicals that these traditional organisations were too culturally conservative. Many of those radicalised joined the International Socialists and the International Marxist Group (IMG), who competed with the CPGB for support among students and influence in the new social movements.

While the concerns of these wider social movements were being recognised within the CPGB as important political issues, the majority of the Party membership was white. The Party had extremely limited success in recruiting black workers and the problem of few black members made further recruiting difficult. Geoff Andrews suggested this was partly a generational problem, mirrored in other political parties, which meant that despite the Communist Party's anti-colonialism drawing in members from the Commonwealth during the 1950s, membership declined throughout the 1960s and 1970s, indicative of 'significant generational differences'.[128] Counter to the rise of black militancy and black separatism, the CPGB advocated the 'urgent need of white-black unity' based around black organisations, white progressives and the wider labour movement.[129] However the correlation between Party activism and wider anti-racist campaigning was not straightforward and despite its co-operation and influence in some organisations, recruitment of black members

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[126] Thompson, 'Black Power', op. cit., pp. 4–5.

[127] John McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party and Industrial Politics', in John McIlroy, Nina Fishman and Alan Campbell (eds), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics vol. II: The High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964–79* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 224.

[128] Geoff Andrews, *Endgames and New Times: The Final Years Of British Communism 1964–1991* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2004), p. 158.

[129] John Williamson, 'The Meaning of Black Power', *Comment*, 11 November 1967, p. 713.

was minimal. Those who did join the CPGB found it difficult to work within the Party framework and as a result, the Party 'failed to penetrate very deeply into the immigrant communities'.[130]

The new social movements were important for revitalising the cultural radicalism of the late 1960s, but the CPGB had to now compete with the International Socialists and the IMG, who were able to attract people looking for a more revolutionary programme. These new social movements saw some within the CPGB (especially in the Young Communist League) attempt to involve those who were alienated by the economic and class based focus of militant unionism. However in 1968, as the LCDTU experienced important victories against the Labour government, there was still much optimism for the CPGB's industrial strategy. It was not until the economic crisis of the mid-1970s and the introduction of the Social Contract that those motivated by (or sympathetic to) the new social movements were able to influence Communist Party politics. However by this time, the CPGB seemed to be on the verge of decline. Amongst the black communities, the CPGB's stature by the mid-to-late 1970s was also weakened by the failure of the white left and the labour movement to effectively represent black workers' demands or take practical measures to combat racism in the workplace.

1968 was a watershed year in the history of the CPGB and in race relations in Britain. The Communist Party was optimistic about its political programme, based around the broad popular alliance advocated in *The British Road to Socialism*, due to the significant victories of the trade union movement against the Wilson government, with the CPGB holding considerable influence through the LCDTU. However, the Party was still losing membership and now had competing political groups on the Trotskyist and Maoist left (difficulties that were exacerbated by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968). While the CPGB seemed to be gaining an influential role in the heightened industrial militancy of the late 1960s, its impact upon black workers and the anti-racist movement was decreasing. In the 1950s, the CPGB had been an attractive organisation for black immigrants, but the subordination of the problems facing them to other immediate issues of militant labourism saw many black workers frustrated with the Party, as well as the rest of the white labour movement. By the late 1960s, ideas of black power and black autonomous militancy demonstrated to black workers that they could organise outside of the traditional organisations of the white working class. There were immediate issues facing Britain's black communities in 1968 and the CPGB attempted to address them, but their dependency upon the Labour Party and trade unions inhibited their actions, alongside a growing distance between the CPGB and black workers and activists. The schism between the CPGB and its potential allies in the black communities only grew further apart during the 1970s. This article has demonstrated that these divisions in the 1970s and 1980s had long been developing and the late 1960s saw these divisions widening and becoming more defined. The issues facing Britain's black population in

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[130] Carter, *Shattering Illusions*, op. cit., p. 111.

the post-war period—immigration controls, racial discrimination (and legal efforts to curb it), the demonisation of black immigrants by politicians, fascist agitation, the failure of the trade unions to combat racism on the shopfloor—were especially decisive in 1968 and as demonstrated in this article, the efforts of the CPGB in these areas were limited, for a number of reasons. This article has shown that the optimism and celebration of 1968 for its industrial militancy and cultural radicalism belies the fact that the 'upturn' of the late 1960s only assisted a section of the British working class, while Britain's black communities were further divided from the organisations of the British labour movement. The CPGB, as an influential leftist organisation and with a legacy of anti-colonial and anti-fascist activism, lost its potential to alleviate this division, significantly demonstrated through the events of 1968.