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# From Behind Closed Doors to the Campaign Trail: Race and Immigration in British Party Politics, 1945-1965

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From Behind Closed Doors to the Campaign Trail:  
Race and Immigration in British Party Politics, 1945-1965

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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Nicole M. Chiarodo

ABSTRACT

Colored immigration from the New Commonwealth became a highly discussed issue in British party politics immediately following the Second World War, but in an effort to sustain Great Britain's imperial status, to portray the nation as a new enlightened force, and in reaction to the race issues taking hold in the American South, political elites moved to keep their debates concealed from the public. In this thesis, I investigate the positions of Labour and Conservative governments and the circumstances surrounding the emergence of race and immigration into the public sphere. Moreover, I examine the effects of its arrival. While the introduction of the British Nationality Act in 1948 by the Labour government might suggest a progressive and tolerant party focused on equality between all British subjects, and the restrictive legislation of 1962 indicates a Conservative party focused on restrictive, racist policies, thorough examination of the debates between the political elite and a clear understanding of the current state of affairs offers a different story. Immediate postwar policies were formed in the interest of shoring up empire, but as Britain began to move closer to Europe, realizing great power status might be beyond its capabilities, the importance of empire waned. Resultant discussions of restricting entry into Britain and increased racial tensions moved the

debates from behind closed doors and into the public gaze. Party positions on the immigration became evident in the 1964 general election. The issue once relegated to private discussions between the political elite could now win or lose an election.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1964 General Election in the small West Midlands town of Smethwick, Shadow Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker was unseated by a young Conservative school teacher by the name of Peter Griffiths. The fact that the Labour MP of almost twenty years had been defeated in a year when national elections swung towards Labour was only part of the story; it was the openly racist campaign led by Griffiths that grasped the attention of party leaders and constituents alike. The issue was not the Conservative school teacher's position on immigration, but rather that it was used as his election platform, thus discussed openly and, for the first time, made a prominent part of a general election.

Politicians had been debating colored immigration since the end of the Second World War, but in a bipartisan effort to sustain Great Britain's imperial status, to portray the nation as a new enlightened force, and in reaction to the race issues taking hold in the American South, political elites moved to keep their debates concealed from the public. With the British electorate becoming more aware of incidents abroad and increased racial tensions at home, the issue had slowly been boiling over into the public gaze, but with Griffith's win against the incumbent it became suddenly clear that taking a stance on immigration could be a vote getter- or loser.

Race had long been an issue in the British Empire. Fueled by commerce and justified by Christianity and a civilizing mission, at its height British rule spread across a quarter of the globe, presiding over one fifth of its diverse population. The nature of such rule was adapted to local conditions; possessions were governed differently based on their perceived capability for self-rule. Where the majority population was white, or where the minority of white inhabitants were economically dominant, policies favored progress towards self-government. For instance, the Gold Coast of Africa was under authoritarian rule by British officials while Canada exercised the right to self-government in all but foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> As the duke of Newcastle noted, responsible government was “only applicable to colonists of the English race.”<sup>2</sup> Deemed uncivilized, colored people were determined unprepared or even incapable of self-government and in need of British guidance. With little to no regard for native culture and customs, Christian missionaries believed it their humanitarian duty to spread European civilization and modernization to those considered to be lesser peoples.

The racial attitudes that dictated rule abroad were duplicated back home. Britain has always been a multi-cultural society, albeit the nineteenth-century cultures were predicated mainly on class. With great disparity in British society, members of different classes found little common ground. Gentlemen and manufactures, stockholders and factory hands had little to not contact with one another. But as different as Britain’s classes were, they did share a common understanding of the superiority of British

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1970* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 151 (1858) in Porter, *The Lion’s Share*, 29.

civilization.<sup>3</sup> Bernard Porter argued that the arrogant belief that all peoples should advance and be measured according to the British yardstick is based not on their prejudices against these peoples, but rather on their understanding of their own nation's evolution.<sup>4</sup> British history dictated progress from savagery to civilization which the middle classes applied to other cultures in order to explain their differences.<sup>5</sup> This shared understanding of cultural supremacy was used to bind British society, as racial identity served as a common denominator amongst British elites and working class alike, providing a connection without need for reordering society. Their identity as Anglo-Saxons constructed to differentiate the English from the rest of Europe was now used to separate them from the colonial 'Other.'<sup>6</sup> Thus, the idea that the British white man was superior to the colored colonial bound British society together. The agricultural worker may be inferior to the international banker, but he ranked above the native simply by virtue of his Anglo-Saxon heritage, or Britishness.

Linda Colley suggests that British national identity was an invention forged mainly by war. In repeated conflict with France from 1689 to 1815, Britons were forced to confront an obviously hostile 'Other' against which they formed a collective identity.<sup>7</sup> As Peter Sahlins wrote, national identity "like ethnic or communal identity, is contingent and relational: it is defined by the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and to implicit negation, the other."<sup>8</sup> In short, we define ourselves by whom or what we are not. First defining themselves as Protestants struggling for survival

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists, Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>7</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989): 271 in Colley, *Britons*, 7.

against a Catholic power, Britons later defined themselves “in contrast to the colonial peoples they conquered, people who were manifestly alien in terms of culture, religion or color.”<sup>9</sup> As the threat of militant Catholicism diminished, the ‘Other’ took shape in the forms of a hostile Continental Europe and exotic overseas empire.<sup>10</sup>

With the threat of danger gone after the Second World War and in face of imperial decline, Britain was looking for a something new against which it could define itself. The focus moved away from an imperial identity; the option of developing a “new identity within a multiracial Commonwealth was being rejected in favor of more traditional modes of belonging, rooted in myths of little England.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, Britons looked within their own shores in search of a new identity, and, consequently to find a new ‘Other.’ With colored immigration into the United Kingdom on the rise, it was to the black immigrant that Britons turned.

The notion of what it meant, in a world-political sense, to be British had to readjust and in that painful readjustment there developed a much more exclusive concept of citizenship and a narrower vision of the kind of society Britain could become. The narrowing of vision took many forms and it is hardly surprising in a society with a long colonial history that a redrawing of the emotional boundaries and images of nationhood would for many people take distinctly racist forms.<sup>12</sup>

By the Second World War there were an estimated 7,000 non-white residents, mainly colonial seaman from the First World War, permanently settled in the port towns of Liverpool and Cardiff, and in Manchester and London’s East End.<sup>13</sup> With the outbreak

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<sup>9</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> A colonial correspondent, “African Attitudes,” *Twentieth Century* 151 (1952): 19-25 cited in Chris Waters, “Dark Strangers in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963.” *The Journal of British Studies* (1997): 214.

<sup>12</sup> Bill Williamson, “Memories, Vision and Hope: Themes in an Historical Sociology of Britain since the Second World War,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (1998): 170.

<sup>13</sup> Figure taken from I. Spencer, “World War Two and the Making of Multiracial Britain,” in *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain*, ed. P. Kirkham and D. Thomas

of war in 1939 the situation changed. Britain found herself in need of labor in the munitions factories and services. Turning to her colonies, the government facilitated migration to the United Kingdom. Over 10,000 West Indians were recruited to serve as ground crew members in the Royal Air Force in Britain; thousands of colonial seamen joined the merchant navy and a significant number of West Indians, Asians and Africans served with the Allied forces.<sup>14</sup>

But the British government never desired nor expected the non-white colonials who came to Britain to support the war effort to stay. The Colonial Office anticipated they would return to their place of origin as ‘good-will ambassadors,’ strengthening ties between the mother country and her imperial subjects. However, working in Britain or serving abroad with the Allied forces broadened the horizons of those devoting themselves to the Allied cause. They saw opportunity in the United Kingdom. The work they had done during the war was with great purpose; they were part of the national war effort and well received by the British public. Colonial laborers were not faced with the racial prejudice and discrimination in housing and employment experienced by colored people settled in Britain before the war. However, though welcome to work and reside in the United Kingdom in order to help the cause, it was never assumed that colored individuals would set up permanent residence. Furthermore, British tolerance ended when it came to relations between black men and white women. Any potential ‘darkening of

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(1995), 209 cited in Sonya O. Rose, “Race, Empire and British wartime National Identity, 1939-45” *Historical Research* (2001): 222.

<sup>14</sup> Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, Race, and Race Relations in Post-War Britain* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992): 11.

the residents of the metropole' was seen as repugnant. "Being British in Britain still meant being white."<sup>15</sup>

By 1945 the colored population in Britain was estimated between 10,000 and 30,000.<sup>16</sup> Unemployment was high in colonies such as Jamaica, averaging between 20 to 35 percent, thus colonials headed to Britain in search of a decent paying job.<sup>17</sup> But as Kathleen Paul noted, the decision of West Indians to migrate to the United Kingdom was based on more than just economics. Having occupied the region for centuries, the British encouraged colonials to think of Great Britain as the center of 'their' empire, thus their identity was very much tied to a sense of Britishness. With a good grasp of the English language and the nation's history, colonials considered themselves British, therefore, migrating to the 'mother country' was "somewhat of a homeward journey."<sup>18</sup> But those awaiting their arrival did not share this sentiment. As Paul explains, competing notions of Britishness existed. The formal nationality policy, to which colonial subjects subscribed, regarded all residents of the Empire as equal and was constructed to maintain and justify imperial control. The informal policy, also devised as a means of imperial justification in that it deemed European races and cultures superior to others, was based on a racialized understanding of the world. "This informal identity restricted Britishness to white residents of the United Kingdom."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rose, "Race, Empire and British wartime National Identity," 226.

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997): 113.

<sup>17</sup> Ceri Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain: A Social Geography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969): 2, 23-5 in Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 114.

<sup>18</sup> Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 114.

<sup>19</sup> Kathleen Paul, "'British Subjects and 'British Stock': Labour's Postwar Imperialism" *The Journal of British Studies* (1995): 239.

As West Indian immigrants continued to arrive in Great Britain, concern and hostility amongst the political and social elite increased. Those arriving post war were no longer seen as valuable additions to the wartime work force or armed services, nor were they brought in by the Colonial Office; rather they remained beyond its public control. Black migrants were deemed likely to provoke ‘problems,’ to incite racial conflict. They were labeled as “quarrelsome, lazy, unskilled and unenterprising.”<sup>20</sup> While it is difficult to ascertain overall public opinion, it is likely that Britons of all social classes were influenced by the nation’s colonial and imperial past and those ideas that legitimized Britain’s superior role throughout the world. But the political elite remained resolute in portraying Britain as a tolerant nation, one that was more tolerant than white Americans and certainly less racist than the Nazi regime they had served to defeat. The government was determined to present a national image that reflected an open-minded, liberal Britain that welcomed colonial peoples as equal citizens of the empire/ commonwealth and would be granted independence once they were ready. “But that independence was always seen as involving a commonwealth of nations- that is retaining a political tie to Britain.”<sup>21</sup>

The continued flow of colored immigrants to the United Kingdom after the Second World War ushered in a new era in British immigration policy and with it came new challenges to Britain’s political elite. It was clear to both the Conservative and Labour parties that Britain could not afford to have her reputation as a beneficent colonial power diminished by the issue of race and existence of color bars, thus debates regarding the status and restriction of colored immigrants were kept behind closed doors. But as

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<sup>20</sup> Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, 35-36.

<sup>21</sup> Rose, “Race, Empire, and British Wartime National Identity,” 226.

Britain's desire for great power status diminished, so did the need to placate those abroad. A nation for so long defined by its imperial role turned its focus inward- imperial identity waned and the notion of Britishness defined solely by those living within the United Kingdom flourished. There was no place within this new model for the colored immigrant, as being British in Britain still meant being white. Opposed to any notion of a multi-cultural society, the government began discussions of restrictive legislation. Coupled with a perceived increase in racial violence, these debates heightened public awareness, thus the immigration issue began its move towards the public arena.

The young school teacher in Smethwick capitalized on the new found importance of race and immigration and Griffith's overwhelming win made it clear that the restriction of colored immigrants into the United Kingdom was a critical issue amongst the British electorate. The bipartisan effort to keep immigration out of public politics was being challenged. Making it clear that each party would have to take a position, the 1964 election marked a brief hiatus from any bipartisan efforts to conceal the race and immigration issue. No longer concerned with imperial status or a workforce to rebuild Britain, the Conservative and Labour parties were able to support restrictive legislation. But while both parties quickly realized that while taking a firm stance against colored immigration could certainly produce votes, they also discovered it could alienate a significant part of the electorate, thus the bipartisan effort to conceal the issue resurfaced.

## CHAPTER ONE

### IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

The Labour government's position towards Commonwealth immigration immediately following the Second World War was in part determined by the acute labor shortage Britain faced in the agricultural, coal mining and textile industries. In order to spearhead the reconstruction of the nation, it was vital the Atlee government find the means by which to rebuild Britain's workforce. In search of a short term solution, the administration formed a Foreign Labour Committee to take into consideration the increased importation of foreign labour.

By the end of 1946 the Cabinet Manpower Working Party reported an estimated labour shortage of 1,346,000.

<sup>1</sup> The Atlee government contemplated several means by which to reduce the deficit including appeals to older workers and women to remain or return to the workforce; initially it was determined that the importation of foreign labour would pose a 'problem.'<sup>2</sup> The issue of race and the biological implications of immigration were part of Parliamentary debates surrounding migration from the start. The Cabinet Foreign Labour Committee determined, "The question of utilising foreign labour obviously raises many

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Man-Power Working Party Memo, 30 November 1945, CAB 134/510 in Shirley Joshi and Bob Carter "The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain" *Race & Class* (1984): 56.

<sup>2</sup> Joshi, "The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain," 56.

delicate social and political issues and these would have to be considered carefully.”<sup>3</sup>

Ministers were wary of the long-term consequences of recruiting alien labor, advising that “any material increase in the foreign population of this country” be considered very carefully due to “the demographic issues involved.”<sup>4</sup>

By 1947 there was bipartisan support for increased migration based on the argument that immigration was necessary to resolve the labour shortage.<sup>5</sup> But Parliamentary debates on migration were not solely concerned with economics. It was argued that “immigration on a large scale into a fully established society like ours could only be welcomed without reserve if the immigrants were of good human stock and were not prevented by their religion or race from intermarrying with the host population and becoming merged in it.”<sup>6</sup> Home Secretary Chuter Ede remarked that “the intake could be limited to entrants from the Western countries, whose traditions and social backgrounds were more nearly equal to our own.”<sup>7</sup> With a strong preference for European workers, the government favored the importation of Polish and Yugoslavian laborers under the pretext that white Europeans could be easily assimilated. It was argued that they were made of “the spirit and stuff of which we can make Britons,”<sup>8</sup> and they could be “assimilated into the British people, to become acquainted with, and to follow, the British way of life.”<sup>9</sup>

During the debate on displaced persons, one Conservative MP claimed that “there are the

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<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Foreign Labour Committee Minutes (CFLC), CAB 134/301 in Joshi, “The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain,” 56.

<sup>4</sup> LAB 13/ 1005 Notes on an Interdepartmental Conference on the Welfare of EVWs, 18 November 1948 in Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997): 79.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Paget, 433, House of Commons Debates, col. 756 (14 February 1947) in Robert Miles “Nationality, Citizenship, and Migration to Britain, 1944-1951” *Journal of Law and Society* (1989): 432.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Population*, op. cit., n. 49, p. 124 in Miles “Nationality, Citizenship and Migration to Britain,” 434.

<sup>7</sup> CAB 134/301 FLC (46), 1<sup>st</sup> meeting, 14 March 1946 in Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 83.

<sup>8</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5<sup>th</sup> ser., [1947], v. 433, c. 386-87 in Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 85.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, [1947], v. 433, c. 386-87.

strongest possible ethnographical reasons for having an infusion of vigorous new blood from overseas at the present time,” noting that “we have very greatly benefited... from other foreign blood at different times in the course of our history.”<sup>10</sup> References were made to “stock” and “race” claiming the biological advantages and suggesting that the British government “act quickly [and] get the best of the pick.”<sup>11</sup> By instituting racialized criteria to determine which workers were considered the best ‘stock’, the ‘source of supply’ was limited to Europe (with the exception of Ireland).

In search of cheap labor, the Atlee government turned towards Polish soldiers who had fought under British command during the war and were still in military camps throughout Europe. Such troops remained the financial responsibility of the British, thus the government moved to solve two problems at once by offering Poles work in construction, agriculture and mining. In May 1946 the government established the Polish Resettlement Corps to facilitate their entry into British society; officers from the Ministry of Labour served to guide Poles into civilian employment.<sup>12</sup> But shortages continued forcing the Atlee government to look elsewhere for free labor. Citing the success of the Polish workers, the administration advocated the importation of ex-prisoners of war and forced labor and Jews from Nazi concentration camps in West Germany and Austria. In September 1945, approximately 1.8 million displaced persons (DPs) were scattered

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Lindsay, House of Commons Debates, col. 758 (14 February 1947) in Miles “Nationality, Citizenship and Migration to Britain,” 433.

<sup>11</sup> Sir Arthur Salter, House of Commons Debates, col. 758 (14 February 1947) in Miles “Nationality, Citizenship and Migration to Britain,” 433.

<sup>12</sup> Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 68.

across Europe.<sup>13</sup> Employing aggressive campaign tactics to lure labor, the British government issued work permits to foreign labor at a rate of 35,000 per year.<sup>14</sup>

Upon arrival, refugees were required to sign contracts accepting work assigned by the Minister of Labour. They were directed to employment in agriculture, textile production, coal mining and domestic service. Initially restricted in the work they could accept, after three years of residence, such restrictions were lifted.<sup>15</sup> Due to the success of alien recruitment and a continued labor shortage, by Spring 1947 government officials began offering foreign laborers permanent settlement within the United Kingdom. This offer was extended based on the idea that Poles and other Europeans could become British. With a clear preference for importing white labor from the start, it was suggested that white workers were considered more suitable for the industries where labor was needed, but it was also assumed that they could easily assimilate into British society. Regardless of differences in culture, language and politics, the British elite believed these laborers could become British solely based on their common genetic makeup.<sup>16</sup>

While European migrant workers may have been required to accept only specific jobs in designated industries and offered substandard government housing, they received better treatment than the British subjects who arrived from the colonies and Commonwealth. These migrants represented another source of labor, albeit one that was ignored presumably because they were not considered of ‘good human stock.’<sup>17</sup> In fact,

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Wyman, *DP: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989) in Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 71.

<sup>14</sup> LAB 13/ 1098 Employment of Foreign Women in Domestic Employment in the United Kingdom, Preliminary Conference on Migration, 8 April 1950 in Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Tannahill, *op cit.*, n. 35, pp. 81, 133; E. Stadulis, “The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom” *Population Studies* (1951/2): 213 in Miles “Nationality, Citizenship and Migration to Britain,” 431.

<sup>16</sup> Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 85.

<sup>17</sup> Miles “Nationality, Citizenship and Migration to Britain,” 434.

in 1948, when Geoffrey Isaacs, the Minister of Labour was informed that a ship carrying “some hundreds of West Indians, many of them ex-service men skilled in various trades” and in search of work was on its way to Britain, the Minister replied that the men would be sent to local employment exchanges, but that he could “give no assurance that they could be found suitable work” and that he hoped “no encouragement would be given to others to follow their example.”<sup>18</sup> When asked if the government would make arrangements for these “British citizens in a strange land,” he rejected the notion stating that, “If they suffer any inconvenience, the blame will be on those that sent them not on those who receive them.”<sup>19</sup> The British government essentially extended the benefits of membership to aliens deemed acceptable for assimilation based on their racial makeup while denying such rights to their own citizens. Political decisions were clearly based on ideological assumptions, as the Labour Government chose to recruit alien labor from the Continent while failing to extend the same policies to British subjects of color.

The government moved to distance itself from any racial prejudice and the issue of ‘colored immigration’ claiming there was “no colour prejudice at all with regard to [West Indian] employment.” But debate ensued behind closed doors. A correspondence between Sir Harold Wiles and M.M. Bevan on 8 March 1948 indicates that consideration was given to the idea of using ‘surplus colonial manpower’ to meet the labour shortage. Wiles suggested that:

Unlike ex-prisoners of war or other aliens, I assume there could be no authority for deporting coloured British subjects if they felt they wished to stay here and take their chance. If there were any assurance these people

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<sup>18</sup> *Hansard*, 8 June 1948, (451) 1851-3 in Joshi, “The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain,” 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

could in fact be sent away when they had served their purpose, this proposition might be less unacceptable.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, he argued that he “did not think any scheme for the importation of coloured colonials for permanent settlement should be embarked upon without full understanding that this means that a coloured element will be brought in for permanent absorption into our own population.”<sup>21</sup>

However determined the Labour government was to curb the flow of colored migration from the colonies, as Arthur Creech-Jones, MP pointed out when asked if the government intended on establishing a system by which West Indian migrants could be vetted out and it ascertained beforehand whether they were suitable for employment in Britain, British leaders could not “interfere with the movement of British subjects.”<sup>22</sup>

While centuries of colonialism and an informal national policy deemed colonial subjects inferior and unworthy of certain British rights, British law stated otherwise- law that was introduced by the same Labour government.

The Atlee administration’s proposal for legislation defining the status of British subjects was not based on a new found philosophy of equality, but rather in an effort to shore up Empire at the close of the Second World War. By 1945 Britain's position as a world power had been diminished. Most of its manufacturing infrastructure was destroyed, its export economy severely crippled, and its war debts totaled over £4.7 billion. Economically exhausted, its overseas assets had been liquidated, leaving its ability to influence international affairs severely hampered. Determined to preserve its role alongside the U.S. and Soviet powers, the empire took on new significance in the

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from M.A. Wiles to M.M. Bevan, 8 March 1948 in Joshi, “The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain,” 59.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *Hansard*, 15 June 1948, (452) 421-2 in Joshi, “The role of Labour in the creation of a racist Britain,” 58.

postwar era.<sup>23</sup> Representing the imperial population of Great Britain and the Commonwealth verses just those that inhabited the United Kingdom secured Britain a seat at the international table. Thus, when the Canadian government proposed legislation defining independent Canadian citizenship, the Labour government was forced to counter with legislation of its own.

Prior to 1945, the United Kingdom had permitted territories to create local citizenships intended to carry weight only in the area of origin. In keeping with the notion of a single nationality throughout the Empire, Her Majesty's Government held that residents of the Empire were first and foremost British subjects. Proposed Canadian legislation attempted to challenge the status quo, placing exclusive Canadian citizenship above the status of British subject. Fearing that any attempt to forestall the scheme would divide the Commonwealth and in due course imperial unity as a whole, British policy makers determined it wise to placate Canadian officials. Thus, deliberations began to devise a British nationality law intending to appease Dominion governments while ultimately solidifying loyalty to the British crown.

While policy makers were able to agree in terms of granting the dominions equal status, determining the position of colonials was met with difficulty. An Interdepartmental Working Party was assembled to establish the best strategy for colonial status. Countering the position of the Home and Foreign Offices that each colony should be granted a separate citizenship, the Colonial Office argued that in order to ensure colonials continued to regard themselves as British they must share a single, common nationality with the United Kingdom. Bestowing a separate citizenship assigned them secondary status.

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<sup>23</sup> Dane Kennedy, *Britain and Empire, 1880-1955* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 87.

Intent on securing imperial unity and preserving Britain's position at the center of the empire, the Atlee government put forth the 1948 British Nationality Act, creating a common citizenship for residents of the United Kingdom and its colonies. Dominions were able to legislate their own citizenship laws, but these would remain secondary to those of the Great Britain. Allowing Dominion governments the right to establish local citizenships appeased national governments while at the same time reaffirming their citizens' common status as British subject. This overarching status as citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies (UKC) remained predominant on the international stage and thus secured Britain's position as a world power.

Although Conservative MPs were rather ambiguous towards the Bill, it did not pass without resistance. The main point of contention between the two parties lay in extending the status of British subject to citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies. The opposition argued that citizens of the colonies and Commonwealth were already British subjects, as imperial nationality was a right granted to all those born within the Empire. Such legislation served to weaken imperial links. Conservatives objected to the proposed UKC citizenship on the pretext that creating a single citizenship for such a diverse collection of peoples was unsuitable. David Maxwell-Fyfe, the Conservative spokesman on home affairs, suggested that citizenship should be assigned based on a shared sense of community and status rather than parliamentary sovereignty.<sup>24</sup>

Labour was willing to look past the informal policy in order to maintain the Empire and Britain's international standing, while the Tories continued to cling to the

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<sup>24</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 453 (1948), cols. 401, 410, 1027-28 in Paul, "British Subjects British Stock," 248.

“familial ‘British’ community of the old dominions.”<sup>25</sup> Labour’s goal was solely to ward off colonial independence and believed the Bill was a means by which they could give colonials “a feeling that... we recognize them as fellow citizens.” But Labour’s objective of raising colonials “to such a position of education, of training, and of experience that they too shall be able to share the grant of full self-government which this House has so generously given in the last few years to other places” offered the same notion of superiority and inequality as the Conservative position that colonials should not share a common citizenship with those in the United Kingdom.<sup>26</sup> While Labour’s paternalistic view may seem more palatable, the fact remains that both parties, regardless of intentions, held a racialized view of the Empire and the world. The Labour government suggested colonials needed the British to educate and advance them, while Conservatives argued against the consideration of equal status. Regardless of any formal policy, members of both parties had a clear definition of Britishness and it did not include colored residents of Britain’s overseas possessions.

Nonetheless, both parties remained cognizant that Britain must present itself as a tolerant, progressive society. In the parliamentary debates Conservative Maxwell Fyfe stated, “We are proud that we impose no colour bar restrictions making it difficult for them when they come here ... we must maintain our great metropolitan tradition of hospitality to everyone from every part of our Empire.”<sup>27</sup> According to the Conservative policy of the next year, “there must be freedom of movement amongst its members

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<sup>25</sup> Paul, “British Subjects, British Stock,” 248.

<sup>26</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 453 (1948), cols. 394-98; (Lords) 5<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 155 (1984), col. 757 in Paul, “British Subjects, British Stock,” 249.

<sup>27</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), vol. 453, col. 405, 7 July 1948 in Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, race, and Race Relations in Post-War Britain* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992): 10.

within the British Empire and Commonwealth. New opportunities will present themselves not only in the countries overseas but in the Mother Country, and must be open to all citizens.”<sup>28</sup> Committed to the right of free movement, Conservatives were concerned about the rights of those residing in the independent Commonwealth countries of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, but were aware that such rights would apply equally to the inhabitants in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. However, it was assumed the majority of migration would be movement from Britain to the Empire and that the source of any inward flow would be the Old Dominions.

By 1953 an estimated 40,000 non-white of immigrants had arrived in Great Britain. The influx of West Indian and South Asian migration was characterized by chain migration- individuals migrated, friends and relatives followed, who in turn sent for additional friends and relatives. The first wave of immigrants took accommodations in the industrial towns in which they found jobs; they were later joined by relatives, allowing settlements of individuals from the same family or village to become concentrated in a single neighborhood. The settlement pattern of colored migrants created ethnic pockets throughout Britain. For instance, the majority of Pakistanis, especially those from the Mirpur district of Azad Kashmir, settled in the north, while Bangladeshis resided in East London and Gujarati Indians spread across the Midlands.<sup>29</sup> As the concentration in England’s major cities became evident, hostility towards new settlers from their white working-class neighbor’s became evident. The British working class had accepted the notion of common citizenship under the assumption it would

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<sup>28</sup> Conservative Central Office, *The Right Road for Britain*, 1949 in Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Steven Vertovec, “Islamophobia and Muslim Recognition in Britain,” in *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 20.

remain theoretical, but when it seemed that colored migrants were to be treated as their equals, or rather that their own position of superiority in relation to blacks was no longer recognized, the white working-class became seriously concerned.<sup>30</sup>

Black immigrants had been regarded with suspicion as early as 1919 when many colored men chose to remain in Britain after being discharged from His Majesty's Forces and the Merchant Navy at the close of the First World War. The numbers were rather infinitesimal, but regardless of size, the colored population was nonetheless regarded as alien. The black population was viewed as a potential threat to security, especially in terms of employment, thus it is no surprise that disturbances erupted between whites and colored migrants. "Public opinion strongly favoured the repatriation of Negroes to the Colonies and many in fact were persuaded to return" and "attempts were made to prevent further Negro immigration and to encourage the replacement of coloured firemen by white on British ships."<sup>31</sup> Thus the combined sense of superiority engrained in Britons through centuries of imperialism coupled with perceived competition in employment and services posed by the arrival of black migrants produced tensions throughout England defined solely by race. Notions of colored immigrants as lazy, unskilled individuals of low social status and bad hygiene began to spread. As more West Indian and South Asian migrants arrived in England's industrial towns, tensions grew. Sporadic outbreaks of violence against blacks erupted in Deptford, Notting Hill and Nottingham, lending credence to any notion that colored immigration posed a 'problem' in Britain. British politicians found themselves facing new problems as the 1950s progressed. While the

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<sup>30</sup> John Rex and Sally Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants in a British City: A class analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979): 49.

<sup>31</sup> Anthony H. Richmond, *Colour Prejudice in Britain: A Study of West Indian Workers in Liverpool, 1941-1951* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954): 20.

postwar Labour Government had moved to strengthen imperial ties and rebuild Britain's workforce, the Conservative government of the next decade faced a new set of challenges. The years immediately following the war have been described as somewhat "halcyon times, since politicians were able to take a relaxed attitude free of the pressures that haunted their successors in the next decade."<sup>32</sup> Home Secretary Roy Jenkins asserted that:

In the early fifties it was easy to be enlightened about immigration – easy both for the progressive middle class who have always judged immigration policy with the objective view that comes from rarely seeing a black face and never living next to a black neighbour, and for the industrial workers of Bradford and Birmingham."<sup>33</sup>

Jenkins argued that immigration was not a large issue until the latter half of the 1950s, as it was at this point that the Eden government began to discuss the implementation of restrictive legislation.

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<sup>32</sup> D.W. Dean "Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s: The Problems of Constraint" *The Historical Journal* (1992): 172.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE 1950s CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

There is a danger that may be faced with the need for urgent action when it is too late. The ideal time for legislation cannot be defined by reference to any precise criteria and the prudent course would be to legislate without delay.<sup>1</sup>

The arrival of colored immigrants to the United Kingdom posed a problem to fundamental liberal and conservative ideologies. The rise and fall of Nazi Germany and its doctrine of racial supremacy challenged previous beliefs in that imperial justification on the basis of racial superiority was no longer acceptable. Thus, by the inter-war period a new set of doctrines had been introduced in the form of the white man's burden and the dual mandate, employing the notion of universal human rights, a belief shared by both political ideologies. But Conservative politicians held that while all men should be afforded the same rights under the law, this did not necessarily translate into equal opportunity or equality of life chances. The fundamentals of conservative political discussions were shaped by the idea that all men shared basic legal rights, but kept with the view that colonial natives should keep to their place. Liberal ideology held that state

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet committee on possible legislation to control immigration from the Commonwealth (Kilmuir Committee), 22 June 1956, London, Public Record Office (PRO), CAB 129/81 CP 125 in D.W. Dean, "Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s: The Problems of Constraint" *Historical Journal* (1992): 172.

intervention was necessary to ensure freedom and equal opportunity, but the notion of universal human rights throughout the Empire forced liberalism to change its nature. Some Liberals answered with ardent anti-imperialism, while others chose to compartmentalize their ideology, suggesting it pertained only to the domestic metropolis. Thus, the migration of colonial natives to Britain presented a serious challenge to both conservative and liberal beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

Members within the Labour and Conservative parties held different positions in terms of immigration. Some Conservatives favored immigration on economic grounds, understanding the dire need for labor within Britain. Former colonials often defended immigration in an effort to speak of for those they formerly governed. But there was also a faction of the Conservative party that opposed immigration all along. These members generally remained 'backbenchers' until given a voice by the 1958 riots and 1964 election in Smethwick. Labour radicals favored immigration on the same grounds as those Conservatives who had the economic development of Britain in mind; idealists favored immigration in order to keep the Commonwealth in tact. In the minority before 1963, Labour's Conservative Right opposed non-white immigration purely on racial grounds, believing that regardless of the economic benefits colored migration presented, non-whites could not be assimilated or absorbed into British culture.

Overall, the Labour party showed concern with immigration from the start. In May 1950, the Secretary of State for the Colonies issued a memorandum requested by the Cabinet addressing the immigration of coloured people to the United Kingdom. The report suggested that coloured immigration was posing problems in the areas of housing,

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<sup>2</sup> John Rex and Sally Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants in a British City: A class analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979): 37.

employment, and law and order and proposed discouraging coloured colonials from migrating as a potential solution; however, in ascertaining that the number of coloured migrants was still relatively small, the Labour government determined it unnecessary to take immediate action.<sup>3</sup> The point is that the administration was considering it and it should be noted that there was serious concern amongst Labour politicians over the immigration of a few thousand black people. The Cabinet revisited the issue one month later to review the possible measures for control and potential ramifications of restrictive legislation,<sup>4</sup> but it was determined again that the coloured population in Britain was so small that taking any controversial action should be avoided, and though not justifiable at the time, any future increase may warrant control.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the Labour government entered discussions about curbing colonial immigration while still in the midst of a labor shortage substantiates the claim that racial prejudice was a clear factor in the Labour government's discouraging mindset. While the attitude of trade unions and fear that the reconstruction effort would be short-lived played a part, had all imported labor been of pure European descent, restrictive measures would hardly have been discussed, as they were welcomed as a positive asset, while black workers were seen as provoking racial prejudice and causing public disturbances. Thus illegitimate reasons were invented by some civil servants in an attempt to justify control.<sup>6</sup>

Sharing Labour's concerns and recognizing that a potential problem may be brewing, after taking power in 1951 the Conservative government began discussing

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<sup>3</sup> Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, Race, and Race Relations in Post-War Britain* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Cabinet Papers, 'Coloured people from the British colonial territories' memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, (50) 113, 18 May 1950, Public Record Office in Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, 31.

restrictive legislation, albeit behind closed doors. Such legislation was not presented in the 1950s for several reasons centering on the desire to keep Britain in good standing with the Commonwealth and maintain her position as a world power; furthermore the Tories wanted to prove that they could resolve the economic problems resulting from the war and regain and solidify their position as the natural rulers of Britain.

Issues abroad were beginning to pose problems, mainly the nationalist regime in Britain's dominion of South Africa and its open segregationist policies. World opinion held that the United Nations should intercede, a notion that the Conservative government did not support on the basis that stepping in may drive the nationalists further into isolation. Nonetheless, worried about the international repercussions, British officials knew they needed to present themselves as hostile to the racist policies developing in the area and were aware that any sense of a race relations issue brewing in Britain would call their position into question. As Lord Salisbury stated, 'We have a reputation to maintain as champion of liberal western civilisation. We must maintain this reputation not only in the UN but also before our public opinion and what is more important with our colonies.'<sup>7</sup>

The Churchill administration wanted to present an enlightened view of conservatism to the world, thus whenever suggestions of restriction were voiced in the Cabinet protests were raised in fear of a blanket policy which may prohibit the entry of Commonwealth citizens. Lord Hume stated, "we do not wish to keep out immigration is a

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<sup>7</sup> Lord Salisbury, 24 September 1952, CAB 129/55 CP 122 in D.W. Dean "Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s: The Problems of Constraint" *The Historical Journal* (1992), 175.

policy to which we have always subscribed,”<sup>8</sup> his predecessor Lord Swinton suggesting that “If we legislate on immigration, though we draft in non-discriminatory terms, we cannot conceal the obvious fact that the object is to keep out coloured peoples. Unless there is really a strong case for this, it would surely be an unwise moment to raise the issue when we are preaching and trying to practise partnership in the abolition of the Colour Bar.”<sup>9</sup> Events in the southern United States highlighted racial tensions in the international arena, presenting an opportunity for British leadership to present the multi-racial Commonwealth as a symbol of tolerance and newly enlightened force.<sup>10</sup>

Concerned about the opposition’s reaction to proposed restrictions, Conservative leaders hesitated to put forth any legislation that may prove controversial; any changes to immigration policy needed to be free of partisan politics. In order to prevent giving the Labour government an opportunity to take the moral high ground and avoid the embarrassment of having the opposition and half the Commonwealth against them, the Churchill administration deemed it necessary to gauge Labour opinion and possible reaction. The Conservative government held deliberation over possible restrictive legislation in 1954 at which time Lord Swinton urged Cabinet Members to establish contact with members of the Labour party.<sup>11</sup>

There was cause to believe that the Labour party would adamantly oppose restrictions, as pressure against discrimination was always presented by Labour politicians, many of which pressed for legislation that would ensure equal treatment in

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<sup>8</sup> Lord Home, 2 September 1955, CAB 129/77 CP 113 in Dean, “Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s,” 174.

<sup>9</sup> Lord Swinton to Lord Salisbury, 14 March 1954, CAB 124/1191 in Dean, “Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s,” 175.

<sup>10</sup> Dean, “Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s,” 174.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

employment and housing. As Labour representative Kenneth Robinson stated, he “doubted if the government would introduce legislation to limit immigration because they know the opposition they would meet.”<sup>12</sup> While it may have been a risk to adopt a position that may prove unpopular amongst the white, working class, Labour leaders did not think race would become an issue. At the time, most discussions were held within confined political circles; they believed they had little to lose politically and perhaps more to gain by taking the moral high ground and opposing restriction.

Race may not have become an issue had the rate of immigration remained as it was at the beginning of the 1950s; however, the rate did increase- within twenty years there were 1.6 million colored people living in Britain.<sup>13</sup> The changing demographic served to benefit the position of backbenchers such as Cyril Osborn, Normal Pannell, Harold Gurden, and Martin Lindsay who, opposing immigration, cited inflated figures and warned against the possible ramifications of mass immigration such as overcrowded hospitals, the resurfacing of diseases such as tuberculosis, and increased criminal activity.<sup>14</sup> While racist ideas in Parliament remained the minority, the constituency for which they spoke began to increase steadily as the 1950s progressed. In 1954 *The Times* published an article titled “First Signs of a British Colour Problem” and several years later the BBC presented a special program on the subject. Public concern began to grow, centered on issues such as housing, particularly in the industrial areas and the suggestion

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Robinson at the conference of the Movement of Colonial Freedom, January 1955, Labour party archives GS/RAC/176 in Dean, “Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s,” 186.

<sup>13</sup> *Hansard*, 594.(29 October 1958): 196 in Fred R. van Hartesveldt, “Race and Political Parties in Britain, 1954-1965” Phlyon (1983), 128.

<sup>14</sup> Van Hartesveldt, “Race and Political Parties in Britain,” 128.

that slum conditions were worsening due to overcrowding and unsanitary conditions of West Indian and Asian immigrants.

Reports issued by a 1958 working party noted that colored immigrants lived in “dirty and overcrowded conditions” which was “as much from choice as necessity,”<sup>15</sup> and that they were employed in unskilled jobs of the lowest grade industries. According to the reports, Southeast Asians were difficult to place in employment due to their inability to speak English<sup>16</sup> and unemployment was certain to increase due to the scarcity of semi and unskilled jobs, which were “the only ones for which coloured people [were] suitable.”<sup>17</sup> In addition, the working party noted that they were not Christian.<sup>18</sup> But these same reports noted that the immigrants were “law-abiding, tend[ed] to keep to themselves, and form[ed] a useful addition to the country’s labour force.”<sup>19</sup> Reports went on to describe the South Asian immigrants as showing “no desire to mix with white people or other immigrants” and noted that the “arrival of increasing numbers fosters the tendency to associate only with each other.”<sup>20</sup> Police reports warned that the degree of assimilation failed to increase, but the British administration never attempted to promote the integration of such migrants. Cabinet ministers focused solely on the prevention of further migration, never contemplating how the problems they believed to be associated

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<sup>15</sup> CAB 134/1466, Cabinet Committee of Colonial Immigrants: Progress Report by the Inter-Departmental Working Party on Social and Economic Problems, 4 September, 1958.

<sup>16</sup> CAB 134/1466 Cabinet Committee of Colonial Immigrants: Progress Report by the Inter-Departmental Working Party on Social and Economic Problems, 17 February 1958.

<sup>17</sup> CAB 134/1466 Cabinet Committee on Colonial Immigrants: Report of the Committee of Ministers, no date.

<sup>18</sup> CAB 134/1466 Coloured Immigration: Review of Developments, 11 March 1958.

<sup>19</sup> CAB 134/1466 Cabinet Committee on Colonial Immigrants: Report of the Committee of Ministers, 10 March 1958.

<sup>20</sup> CAB 134/1466 Cabinet Committee on Colonial Immigrants: Report of the Committee of Ministers, 10 March 1958.

with migration could be ameliorated by any other means than nationality law.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, cabinet papers note that this “lack of intermingling was due to the attitude of both races.”<sup>22</sup>

The majority of immigrants in the early 1950s were West Indian; they were viewed as noisy and having loose sexual morals. The high number of single men and convenience of a common language resulted in more interaction between the races and prostitution than would have been the case had families migrated together.<sup>23</sup> The influx of South Asian migration in the late 1950s to early 1960s was characterized by chain migration- individuals migrated, friends and relatives followed, who in turn sent for additional friends and relatives. The first wave of immigrants took accommodations in the industrial towns in which they found jobs; they were later joined by relatives, allowing settlements of individuals from the same family or village to become concentrated in a single neighborhood, creating ethnic pockets throughout Britain. The segregation of communities came to be seen as the self-segregation created by immigrants; the belief spread that the ethnic community was attempting to create its own exclusive neighborhoods in an attempt to exclude whites and prevent the mixing of cultures.

In the summer of 1958 riots broke out between colored immigrants and whites in Nottingham and Notting Hill. Labeled a ‘race riots’ by the press, it is unclear whether the actions were inspired by racial strife but, nonetheless, backbenchers pushing for restrictions attempted to use the events in their favor, arguing that “What we ignore at our

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<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 156.

<sup>22</sup> CAB 134/1466 Cabinet Committee on Colonial Immigrants: Report of the Committee of Ministers, no date.

<sup>23</sup> Van Hartesveldt, “Race and Political Parties in Britain,” 129.

peril is the bitter resentment often felt by the local white English citizens.”<sup>24</sup> Those favoring control began to lobby for restrictions as soon as Parliament returned to session; the cause was the same, but the arguments different. “Sooner or later some control would have to be put on. If it is not put on soon we shall, whether we like it or not- this is what I fear and am very frightened about it- have Little Rocks and Notting Hill incidents over and over again.”<sup>25</sup> However, the administration decided it was not the opportune time to present such legislation, partly due to the recent Suez Crisis and its effects through out the Commonwealth.

The immediate government reaction was to ensure that law and order was maintained in the areas.

It would be desirable to make it clear that, in the view of the Government, law and order must be maintained irrespective of the racial characteristics of individuals. It would be important to avoid, if possible, any major pronouncement on Commonwealth immigration. We should continue to deal with the problem empirically and shall base our action on the practical considerations of the availability of housing and the capacity of the labor market.<sup>26</sup>

On the surface the government continued to support the notion of a common status for all Commonwealth citizens, however, behind closed doors were attempting to restrict entry by other means such as “administrative legislations and government circulars and letters.”<sup>27</sup> The government adopted a series of administrative controls in an attempt to curb the flow stemming from the Indian sub-continent. Such controls were

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<sup>24</sup> A working party of Conservative central office officials under Mrs. Henry Brooke, 7 November 1957, Conservative party archives, Bodl. Lib. CCO 4/7/166 in Dean, “Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s,” 188.

<sup>25</sup> Cyril Osborne, House of Commons debates, 29 October 1958, vol. 594, col. 197 in Dean, “Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s,” 189.

<sup>26</sup> Cabinet conclusion, 8 September 1958, CAB 128/32 in in Dean, “Conservative Governments and the Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration in the 1950s,” 190.

<sup>27</sup> Lauren McLaren and Mark Johnson, “Resources, Group Conflict and Symbols: Explaining Anti-Immigration Hostility in Britain,” *Political Studies* (2007), 710.

enforced by the governments of India and Pakistan. Passport application fees were increased and deposits required to cover possible repatriation fees.<sup>28</sup> Passports were denied on the basis that prospects did not intend on permanently establishing themselves in the United Kingdom<sup>29</sup>, and notices were placed in Indian newspapers detailing the harsh living conditions and unemployment migrants were likely to find in Britain.

Public awareness of the immigration situation had been building through the 1950; by the end of the decade public opinion became more important to the political parties, thus, Conservative and Labour leaders were forced to formulate party policy. The Tories remained divided, with some believing there was considerable support behind the idea of restrictive immigration while others feared taking any controversial position so close to an election. The Labour party reacted by moving towards the opposition of controls and proposition of discrimination laws, however, there were clear anti-immigrant and racist feelings within the trade union movement which the Parliamentary Labour Party chose to ignore for purposes of political expediency.<sup>30</sup> Although discussions on immigration control became more public, the leadership of both parties avoided commenting on the race issue outright. However, Tory candidates used racial innuendo to attack some Labour candidates with liberal records in terms of immigration, and Conservative backbenchers placed increased pressure on the leadership of their own party to control immigration.

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<sup>28</sup> Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 152.

<sup>29</sup> PRO DO35/5216, no date.

<sup>30</sup> Van Hartesveldt, "Race and Political Parties in Britain," 129.

To the credit of party leadership, immigration and race relations were not part of the 1959 election.<sup>31</sup> With the Tories returning to power, it was likely no serious consideration was going to be given to restrictive legislation or any anti-discrimination laws, however, the resounding Conservative victory brought a faction of new Members to the House of Commons who, hailing from constituencies with a large number of immigrants, favored demands for control.<sup>32</sup> These members could claim direct constituency experience of the difficulties associated with immigration- a claim which, for reasons of electoral geography, was previously mainly confined to Labour Members. But perhaps most significant, these Members were claiming the view they were putting forward as representative of public opinion at large. In this claim they were assisted by the setting up in the Birmingham area of a lobbying organization, the Birmingham Immigration Control Association.<sup>33</sup>

Given a voice by the ‘riots’ of 1958 and fostered by the election of Ministers favoring their cause, political ‘backbenchers’ not only became more vocal, but also started to organize their efforts. At the beginning of 1961, Conservative MP for Selly Oak, Harold Gurden, organized a private meeting of backbenchers from London, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester, all areas with large concentrations of coloured migrants, to organize their efforts to support restrictive legislation.<sup>34</sup> A motion was presented by Cyril Osborne that required Commonwealth immigrants to present evidence that they had guaranteed employment and housing, were in good health and no criminal

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<sup>31</sup> D.E. Butler and R. Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London, 1960), 45-67 in John Carson, “A Matter of Policy: The Lessons of Recent British Race Relations Legislation,” *Albion A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* (1976), 158.

<sup>32</sup> Carson, “A Matter of Policy,” 158.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1965): 133.

<sup>34</sup> Race Relations Institute, Newsletter, February 1961, p. 6 in Van Hartesveldt, “Race and Political Parties in Britain,” 130.

record in order to reside in Britain, suggesting that such measures were necessary to do the housing crisis, unemployment rates, growth of slums, and strain on welfare services. Nationally, unemployment wasn't necessarily a grave issue however rates remained high in areas where there were large concentrations of immigrants. But what backbenchers failed to mention was that as much as one-third of unemployed immigrants were women and two-thirds had been out of work for less than eight weeks.<sup>35</sup>

But the racial motives behind such positions were illuminated by remarks made by Osborne and other proponents of control. Osborne stated that the reasons colored immigrants were such a 'problem' was because "they have altogether a different standard of civilization,"<sup>36</sup> and that "This is a white man's country and I was it to remain so."<sup>37</sup> Osborne and Pannell went on to contend that the construction of a Sikh temple in Smethwick served as a threat to Christianity and that the influx of immigrants was causing a serious outbreak of venereal disease.<sup>38</sup> While some Members showed genuine concern based on housing and employment issues, the debates still took on an openly racial tone. But party leadership continued to minimize every problem mentioned in an attempt to avoid any notions of discrimination. Ironically, David Renton, government spokesman and Joint Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office stated that the problems would become worse if immigration continued, declaring that although Government was not ready to take action, they were considering possible solutions.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Hansard*, 639 (May 3, 1961): 1343-33; 600 (May 10, 1961): 415-417 in Van Hartesveldt, "Race and Political Parties in Britain," 131.

<sup>36</sup> *Hansard*, 634 (February 17, 1961): 1933 in Van Hartesveldt, "Race and Political Parties in Britain," 130.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Hansard*, 645 (August 1, 1961): 1320-38 in Van Hartesveldt, "Race and Political Parties in Britain," 131.

<sup>39</sup> *Hansard*, 634 (February 17, 1961): 1991 in Van Hartesveldt, "Race and Political Parties in Britain," 130.

Fred van Hardsvedlt argued that “no rational political can afford to ignore an issue of concern to more than 80 percent of the electorate,” but the question remains whether the vast majority of Britons opposed colored immigration to the extent that the backbenchers claimed.<sup>40</sup> Home Secretary R.A. Butler openly admitted that the Government had begun to move towards control, but it is necessary to investigate whether public opinion drove government or the actions of the political elite shaped public opinion. While some believe that public opinion created pressures on Government, many argue that it is the government that politicized the problems associated with coloured immigration in order to show the public the necessity of introduction immigration control;<sup>41</sup> although public opinion is often perceived by a few observers as creating pressures on the Government to pass restrictive legislation, many claim that actions and inactions of elite political were responsible for the state of public opinion and for governmental action in the fields of race relations and immigration policy.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in light of the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill of 1962, we must ask what caused Government to abandon the policy they firmly believed would solidify their position as a world power.

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<sup>40</sup> Van Hartesveldt, “Race and Political Parties in Britain,” 132.

<sup>41</sup> Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Donely T. Studlar, “British Public Opinion, Color Issues, and Enoch Powell: A Longitudinal Analysis” *British Journal of Political Science* (1974), 371.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### TOWARDS RESTRICTION AND INTO THE PUBLIC GAZE

Through the 1940s and early 1950s there was little official or public concern about the flow of migration from the New Commonwealth. Such migration was accepted by the Labour and Conservative Governments on the basis that it was part of the joint economic effort to rebuild Britain after the Second World War and the belief that liberal legislation was necessary in order to maintain Commonwealth unity. The arrival of colored immigrants caused little reaction from the British public; it was generally assumed that such migrants would assimilate culturally and economically into greater British society. The issue remained in a 'pre-political age' due to an unspoken consensus that any problems that existed would right themselves in the end.<sup>1</sup> Some Conservative backbenchers voiced discontent and several attempts made at the Cabinet level to limit the number arrivals, none of which really came to fruition due to the Nationality Act of 1948. Restricting immigration would involve amending the Act, which was both a complicated parliamentary procedure and an act the government wanted to avoid for reasons highlighted previously.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ira Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities: Politics and Migrations in the United States, 1900-30 and Great Britain, 1948-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Romain Garbaye, "British Cities and Ethnic Minorities in the Post-war Era: Front Xenophobic Agitation to Multi-Ethnic Government" *Immigrants and Minorities* (2003), 304.

Following the 1958 riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill, incidents that influenced Conservative backbenchers, brought more illiberal parliamentary candidates to office, and sparked a sense of xenophobia within Conservative local organizations, the race and immigration issue was becoming more and more divisive.<sup>3</sup> Initially the two parties held opposite views on the issue; the Conservative leadership was beginning to react to the pressure from those favoring restrictions, while Labour remained vehemently opposed. However, within a few years, the debate moved from polarization to consensus. In an effort to prohibit the issue from electoral contests, both parties adopted moderate and somewhat interchangeable positions on immigration.<sup>4</sup>

Through out the 1950s the Labour Party was dominated by those who supported human equality, but as the decade came to a close, party leaders began to recognize the political dangers of taking such a position. As the controversy grew more intense, it began to take on unmistakable political overtones. In July 1960 the official policy of free entry still remained, but increasing pressure was placed on the governments of Pakistan, India and the West Indies to control emigration from their ports. In the meantime, local Conservatives began to challenge Labour candidates with more openly racist campaigns; the Tories implied that Labour favored immigration, later associating any issues associated with blacks as problems fostered by Labour's position.<sup>5</sup>

In 1962 a faction of the Labour party supporting a centrist view emerged. Members such as Richard Crossman, Roy Hattersley, Frank Soskice, and Labour leader Harold Wilson supported entry restrictions on the grounds that they would allay the sense

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Fred R. van Hartesveldt, "Race and Political Parties in Britain, 1954-1965" *Phylon* (1983), 130.

of xenophobia emerging in Britain; a position that, unlike that of the Conservatives, was not racially prejudice. However, it is important to note that the main concern of Labour was to become the majority party in Britain which they believed they could accomplish by taking the middle ground. They believed race issue as politically volatile, a “political joker that not only could impede Labour from immediately gaining power but, also, and perhaps more importantly, deflect the party from its post-1951 adherence to centrist, non-ideological politics.”<sup>6</sup> Labour’s new race policy was merely part of a strategy, which while repugnant to the party’s Left, was viewed as fundamental to Centrists in an effort to gain national office. Centrist MPs firmly believed that the only way to gain a parliamentary majority was to capture the middle-ground and to do so must “project a more contemporary, classless image than in the past;” to be “regarded as efficient, energetic and up-to-date – concerned with the problems of the 60s and the new Britain.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, party leaders made the decision to avoid all policy commitments that might polarize public opinion along party lines and adopted the same position as the opposition. As Richard Crossman stated, “We felt we had to out-trump the Tories by doing what they would have done and so transforming their policy into a bipartisan policy.”<sup>8</sup> By aligning with the political opposition, Labour leaders hoped to avoid taking a position that may require public defense.<sup>9</sup>

Research shows that the Conservative Government of the 1950s sought evidence proving that colored immigration posed a problem in Britain in order to justify the consideration and later implementation of legislation restricting the British settlement of

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<sup>6</sup> Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism* (London: Merlin Press, 1979): 350-77 in Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain*, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

colored migrants from the New Commonwealth. In 1955 the Cabinet ascertained that public opinion had not 'matured sufficiently' enough to guarantee support for restrictive measures.<sup>10</sup> Opinion poll data shows that in 1951, only a third of those polled were opposed to the entry of British subjects from the colonies; in 1956, as much as 71 percent agreed that 'coloured' British subjects had a right to enter Britain when compared to European migrants such as Italians and Poles.<sup>11</sup> Yet just a few years later, polls suggest widespread support for immigration control.<sup>12</sup>

Public opinion seemed to change drastically in just a few years time. Originally tolerant of migration from the Commonwealth, the British public began to take a rather hostile stance. Robert Miles suggests that contrary to arguments that racist ideals stemming from a colonial past permeated all of British society, British public opinion regarding colonial immigration remained rather fluid. He argues against the notion that racism was a monolithic ideological bloc, noting that while propaganda such as contemporary newspaper headlines and racially charged cartoons were present, what needs to be examined is whether or not the British public actually received the message and whether it remained relevant.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, it is important consider the impact of government action on the nature of British public opinion. In moving towards restriction, were the political elite responding to mass opinion, or had the government cultivated an atmosphere of intolerance in order to justify restrictive measures?

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<sup>10</sup> Carter et al., "The 1951-55 Conservative Government," 344 in Robert Miles, "The Racialization of British Politics," *Political studies* (1990), 284.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Banton, "The Influence of colonial status upon black-white relations in England, 1948-1958," *Sociology* (1983), 551-2.

<sup>12</sup> Miles, "The Racialization of British Politics," *Political studies* (1990), 283-4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Through out the 1950s and into the 1960s, the importance of Commonwealth had begun to fade. The Cold War of the 1960s brought in what Harold Macmillan called ‘the winds of change;’ the United States and Soviet Union began to vie for the support of independence movements in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, severely marginalizing and sense of British influence.<sup>14</sup> At the heart of the matter was the economy. Exhausted from the cost of the war, Britain was no longer able to afford her empire, as new military technology had made imperial defense much more expensive, albeit the costs of empire had begun to outweigh the benefits long before. British defense expenditures amounted to 5.8 percent of gross national product between 1947 and 1987; no longer able to manage her trade deficit with the income from overseas investments, Britain faced a crushing foreign debt burden, not to mention that the much larger costs of nationalized health care, transport and industry had to be met.<sup>15</sup> After the Second World War, Britain turned to the United States for a loan, the ramifications of which proved grave, ultimately diminishing Britain’s international power. In return for the loan, US policy makers insisted the conversion of the pound into the dollar within a year, resulting in a run on the Bank of England and starting the first in a series of sterling crises. “In the early 1950s, Harold Macmillan declared that the choice facing the country was between ‘the slide into a shoddy and slushy Socialism (and second rate power), or the march to the third British Empire.’ After Suez only the first option seemed to remain.”<sup>16</sup>

The total of trade with the Commonwealth remained substantially large, but after the British entry into the ‘Common Market,’ European protectionist tariffs forced British

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<sup>14</sup> Naill Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2003): 359.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

trade to focus on the continent rather than the Commonwealth. But the issue with the Commonwealth was not necessarily its waning economic importance to the United Kingdom, but rather its growing political impotence.<sup>17</sup> With Britain's gradual decline, international dominance was no longer of drastic importance. Political leaders turned their focus away from the preservation of Empire and Commonwealth and towards the maintenance of Great Britain itself. With Commonwealth unity no longer at the forefront of political minds, the government was able to consider restrictive legislation, regardless of its implications. Thus, the Conservative government passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962 because, "the formal policy was no longer capable of maintaining Empire in its most desirable form...its commitment to free entry threatened the political elite's perception of the true identity of the 'British' people."<sup>18</sup>

The actions of government and state officials were partly motivated by racism, and in terms of racism within the overall British population, many argue that this was simply a means by which to legitimize the actions taken by the political elite. Citing the overall unity of British society as their goal, decision-makers believed it necessary to prevent "a significant change in the racial character of the English people."<sup>19</sup> Convinced any significant change in the racial makeup of Britain would pose serious problems between 'whites' and 'coloured people,' leaders believed it necessary to manipulated public opinion in an effort to ensure that the British public reached the same conclusions. Public opinion on the issue had barely formed in the late 1940s into the 1950s, thus

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Kathleen Paul, "'British Subjects' and 'British Stock': Labour's Postwar Imperialism," *The Journal of British Studies* (1995), 276.

<sup>19</sup> Carter et. al., "The 1951-55 Conservative Government," 338 in Robert Miles, "The Racialization of British Politics," *Political studies* (1990), 284.

British officials needed to convince the masses that the presence of colored immigrants was problematic and, thus, needed to be prevented.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of 1960 the Home Office contemplated possible administrative and regulatory means which might be employed in order to reduce immigration from certain parts of the Commonwealth, but their efforts proved ineffective. As Colonial Secretary Iain MacLeod stated, “administrative measures will not really serve. The choice must be between trying to hold these administrative measures or legislation.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, a Cabinet committee was formed to examine immigration and consider the possibility for broad legislative controls.<sup>22</sup> Determined to exhaust all ideas surrounding limited emigration and not yet committed to restrictive legislation, the Government placed the issue of immigration on the agenda for the 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference.<sup>23</sup> The placement of immigration control on the back burner fueled the cause of backbenchers, prompting them to respond with new found vigor. In a letter to *The Times*, Harold Gurden, MP stated that the ‘saturation point’ of immigration had been reached throughout the Midlands.<sup>24</sup> Conversations surrounding controls became more widespread, pushing the issue into the public eye and increasing the urgency for restrictive measures.

Immigration Control Associations began to form at the end of 1960 and beginning of 1961 to lobby Parliament and publicize the dire need for legislation. The associations took on extremely racist tones. Letters were published speaking to the threat colored

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<sup>20</sup> Miles, “The Racialization of British Politics,” *Political studies* (1990), 284-5..

<sup>21</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 631, col. 585 in John Carson, “A Matter of Policy: The Lessons of Recent British Race Relations Legislation” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* (1976), 159.

<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, December 2, 1960.

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, December 16, 1960.

<sup>24</sup> *The Times*, December 13, 1960.

immigration posed to “the spirit and purity of white Christians,” the dangers of a multi-racial society,<sup>25</sup> and notions of overcrowded hospitals and strange diseases continued. The most powerful organization was the Birmingham Immigration Control Association (BICA). The organization, formed in October 1960, called for restrictions to immigrant settlement within Birmingham; their cause was given a great deal of publicity in the *Birmingham Mail*. The group sent postcards to the House of Commons declaring that residents of Birmingham were “‘suffering the consequences’ of uncontrolled immigration, and called on Members of Parliament to ‘vote against the come-who-may policy’ or lose the sender’s vote;” the group went on to circulate petitions for Cyril Osborne, collecting some 50,000 signatures.<sup>26</sup> With anti-immigrant organizations such making the intensity of grass-roots anti-immigrant sentiment quite evident, some suggest that the Conservative governments move towards restriction was in response to the involvement of local Conservative activists with anti-immigration organizations such as the BICA.<sup>27</sup> As Paul Foot suggested:

[I]mmigration Control Associations which arose in Birmingham and the surrounding area in 1960 and 1961, by means of their concentration on a single issue [and] their ability to move freely among members of established political parties... had a great impact on British politics.

The Government responded to anti-immigrant charges by stating that rumors that restrictive legislation was being contemplated were false with Iain MacLeod issuing a categorical denial to the press. But these were false statements in themselves.

Immigration statistics and the demand for action from the rank-and-file Members of

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<sup>25</sup> Cyril Osborne, “Should We Control Immigration?,” *The Church of England Newspaper*, 7 July 1960 in Carson, “A Matter of Policy: The Lessons of Recent British Race Relations Legislation,” 161.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), 201-2.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 24.

Parliament forced a decisive response from Conservative party leadership.<sup>28</sup> At the annual conference of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations held in October 1961, Home Secretary R.A. Butler announced that all possible solutions had been considered and ultimately found ineffective, thus, immigration controls were necessary and that restrictive legislation would be introduced.<sup>29</sup> The Commonwealth Immigrant Bill was published twenty four hours after Parliament opened on November 1, 1961, receiving Royal Assent on April 18, 1962.<sup>30</sup>

Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and R.A. Butler cited the cost of housing and influx of migrants as the official reasons for the Bill, noting that the tendency of immigrants to cluster into certain areas was causing social problems in Britain. They claimed that the government would not be able to control such problems if immigrants continued to arrive at the current rate. The Bill introduced a voucher system, granting migrants entry based on their skill and whether they had secured employment before arrival. But the Bill clearly had a color bias, as the Irish were conveniently exempt- all other groups arriving in significant numbers were colored.

The Labour opposition to the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill was led by Hugh Gaitskell who argued that the “bill will be regarded very largely throughout the world as the imposition of a colour bar...”<sup>31</sup> He cautioned against restricting Commonwealth migrants while opening the door to Europeans by entering the European Economic Community, stating that it was a “very sad day for the Commonwealth” and that the true

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<sup>28</sup> Carson, “A Matter of Policy: The Lessons of Recent British Race Relations Legislation,” 161.

<sup>29</sup> National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, Official Report of the Eightieth Annual Conference, October 11-14, 1961, 26-33 in Carson, “A Matter of Policy: The Lessons of Recent British Race Relations Legislation,” 161.

<sup>30</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), vols. 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 657 and 658 in Carson, “A Matter of Policy: The Lessons of Recent British Race Relations Legislation,” 161.

<sup>31</sup> Hansard, 648 (October 31, 1961): 26 in van Hartesveldt, “Race and Political Parties in Britain, 1954-1965” (1983), 132.

motive for the Bill was “colour and fear of racial disorder.”<sup>32</sup> Other liberals agreed in terms of the racial bias and its certain effect on Commonwealth relations, thus urging the Labour party to eliminate it at first chance.<sup>33</sup> But with Gaitskell’s death in January 1963, Harold Wilson, now leading the Party, moved away from the opposing position, later that year conceding that control was necessary and suggesting Labour’s position never changed, as it was Tory *methods* of control they had opposed all along not the Conservative position.

By the time the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was adopted in 1962 there were already an estimated 400,000+ migrants from the West Indies, India and Pakistan living in Great Britain. The government was primarily concerned with halting the flow of new immigrants; by time action was taken, Britain was already a multicultural society. Some suggest that it was the Act itself that created a multiracial society as it allowed for family reunification and high quotas on new immigration.<sup>34</sup> Whether or not the clear influx of immigration was due to the imminence of the Act is still a matter of debate, but the fact remains that between 1940 and 1950, 211,640 people emigrated from India, Pakistan and the Caribbean; during 1961 and the first half of 1962, before the Act came into force, 191,060 arrived on British shores.<sup>35</sup>

The talk of restrictions and formation of control associations pushed the race and immigration onto the public stage. A subject previously debated in Cabinet surgeries was beginning to receive public attention. In their vigorous attempt to pressure party leaders, political backbenchers were more apt to participate in editorial debates and make public

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 649 (November 16, 1961): 792, 796, 803.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 654 (February 27, 1962): 1228-29, 1231, 1235.

<sup>34</sup> Lauren McLaren and Mark Johnson “Resources, Group Conflict and Symbols: Explaining Anti-Immigration Hostility in Britain” *Political Studies* (2007), 711.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Evans, “Immigration: British-Style” *Transition* (1971), 42.

statements, the content of which became more and more exaggerated and racially charged.

In a meeting of the West Indian Immigrants Committee in December 1961, it was stated that:

Since the public discussion of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill there had undoubtedly been increased sensitivity amount West Indians, who were worried about the likely attitude of their English neighbors. There was a feeling that those people who were prejudiced against coloured people might feel strengthened in their attitude by the Government decision to introduce legislation.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the Commission had received reports of “West Indians having been insulted in the streets and public houses,” and since the publication of the Bill there had also been an increase in activity of organizations opposing colored immigration. It was reported that the Commission had received a vast number of reports suggesting there was a significant change in the attitude of police officers against West Indians; “there had been many allegations of physical manhandling of West Indians by the police.”<sup>37</sup>

Growing local tensions spurred civic-minded white residents to create Voluntary Liaison Committees (VLCs) in many cities. With the aid of local churches and councils, such organizations sought to assist immigrants to get settled in their new home. They carried out a diverse set of functions including the delivery of juridical and social services such as the administration of English classes. The committees had a paternalistic conception of the welfare of immigrants, as they were primarily focused on explaining to colored migrants how to conform to British society. At the time of creation, they were neither efficient nor politically expedient. Generally run by volunteers, VLCs were

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<sup>36</sup> CO 1031/ 3931, 19 December 1961, Extracts from minutes of meeting of West Indian Immigrants Committee.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

marginal on the political scene in the 1940s and 1950s. They were generally ignored by local councils, who had little to no interest. Some scholars of immigration politics favor a Marxist-inspired argument that VLCs served to control minority populations and shield them from local politicians, thus contributing to the non-politicization of racial issues, while others suggest that the Committees contributed to the local attitude of benign neglect that was present on the national scene. However, the VLCs did have a serious impact on how the issue would be dealt with nationally in that they encouraged the central government to see the problem as one that should be dealt with locally; their presence in the 1940s and 1950s can in some ways be seen as placing racial issues on the path of local politics rather than national.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of the actions and influence of Volunteer Liaison Committees and the positions taken by the Conservative and Labour parties in order to marginalize race and immigration, the issue exploded onto the national scene shortly after the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, mainly as a result of the shocking events that occurred in the Midlands town of Smethwick. Determined to seize the parliamentary seat that had been held by Labour for almost twenty years, the Conservative candidate, Peter Griffiths, chose to run on an openly racist platform, tackling the colored immigration issue outright. The nature of his campaign and the ultimate results would have a long and lasting impact on race and immigration in British party politics.

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<sup>38</sup> Romain Garbaye “British Cities and Ethnic Minorities in the Post-war Era: From Xenophobic Agitation to Multi-Ethnic Government” *Immigrants and Minorities* (2003), 303.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SMETHWICK AND AFTER

I have come here to visit because I am disturbed by reports that coloured people in Smethwick are being treated badly. I have heard that they are being treated as the Jews under Hitler. I wait for the fascist element in Smethwick to erect gas ovens. -*Malcolm X, February 1965*

Immigration first entered the political scene in Smethwick during the local elections of 1960 when a Conservative candidate for the Soho Ward ran on a policy of evicting colored people from overcrowded houses without government responsibility to assist in their relocation. Running on a racist platform, the Conservative almost won the Labour seat at a time when Smethwick Tories, riding on their Party's current fortunes, gained four seats on the Smethwick Council and for the first time threatened the well-established Labour majority. Shortly after the 1960 campaign a series of disturbances dubbed as 'race riots' broke out on the borders of Dudley and Smethwick, following which a wave of letters on immigration began to appear in the local newspapers, the publication of which continued almost unabated until the General Election of 1964.

In 1960 a long series of letters written by Lawrence Rieper, a retired bank officer from Manchester, vehemently opposing colored immigration were published in the *Smethwick Telephone*, a widely circulated local paper. The paper served as a vehicle to spread racist propaganda, facilitating Rieper's correspondence with Donald Finney, an

engineer from Smethwick who joined Rieper in a long campaign violently opposed to the settlement of colored people within Britain. In an effort to spark fear amongst the Smethwick population, Finney included exaggerated and unsubstantiated statistics in his letters. In February 1961 he wrote:

I wonder how many people realize that in 1951 we had 19 people known to have leprosy and in 1959, the total jumped to 317 known sufferers in England. In five years' time, at the present rate immigrants are coming into this country, I suppose it will be 1,000 with leprosy. In 1939 there was no leprosy in England and tuberculosis had been stamped out. Now our hospitals are full again.<sup>1</sup>

One month later, at the request of a leading Birmingham councilor, Finney announced the formation of a branch of the Birmingham Immigration Control Association in Smethwick. Over three hundred people attended the committee's first meeting, with an excess of five hundred signing up in the weeks that followed. The group organized the circulation of petitions calling for immigration control, ultimately sending thousands of signatures to Cyril Osborne who was making similar efforts on the national level. Pamphlets were assembled and circulated throughout the district calling for individuals to 'wake up' and take action against the immigrant invasion.

Foot soldiers for the Smethwick branch canvassed the area en masse; their efforts to spread propaganda were organized and extremely effective. Regardless of the veracity of their claims, the average Smethwick resident could not tell the difference between fact and fiction. Furthermore, the leap from real to fantastic was simple; propagandists turned the reality that Asians were more prone to tuberculosis into the notion that all blacks

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1965): 34.

spread dreadful diseases and spun the fact that immigrants resided in multi-occupied slums into the idea that they ‘lived like cattle.’<sup>2</sup>

Events that occurred over the summer of 1961 supported the claims of the Smethwick branch, bringing their cause into the national spotlight. After a ‘Korean war veteran’ was evicted from a home owned and occupied by Indians, the organization circulated a petition arguing that the man had been evicted simply because he was white. Shortly after, the Labour-controlled council agreed to house a Pakistani whose home had been demolished due to slum clearing. Residents of the area of relocation were outraged, threatening to withhold rent should the colored immigrant be granted accommodation; their efforts proved fruitless. Nonetheless, the events further provoked agitators, leading to increased correspondence in the *Smethwick Telephone*; articles and letters addressing the ‘Growing Colour Problem’ appeared on a regular basis.<sup>3</sup>

Until that summer, the Smethwick branch had steered clear of party politics. They trusted neither the Conservative nor the Labour party, believing both would conform to any policy necessary to capture votes- even the colored vote. But as time went on and it became clear that the Conservatives were moving towards the introduction of restrictive legislation, the Association called for “an *en bloc* Labour resignation [in order to] get Smethwick run by councilors who are servants of the people of Smethwick.”<sup>4</sup> The organization’s newfound support for the Conservative party aroused Labour leaders. Accusing the Smethwick branch of being directly connected with Conservatives, Patrick Gordon Walker, the Labour Minister who had held Smethwick’s seat for almost twenty years, refused to speak at a BICA engagement and following the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 36-7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 39.

introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, delivered a speech in opposition of the Bill, further provoking the Association's members.

In March of 1962 the Smethwick branch of the Immigration Control Association was dissolved. Shortly after, Finney, Association founder and former leader officially joined the Conservative party, joining forces with Peter Griffiths, a school teacher, leader of council Conservatives, and Conservative Parliamentary candidate for the Smethwick constituency. Griffiths was different from previous Conservative candidates in that he was not a member of society's higher echelons, but rather a 'man of the people.' He was also a strong supporter of teacher's unions, favored more schools, higher salaries, and better benefits for the unemployed.

As Paul Foot argued, a common misconception about Griffiths is that he was a political opportunist who adopted an anti-immigration stance once the political advantages became evident. Prior to immigration becoming a significant political issue, Griffiths took a stand in favor of restrictions, stating that:

Immigration into this country should be limited to persons of sound health who have jobs and living accommodation arranged before they enter. Preference should be given to persons holding British passports. Immigrants should not be permitted to remain here without working, or to overcrowd their housing accommodation.<sup>5</sup>

Foot noted that this statement was made without provocation and in absence of any electoral advantage. Griffiths' interest in immigration as a political issue became evident in 1961 when he led the Smethwick council in drafting a letter to Harold Gurden, MP for Birmingham, in support of his demands for immigration control. After joining forces with Finney in 1962, Griffiths began addressing the immigration issue in his weekly political columns in the *Smethwick Telephone*, using the column to spread racial

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 31.

propaganda as well as attack his opposition, Patrick Gordon Walker, making such statements as “We do not want another Varna Road in Smethwick” (a street in Birmingham known for its prostitutes), that a single incident in Smethwick could result in race riots, and “As our MP [addressing Gordon-Walker] you have been a dead loss- no doubt you’ll get a medal from the West Indies.”<sup>6</sup>

The campaign slogan “If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour” appeared in July 1963 when Gordon-Walker reported that school children had been organized to chant the slogan. Griffiths’ responded that, “We can’t stop children reflecting the views of their parents. The people of Smethwick certainly don’t want integration.” He went onto tell *The Times*, “I would not condemn anyone who said that. I regard it as a manifestation of popular feeling.”<sup>7</sup> Immigration had become the main theme of Griffith’s campaign. He made statements about the moral dangers the presence of Indians posed to white girls, saying that he had personally seen young ladies entering the homes of such immigrants, called for a ten-year residential qualification for immigrants displaced due slum clearance, and referred to colored residents as “Labour’s immigrant friends.” In January 1964 he wrote that:

Apparently the plight of English children held back by the presence of non-English speaking children in a class doesn’t bother the immigrant leaders. Well, it bothers the Smethwick Tories and our kids are going to get a square deal in spite of the combined opposition of the Socialists and their immigrant friends.<sup>8</sup>

In his official election address he wrote that:

I shall press for the strictest possible control of immigration. We British must decide who shall or shall not enter our country. So vital a matter cannot be left to other Governments. Overcrowding and dirty conditions

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 45.

must be ended. There must be no entry permits for criminals, the unhealthy or those unwilling to work. Our streets must once again be safe at night.<sup>9</sup>

A campaign was also launched directly attacking Gordon Walker, spreading callous rumors that he had sold his house to blacks, that he went to the West Indies to recruit blacks, that his wife was black, and that all of his daughters had married blacks. Patrick Gordon Walker responded that “Labour favours continued control of immigration, stricter health checks and deportation of those convicted of criminal offences.” He thought this simple statement may be enough to pacify his critics.<sup>10</sup>

The people of Smethwick cast their votes on October 15, 1964. Peter Griffiths defeated Patrick Gordon Walker with a swing of 7.3% to the Conservative party in a year when the national average of 2.9% swung towards Labour. The shock was not so much that Griffiths won, nor that race and immigration played such a prominent part in a general election- such feelings towards the issues had been on the verge of eruption. What was amazing was that the sentiment was expressed so openly. With the trickle of Commonwealth immigration turning into a flood and former colonies such as Africa and the Caribbean gaining political independence, the issues of race, nationalism, colonialism and the end of Empire were certainly a part of the electoral agenda that year. Furthermore, given the exposure to events in the southern United States and South Africa through television news, Britons were undoubtedly more aware of current racial strife. But although race was seen as an important issue, it had not been considered a determining factor- until Smethwick.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

The Smethwick results raised the visibility of the race issue on a national level, due solely to the vicious nature of the contest. Furthermore, the outcome confirmed anti-immigrant views that the public was behind their cause. More importantly, the outcome had a resounding effect on both parties' position, especially Labour, making it evident that taking a racist position could, in fact, deliver electoral dividends. Anti-immigrant candidates in Southall and Birmingham Perry Bar had done also well, sparking fear within the Labour party and increasing the vulnerability of the new Labour government.<sup>11</sup>

Newly elected Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson accused Griffiths of manipulating the race issue in order to gain a political advantage, describing the new Conservative Member as a 'parliamentary leper' who would return to 'oblivion; in the next general election. In a public address he asked:

Is the Leader of the Opposition proud of hon. friend the Member for Smethwick? Does he now intend to take him to his bosom? Will the Conservative whip be extended to him, because if he does accept him as a colleague he will make this clear; he will betray the principles which not only his party but also his nation have hitherto had the right to proclaim.<sup>12</sup>

Wilson's direct attack on Griffith's shocked many Conservative politicians, while the leader of the Opposition's refusal to comment on the Griffiths' campaign angered Labour Members.

Prior to the election, then Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home appeared on a national broadcast where he responded to statements in which Griffiths where he claimed that "Smethwick rejected the idea of being a multi-racial society" Douglas-Home commented that "We should not indulge in statements of this kind... Every Conservative candidate and certainly any member of the government and Conservative Party, would

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<sup>11</sup> Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, Race and Race Relations in Post-War Britain* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992): 78.

<sup>12</sup> Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 66.

reject any feeling of racial discrimination and we should not indulge in this kind of statement.” Griffiths responded with a comment in the Birmingham Evening Post, stating that he “still believe[d] the people of Smethwick reject[ed] the idea of a multi-racial society in the town.” The incident prompted Gordon Walker to draft a letter to Douglas-Home addressing the nature of the Griffiths’ campaign asking the Prime Minister to “repudiate specifically and publicly Alderman Griffiths repeated statement of a view which [Douglas-Home]... said is in conflict with Conservative Party policy.”<sup>13</sup>

In a Birmingham Post article published on 24 September 1964, Griffiths argued that the:

Labour Party was stirring up ‘a most dangerous political situation’ and if Socialist council returned to Smethwick in the next few years and gave homes to those who had only been in slum clearance properties a few months there would be immediate riots.

In response, Gordon Walker went on to write to the Prime Minister, “I also ask that you disassociate yourself and your party from these remarks by Alderman Griffiths.” In the Conservative Prime Minister response he stated, “I understand that Alderman Griffiths has stated that he finds himself in entire with what I said. I do not, however, feel that a problem of this sort is dealt with by public correspondence during a General Election campaign.” He contemplated closing the letter with the statement, “I am sure you will agree that it would be undesirable to risk making immigration a major national issue by continuing the correspondence.”<sup>14</sup>

The fact of the matter was that race and immigration had already surfaced on the national scene. What Douglas-Home wanted to avoid was taking a clear stance on the events unfolding in Smethwick. Furthermore, it was becoming evident that Griffiths may

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<sup>13</sup> PREM 11/ 4891, Patrick Gordon Walker to Alec Douglas-Home, 25 September 1964.

<sup>14</sup> PREM 11/ 4891, Alec Douglas-home ot Patrick Gordon Walker, 27 September 1964.

win the electoral bid, thus Conservative leaders chose to ignore the Candidates extreme positions in light of the fact that he was about to gain a seat held by Labour for the past twenty years.

Two years later, Peter Griffiths was unseated by a well-known actor, disappearing from political life until in 1979, he returned to Parliament representing Portsmouth North. Holding the seat until 1997, he carried out the rest of his political career with great caution, so much that the greater public did not realize he was the same “Peter Griffiths” from the 1964 Smethwick campaign.

Following the 1964 election, in a period when race relations was at the forefront of politics, Griffiths was not asked to become involved politically again. Nonetheless, his campaign tactics had made it evident that playing the ‘race card’ could certainly equate to electoral success. The events which unfolded from 1960 to 1964 in the small Midlands town constitute what Foot called a “milestone in British politics.” Smethwick brought on the first Conservative organization in the country that dared associate itself unequivocally with anti-immigrant propaganda. Prior to 1960, the mass of Conservative statements made in favor of multi-racialism had deterred such associations from doing so. More importantly, by highlighting the electoral advantage of an anti-immigrant platform, Griffiths and his 1964 campaign provided the Conservative Party with a political formula to counter the electoral loyalty of the industrial working class to Labour. However limited and temporary his success, Griffiths, by way of his own working class origins and understanding that working class individuals were those most effected by immigration, helped develop the same resonance of loyalty as experienced by the Labour Party. The issue was used to gain the necessary working class votes; in a sense, by facing the issue

straight on and taking a stance, the Smethwick Conservative accomplished what Labour set out to do by means of avoiding the issue.<sup>15</sup>

Recognizing potential political payoff, the majority of Shadow Cabinet decided to move to the Right on the immigration issue. On 3 February 1965, Alec Douglas-Home delivered a speech in which he called for tighter immigration control and evasion and a government scheme to assist immigrants to return to their countries of origin.<sup>16</sup> Cyril Osborne went on to introduce a motion calling for a ban on all future immigration into Britain except for those whose parents or grandparents had been born in the country. Peter Thorneycroft MP, then Shadow Home Secretary, approached Cyril Osborne with the suggestion of a milder approach. The slightly toned-down motion – which still called for deportation and repatriation – was debated on 2 March 1965; the entire Shadow Cabinet marched into the same voting lobby in favor of ‘periodic and precise limits’ to immigration.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the ideas which would produce the 1971 Bill were shaped immediately following the Smethwick election. Griffiths “had thrown a primed grenade into the parliamentary process” which would spark new debate; discussions previously avoided and viewed as political poison were now deliberated in the open arena.<sup>18</sup>

On 21 May 1965, Enoch Powell, MP and staunch supporter of immigration control argued:

The opportunity of a person to enter this country from the Commonwealth ought to be subject to exactly the same considerations, controls and conditions as the opportunity of a person coming from anywhere else... It is wholly absurd that while entry of aliens, whether from France or China,

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<sup>15</sup> Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Evans, “Immigration: British-Style” *Transition* (1971): 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 42..

<sup>18</sup> Clayton Goodwin “If you want a nigger for a neighbour vote Liberal or Labour” (2004): 41.

is controlled and policed with utmost efficiency, and permission to work, and even more to settle is granted only with the greatest care and circumspection, Commonwealth immigrants still stream in with little surveillance and an absolute right to bring or fetch an unlimited number of dependants.”<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, the Conservative Party remained divided on the immigration issue.

The inadequacy of the 1962 election had become evident, highlighted by the introduction of thirty one resolutions introduced at the 1965 Conservative Party calling for further restrictions and ‘precise limits.’<sup>20</sup> Three years after the implementation of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, Conservatives were still plagued by the same pressures which motivated the move towards restriction in 1962.

The Labour Party faced their own set of challenges. Well aware if they adhered to a strong pro-immigrant policy they were certain to alienate the working class, yet fearful if they opted for further control they would lose the support of the socialist-intellectual Left, Labour leaders realized the less they commented on the subject, the better, hoping that an attempt to remove the issue from the political agenda may result in less intense public opinion.

The 1964 Wilson Administration was faced with two unattractive alternatives- they must either tighten controls or risk being perceived as acting irresponsibly by a significant section of the electorate. Labour leaders were well aware that the Smethwick election made it quite evident that immigration could be a huge potential vote-loser if seen as permitting a flood of additional immigrants to enter British cities.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Evans, “Immigration British-Style,” 43.

<sup>20</sup> I. Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities*, (London: OPU, 1973) in Anthony Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 36.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister Volume I, 1964-1966* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 150.

The Government chose a two-pronged approach, attempting to strengthen the ineffective immigration controls enacted in 1962 while also moving to prevent discrimination against immigrants already residing in Britain. Ultimately hoping to remove the immigration issue from the minds of the British public, Labour's actions generated additional interest, as discussions of further limiting the entry of colored immigrants and the possible introduction of criminal sanctions against anyone charged with discriminating against a colored migrant made immigrant communities even more visible to the greater British public.<sup>22</sup>

In response to the politicization of race at Smethwick, the parties worked in a bipartisan effort to extricate the issue from the political arena. Until 1975 leaders followed an informal rule in which each party avoided all race-related subjects. Whichever party was in control of government, they could expect the Opposition to cooperate in this area to an extent rarely enjoyed on other subjects. For over a decade, the Conservative and Labour parties joined in a truly bipartisan effort in terms of British race policy.

The cooperation between the two parties was made evident through the Conservative acceptance of the Race Relations Act of 1965, a hollow act outlawing discrimination in public places, and their agreement with the general outline of the White Paper proposing a reduction in the number of vouchers issued to Commonwealth Immigrants. Alec Douglas-Home referred to the Labour initiatives as "sensible and very fair;"<sup>23</sup> Norman St. John-Stevas, a Conservative Radical stated that both parties were in a "broad area of agreement on this [immigration] question... We are all agreed on the need

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<sup>22</sup> John Carson "A Matter of Policy: The Lessons of Recent British Race Relations Legislation" (1976): 155.

<sup>23</sup> Katznelson, *op. cit.*, 149 in Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain*, 38.

for control.”<sup>24</sup> It was obvious that by the end of 1965 there was clear party agreement in the areas of race and immigration. Both parties had agreed- keep race out of party politics- they did so simply by denying that such issues were politically relevant.<sup>25</sup>

Before the Smethwick election of 1964, the Conservative and Labour parties attempted to keep the immigration issue out of public politics in order to secure their standing in the international arena. After the hostile and openly racist campaign led by Griffiths, party leaders found it necessary to bury the issue once again. It was true that taking a clear stance could result in an electoral advantage, but in gaining the support of one faction, party leaders realized they would lose the votes of another, thus the parties chose to work together to keep the race issue out of politics all together in an effort to satisfy both ends of the electorate. They wanted to decrease immigration while also appealing to the anti-discrimination lobby. By extricating the issue from public politics, both governments were able to enact the necessary laws while avoiding the alienation of any certain part of the British public.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain*, 38.

## CONCLUSION

Between 1945 and 1965, race and immigration in British politics had gone full circle. The bipartisan effort to keep the immigration issue out of the public gaze immediately following the Second World War, launched in order to sustain Britain's imperial status and portray the United Kingdom as a newly enlightened force, began to erode throughout the 1950s. As the importance of Empire diminished and discussions of control increased, the issues of race and Commonwealth immigration formally confined to Members' surgeries began to spill over into the public arena. The 1958 incidents in Nottingham and Notting Hill, deemed 'race riots' by the press, contributed to public awareness, ultimately giving voice to political backbenchers who had opposed colored immigration from the start.

By 1961, aware that could no longer keep pace with the American and Soviet superpowers thus less concerned with international opinion or Commonwealth preservation, the Conservative government found it an opportune time to introduce restrictive legislation. While the Tories began to react to the strong lobby for immigration control, Labour remained opposed, resulting in a crack in the bipartisan effort established in the late 1940s. But before long, consensus reemerged, as both parties wanted to avoid the issue from influencing electoral contests, though in an effort to appeal to the a wider section of the electorate, a centrist faction of the Labour party

emerged. Intent on keeping the immigration out of public politics, both parties remained acutely aware of its significance, maneuvering in order to placate public opinion, but even more so, attempting to manipulate public opinion in order to forward their cause.

The issue of colored immigration became a clear part of party politics in the 1964 Smethwick election. Not only did the Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths run an openly racist campaign, but he managed to *win* running on a clear anti-immigrant platform. Both parties were aware of the political expediency the race issue may produce, but it was the Smethwick election that proved that the race and immigration issues could be major vote-getter. While Conservative leaders did not issue official support for Griffiths and his tactics, they also failed to condemn his actions. Party leaders may not have agreed with his tactics, but chose to turn a blind eye in order to capture the longstanding Labour seat.

But just as Smethwick demonstrated the electoral advantage that may be gained by taking a strong stance against colored immigration, it was also clear that such a position would alienate the Socialist-intellectual section of the electorate. Thus, in an attempt to avoid alienating either faction, both parties reentered their unofficial, unspoken bipartisan agreement to keep race and immigration out of party politics.

While the colored immigration issue had been stifled after 1965 by the bipartisan agreement, the race issue would rear its ugly head again in 1968, when Enoch Powell resurfaced as the populist leader of the charge against non-white immigration. He believed the entry of colored migrants into Britain posed a serious threat to British nationality and culture. He argued that the arrival of a large number of colored immigrants and their tendency to congregate in concentrated areas in Britain would serve

as a barrier to assimilation resulting in a 'race problem' the equivalent of which had taken hold in the United States. He went on to lobby for a complete halt to all immigration and the implementation of a plan to assist those black immigrants already settled in Britain in returning to their native countries.<sup>1</sup>

Powell and his views were launched onto the national scene with his infamous 'river of blood' speech delivered on 20 April 1968. Opposing the pending Race Relations Bill, introduced two days later, he stated:

For these dangerous and divisive elements the legislation proposed in the Race Relations Bill is the very pabulum they need to flourish. Here is the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organize to consolidate their members to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with legal weapons which the ignorant and the ill-informed have provided. As I look ahead I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood!' That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, its coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect.<sup>2</sup>

Powell's speech made him the most popular Conservative politician. In four opinion polls he recorded an average approval rating of seventy-five percent.<sup>3</sup> He received a flood of letters and enormous support at rallies and demonstrations, exhibiting the public frustration surrounding the bipartisan approach and dissatisfaction with anti-discrimination legislation.

The Labour government was enraged by Powell and his speech, believing the bipartisan agreement had been broken. In order to disassociate the Conservative

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<sup>1</sup> Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, Race and Race Relations in Post-war Britain* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publisher, 1992): 81.

<sup>2</sup> Text of speech delivered to the annual general meeting of the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre at the Midlands Hotel, Birmingham, 20 April 1968 in Layton Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, 81.

<sup>3</sup> D. Spearman, "Enoch Powell's Postbag" *New Society* 9 (1968): 667-8 in Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, 81.

leadership from Powell's views, he was removed from the Shadow Cabinet. It was not the exact nature of his position that alienated Powell, but the fact that he expressed his opinions publicly. After removing Powell, Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath stated: "I have repeatedly emphasized that the policy of the Conservative party is that immigration must be more stringently limited and that immigrants wishing to return to their own countries should be helped to financially do so."<sup>4</sup> Heath was angered at the fact that Powell broke the established rule of silences. It became clear that Powell's view represented the large segment of the population that clearly opposed New Commonwealth immigration, were angry over the decline of Britain's imperial decline, and frustrated that British politicians, in their bipartisan effort to keep the issues out of the public eye, were, in fact, ignoring public interest.

Although removed from the Shadow Cabinet, Powell still had a lasting effect on British politics. As a result of his speech, eighty constituency resolutions on immigration were introduced at the annual Conservative conference. With the amount of support Powell was receiving from within the Conservative party, combined with his overwhelming public popularity, the Heath administration was forced to announce tougher controls on immigration.

Smethwick was the 'political earthquake' that injected race onto the political scene as, before the 1964 election, neither party could have guessed the extent to which it would galvanize the political scene. With Smethwick the issue received a high political profile from which it was difficult to retreat. The response of both parties was to attempt to depoliticize race, a bipartisan effort that proved both self-serving and angering the

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Ira Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities: Politics and Migrations in the United States, 1900-30 and Great Britain, 1948-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 181.

electorate and party activists long-term. Nonetheless, Conservative and Labour leaders had managed to create dilute the issue for a period of time, ultimately ensuring the campaign tactics used at Smethwick would not resurface. With the exception of Enoch Powell, both parties managed to impose the bipartisan agreement and marginalize the issues of race and immigration for over a decade.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 51.

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