

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF BRITAIN (MARXIST-LENINIST)

155 Fortess Road,
London N.W. 5.

PARTY SCHOOL ON IMMIGRANT WORKERS - 25th March 1972

Background Paper

A few points need to be made at the outset. The largest number of immigrant workers coming to Britain are from Ireland - North and South. The second largest category in the 1950's - workers from India, Pakistan and the West Indies, - the so-called "dark million" to use the expression coined by the Times, has been severely curtailed ever since the Labour Government's White Paper of 1965 reducing the number of Commonwealth entrants to 8,500 a year. The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, also passed by Labour and directed against East African Asians with British passports statutorily limits their numbers to 1500 a year. The third group that is growing and will grow, though Britain's present economic troubles has inhibited the flow to a certain extent, are workers from Europe - from within and outside the Common Market. Thus Spanish migrant workers are beginning to outnumber those from the Caribbean in certain kinds of hospital jobs. That this last group is classified as aliens while the former two are in the category of Commonwealth and UK citizens is not in the last resort of such importance as all three classes are part and parcel of the working class, subject to all the pressures and conflicts of class exploitation.

The proper definition of immigrant worker is therefore any worker from a foreign land who has come to work and live here. That his hopes and illusions are for a temporary sojourn while reality forces him to extend this period are inevitable to all migrants and do not change the essentials. It is unfortunate that in Britain the word "immigrant" is often not used accurately but rather as an euphemism for non-white workers, for black workers who may happen to be native-born British. Thus the Ministry of Education continues to refer to children born in Coventry and Wolverhampton and London to non-white parents as immigrants. Again in the recent spate of unemployed school-leavers we are told there are many "immigrants" who include black youths whose names may be exotic but whose diction and intonation are unmistakably cockney.

But terms must be used precisely. Black workers, whether native born or migrant, and all immigrant workers, be they Irish, Italian or Pakistani, share common problems with the entire working class. But there are special problems connected with racialism and the deliberate exploitation of racialism by successive British governments since the passage of the first Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962. Related to racial contradictions manipulated for all kinds of political gain are religious and chauvinistic prejudices directed against Jewish immigrants in the early years of the century and against Irish workers. Today with the British government's colonial war in Ireland reaching a new stage the mass media are once again fanning anti-Irish prejudice.

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Our problem at this school, however, is wider than those encompassed by racialism. How to bring migrant workers into the unified stream of a class-conscious, politicised British working class to struggle for the overthrow of the capitalist system: that is the goal. In this task the immigrant workers present some positive and negative features. The most obvious positive feature is of course their class position as workers. The following table taken from a 1971 Runnymede Trust pamphlet (Race and Jobs, Question 56) for 1966 shows how far the integration of immigrants into the different strata of the working class has gone. It is important to compare the immigrant job position with that of the total labour force and to notice how, for each stratum, the percentage of immigrants parallels that of the total labour force. Incidentally the immigrant figures are for all - not just black ones.

<u>Distribution of Jobs</u>	<u>All Immigrants</u>	<u>Total Labour Force</u>
	%	%
Chemical workers	0.61	0.59
Glass workers	0.33	0.42
Metal workers	1.16	0.85
Electrical workers	1.85	2.47
Engineering workers	10.66	11.14
Woodworkers	1.80	1.88
Textile workers	2.09	1.63
Clothing workers	2.64	1.88
Construction workers	2.59	2.39
Transport workers	4.99	6.03
Food workers	1.46	1.61
Labourers	9.23	5.19
Manual Total	<u>29.38</u>	<u>36.08</u>
Clerical workers	9.74	13.69
Sales workers	5.44	9.59
Service workers	15.28	12.04
Professional workers	13.47	9.55
Non-Manual Total	<u>43.93</u>	<u>44.87</u>

A young labour force, concentrated in industry, should not prove as difficult to mobilise as migrant, seasonal agricultural workers in parts of the USA. The way in which immigrant workers in the post office or engineering have joined the ranks of militant workers is further evidence of this positive feature.

What then are the negative features? Their tendency to travel and move around in search of something better is not all that insuperable a barrier although it does present problems. Like all migrants they have to take the jobs that in times of full employment the native-born workers avoid because of low wages and obnoxious conditions of service. Difficulties associated with

getting employment make them more vulnerable to abuses at the hands of intermediate and lower-level management as experiences of Irish building workers and Asian workers at Injection Moulders for example have shown.

Of particular concern with regard to black workers from the Commonwealth is their growing insecurity over and above that connected with rising unemployment. The government's deliberate policy of emphasising racial differences everytime it wants to create a distraction has led to laws whose effect has been to create all kinds of difficulties for immigrant workers and their families. The most recent of these - the Immigration Bill of 1971 soon to be enacted into law - is the most harsh, creating conditions of service for the "non-patrial" black immigrant reminiscent of indentured labour. Tied to specific jobs for specific periods with the threat of deportation hanging over them should they become militant, immigrant workers will become not merely liable to all manner of intimidation but a possible source of scab labour. Together with the prospects of a mobile labour force, as the various regulations guaranteeing this within the E. E. C. become operative for Britain, the immigration controls are going to intensify the migrant workers' sense of fear and isolation. It makes our task all the more urgent.