

CLEANSING OUR RANKS

A platform for
anti-racist
trade unionists

Workers Against Racism 20p



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Introduction

'Unity is strength' is one of the basic principles of trade unionism. Trade union leaders recognise that racism is divisive; the TUC condemns all manifestations of racism. Yet racism exists, not only outside, but inside the trade union movement. The basic principles of trade unionism do not apply to black workers. In numerous industrial disputes — at Imperial Typewriters, Courtaulds, Mansfield Hosiery, Red Scar Mill — black workers had to fight alone.

The TUC leadership has published a mass of pamphlets and leaflets urging fair and equal treatment for its black members. It even has its own guidelines: *Black workers — a charter for equality of opportunity*. But racism cannot be fought with paper declarations, only with action and organisation. For the past two years trade union supporters of **Workers Against Racism** have been monitoring racist activities inside the trade union movement. Our evidence shows a disturbing trend. Racism is widespread at all levels of the union movement. Moreover, it is institutionalised at the workplace in many industries. Discrimination exists in hiring, promotion, grading and working conditions.

We want to change this state of affairs for two reasons. First, because racism paralyses the working class. The more workers are at each others' throats, the easier it is for the employers to get their way. Second, the only class that can fight racism effectively is the working class. We believe the trade union movement can and *must* become an effective weapon in the anti-racist struggle. But we must put our own house in order first, we *must cleanse our ranks*. In the following pages we outline our platform for anti-racist workers in the trade union movement.

BL 'broke race Act' by rejecting black man

By Lucy Hodges

British Leyland and two union shop stewards were accused yesterday of discriminating against a black man by refusing to employ him at BL's Castle Bromwich plant, West Midlands, in 1977.

The finding against BL Cars, announced by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) at press conferences in three cities, was angrily denounced by the company, which said the commission had produced a misleading and inaccurate report. The union concerned, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, accepted it.

The commission's report, forecast in *The Times* last week, has taken more than two years to complete. The CRE, announced in February, 1979, that it was carrying out a formal investigation into the complaint after a white worker complained that a black machine tool fitter, Mr George Jones, was refused a job on racial grounds.

The report yesterday found that BL Cars and the two

AUEW shop stewards, who have since resigned their union positions and left the plant, had broken the Race Relations Act 1976.

Non-discrimination notices against the company and against Mr John Gardner and Mr Terry McAuley, of the AUEW, were issued instructing them not to discriminate further. BL Cars was told it had to issue instructions regularly to all staff concerned with recruitment setting out the law, as well as to provide the CRE with information about staff employed at the plant in future.

The company promptly appealed to an industrial tribunal against these requirements, saying they were unnecessary and a burden. The hearing was dropped when BL confirmed that it proposed to reissue its equal opportunity handbook.

The CRE disliked the argument put forward by the company at the industrial tribunal stage, which BL Cars repeated yesterday, that it had not discriminated against Mr Jones because he was black, but because others would not work with him because he was black. It decided to investigate BL Cars after a complaint from Mr Henry James. He said that after a meeting of AUEW machine tool fitters their shop stewards successfully put pressure on their superintendent to reject a Birmingham-born applicant of Caribbean origin. They voted by 17 votes to 14 to reject the man because he was black.

The CRE reported that when it first approached the company it said there had been no discrimination because the superintendent, Mr A. Fisher, had decided not to appoint Mr Jones before his meeting with the shop stewards.

"Then, when we embarked on the investigation, they said that the decision had been made after the meeting, but initially maintained that Mr Jones was rejected, not because of his race, but because he lacked the required experience, even though whites with similar experience had been taken on.

1) Apprentice recruitment procedures by many employers contained a clear potential for indirect discrimination against black youths, it was said in a report published yesterday (Arthur Osman writes from Birmingham).

Dr Gloria Lee and Dr John Wrench, of Aston University, Birmingham, monitored 1,266 pupils at four local comprehensive schools. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils varied from between 29 per cent and 72 per cent.

From the schools, 46 per cent of the white fifth formers seeking jobs obtained craft apprenticeships, compared with 1) per cent Asians and 15 per cent West Indians. The report was commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality and Birmingham Community Relations Council.

Racism at work

'BL Cars' company solicitor, unwillingly and belatedly conceded to an industrial tribunal at the end of last year that the company had, indeed, refused to hire a British-born black on racial grounds.' (*The Guardian*, 1 October 1981)

BL Cars at Castle Bromwich, recently exposed by a formal investigation of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), has a long record of discrimination. BL at Coventry recently instituted special security precautions on black employees — until a public protest stopped them. But, as the CRE reports shows, it was not only the employers but also the white workers who conspired to prevent the employment of a black fitter. Thus, BL's company solicitor could claim that 'the reason for not hiring him was not because he was black, but because others would not work with him because he was black'.

The CRE report shows that the majority of machine tool maintenance fitters at the plant refused to accept a black fitter in the shop. Two shop stewards, T McNulty and J Gardner informed the plant superintendent of the decision and the black applicant was not hired. The report gives other instances of racist abuse by white workers at BL.

Unfortunately BL is not an isolated example. TUC-affiliated unions have controlled entry into employment in sections of the motor and engineering industry for decades — and they have used this power to enforce an informal colour bar. In the West Midlands engineering apprenticeships are closed to black youth. Union officials who sit on selection boards for apprenticeship schemes must take their share of the blame for this situation. Our evidence shows that Massey-Ferguson in Coventry turns down blacks for employment. It is widely believed that the colour bar is tolerated by the local unions. Asian workers at Vauxhall in Luton are being actively encouraged to take voluntary redundancy payments, *not by management, but by their local AUEW officials.*

One indignant worker of Asian origin at Ford, Dagenham exposes the complicity of the unions in racism: 'The Ford management has used racism to build its huge empire. The unions have the power to do something about it but only if we have a different leadership. I've been at Fords for over 10 years and during that time there has been no improvement. Black workers have the worst jobs on the line and in the foundry. We are pushed around and abused by white foremen. Some years ago there were big fights — they were racial, black workers responding to abuse. The unions didn't do anything, in fact they went out of their way to deny that the fights were motivated by racial abuse'.

The colour bar operates in other industries as well — the foundries and textile mills are the most notorious examples. In these industries the workforce is often segregated through the shift system — blacks on nights, whites on days. Many colour bars are designed to reserve higher grades of work for white workers.

Local government is another area where discrimination prevails. Local authorities like Walsall Council still get away with informal apartheid, employing as little as 1.2 per cent of the manual workforce from the black community. Boroughs in London, such as Lambeth and Hackney, espouse equal opportunity policies — but employ very few blacks and virtually none in the higher administrative grades. Hackney Council takes its discrimination even further: black employees in the Social Services department have been disciplined and demoted for drawing attention to the discrimination that prevails in every sphere of Council authority —

health, housing, education and employment. The unions tolerate this state of affairs. When an overzealous white housing officer encouraged police raids on the houses of suspected illegal immigrants — the unions remained silent.



Discrimination haunts education too.

Even education is not immune from racist practices. One black teacher from Waltham Forest tells of his experiences in the schools: 'Of course all teachers face deteriorating conditions. But black teachers in particular get a raw deal, we get bad classes, we don't get promoted. It's happening to me. I've been 10 years on Scale I. That does not happen to white teachers. The NUT locally has passed a motion asking for the monitoring of black teachers' progress. This hasn't happened'.



David Hoffman

Black workers on their own

Unions do more than tolerate racial discrimination at work — they also fail to defend black workers who are resisting the employers' attacks. In their statements to us, black workers have repeatedly drawn attention to the uncooperative and sometimes overtly racist reaction of union officials. Ajmeer Singh, a leading activist in Coventry Indian Workers Association, told us how blacks often have to fight alone:

'In the 'sixties and 'seventies whenever there was any strike action, Indian workers always backed it. But on the other hand, when we came out white workers often ignored us. For example, in Sutton at the Mothers Pride bakery, 86 loaders in the despatch department came out in a dispute over extra workloads. White workers didn't come out. The strike lasted 10 to 12 months and all the time the TGWU didn't make it official. This was sabotage.'

Railway worker John Defoe tells the same story: 'The unions, the TUC and the Labour Party don't do anything to fight racism, they say they stand for the working class but we don't get any benefits. Where I work now, there is a lot of racism. I used to be in the AUEW, now I've joined the NUR, but things haven't changed much. Black people still don't find their problems being taken up by the unions'.

Indeed, black workers often find that union officials are ready to sabotage their struggles. The action organised by migrant workers against their miserable conditions in the hotel and catering trade in London is a good example. The union officials were as big a problem as the employers:

'We have had a hard fight, but the hardest fight was against union officials. . . . The union didn't seem interested in us at all — we were only allowed five minutes with the district official of the union to explain our case. Many of the workers are going to leave the union.'

The union in this case was the TGWU. When the leading militants in this struggle were finally deported, the TGWU did nothing. On the contrary, TGWU leaders went on to petition the government to decrease the number of work permits issued to foreign workers.

Textile unions have perhaps the worst record. Black workers who fought against degrading conditions in the early 'seventies were pressurised back to work by officials such as L R Smith of the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers. Smith blamed black people for their appalling working conditions:

'Heckmondwike Carpets is a lively, well-run profitable firm and carpets is the second highest paid section in the textile group. There's a communication problem really. The immigrants tend to stick together in a community and, when they hear that someone else has had a pay rise, they think they should get one too. . . . They're a bit naive really, some of them don't know what a statute is.'

The trade unions are prepared to organise black workers and to take their dues. But black workers receive little attention from their unions. *Black workers are union members but they are not considered as part of the British labour movement.* Why? Because the TUC, both ideologically and organisationally, has become closely linked with the British state. Along with the employers, the TUC argues that British industry must come first and the national interest must be defended. This nationalist prejudice assists the bosses but divides the labour movement. Workers see themselves as British first and workers second. That's why chauvinist attacks on foreigners — including foreign workers — are accepted in the labour movement. Nationalism and suspicion of all things foreign easily turn into an acceptance of racial discrimination. Workers who believe in putting Britain first will also argue that British workers should come before foreigners.

When nationalism turns into racist abuse the union leaders are powerless, not because they don't want to do anything, but because it is their own patriotic outlook that makes racism respectable. The first step towards defeating racism in the unions is taking a stand that rejects nationalism, collaboration with employers, and all manifestations of the prejudice which puts British workers before the working class as a whole.

Paper equality

The trade unions have reduced the anti-racist struggle to a sick joke. After the CRE investigation into racial discrimination at BL, the AUEW made a strong plea for racial harmony. Local divisional organiser Bill Jordan spoke reassuringly: 'All new shop stewards were invited to a two-day course which covered equal opportunities and racial discrimination'. But racism cannot be fought in the classroom. The union leadership itself has got to root it out. One of the black workers occupying Staffa works in East London had a simple solution to racism at BL, Castle Bromwich: 'The AUEW should have immediately expelled any of its members and shop stewards who were active racists'.

The widely publicised South East Regional TUC (SERTUC) initiative provides a good example of the TUC's directionless anti-racism in action. In 1978, after a series of violent racist attacks on Asians in Brick Lane, Len Murray visited the area to express his concern to the Spitalfields Bangladeshi community: the SERTUC campaign was officially launched more than a year later, in October 1979. However, SERTUC secretary Jack Dromey struck a note of caution shortly after the much heralded launch: 'Immediate dramatic success was not expected — the unions had in mind a programme covering three or four years activity'. And Dromey cannot be accused of undue pessimism. Since that time there has been no 'dramatic success', in fact in the first two years there has been no success at all.

SERTUC's Phase One was a recruitment campaign for black workers. But organising in East London sweat shops has not been easy. Since the campaign was launched more than 5000 jobs in the garment trade have been lost. Many of the shops designated for the recruitment drive no longer exist. But in any case, organising black workers is no substitute for fighting white racists.

It is now 1981 and the 'major campaign' has amounted to nothing; black workers' livelihoods are even more threatened as a result of the collapse of the garment industry and racial violence stalks the streets of East London. SERTUC's Phase Two is now in full swing: the 'implementation of equal opportunities' in the workplace. Not much is expected out of this phase either — for the simple reason that there are few workplaces left in which to encourage 'racial harmony'. And the record of the local public sector unions shows that 'racial harmony' is not one of their priorities. Public

Round 1 in major campaign against racism—organising ethnic minorities

Unions declare war on the East End sweat-shops

Morning Star Industrial Reporter
WAR on the worst excesses of the sweat-shops is the first stage in a major initiative to combat racism in London's East End launched yesterday.

The campaign to recruit to the trade unions the ethnic minorities and unorganised white workers was set up by the South East Regional Council of the TUC.

Tens of thousands of jobs in the ethnic industries will be distributed, saying people to join a union and a recruitment film is to be screened in Asian cinemas.

Secretary Jack Dromey said that the trade unions also intend to put their own house in order, for example, returning to the tradition of bilingual and bilingual union meetings.

HOUSEHOLD NAMES

Small sweat-shops and the practice of sub-contracting, coupled with unorganised cheap labour, formed the basis on which many cheap clothes are made by stores that are household names, he added.

On this, said TUC general secretary Len Murray, "it is common to it we are prepared to name names."

Trade union organisation would remove this element of unscrupulous competition between employers, he said, as had happened in other parts of the country.

Mr. Maurice Styles, an assistant general secretary of the Union of Postal Workers, said



Launching the unions' campaign against East End racism (left to right): Mr. Len Murray, Mr. Maurice Styles, Mr. Jack Dromey, Mr. John Dar and Mr. Arthur Hillier.

that to end racism people's hearts and minds must be won, and this would be helped if they were all in the same unions.

Mr. John Dar, chairman of the recruitment working party, emphasised: "We will be recruiting all workers including whites. If we want harmony we must win them all."

But by showing the ethnic minorities that the unions cared about them, and were prepared

to speak to them in their own languages, their dignity and respect would be restored.

Once that was achieved they had a better chance of success than they had had at Grunwick and Clerkenwell House, he said.

Mr. Dromey said that industrial dramatic success was not expected — the unions had in mind a programme covering

three or four years' activity.

The second phase, to start next year, will be geared to ending discrimination and the lack of equal opportunity in union-organised workplaces.

The 11 major trade unions are all involved in the campaign, including SOGAT which will concentrate on the large number of small retail shops in the area.

And declare, and declare, and declare. . .

sector unions such as NALGO, GMWU, TGWU and NUPE have turned a blind eye to informal apartheid among their own membership. While more than 20 000 black people live in Tower Hamlets, you can count the number of black local authority employees on one hand. SERTUC's bandwagon has ground to a halt before the inbuilt structures of racial discrimination accepted by employers and unions.

WAR action platform

We have had enough of the TUC's anti-racist charade. An informal colour bar exists in many areas of local government and discrimination is practised daily in industry. We believe it is hypocritical of the TUC to

denounce racial violence and fascism while it tolerates racist practices in the workplace. Below we outline the issues that anti-racist workers must tackle.

Public sector workers

Workers in the public sector have a special responsibility for fighting racism, because they work for an employer — the British state — that puts considerable resources into the enforcement of racial oppression. State employees are called upon to execute government policies such as the regulation of the movement of immigrant workers and their internal control. The civil service monitors ethnic minorities and provides the forces of repression with valuable information. *Supporters of WAR, particularly in the civil service unions, should fight for union-wide support for a boycott of activities which assist the implementation of anti-immigrant policies.*

There is an even more pressing issue facing anti-racists in the public sector. To overcome the crisis of profitability, the ruling class is prepared to cut back ruthlessly on government spending on education, health care and social services. The authorities are also determined to reduce the real value of pensions and dole money. To implement these cuts the state uses traditional divide and rule tactics. In the first place, cuts are often directed against unpopular 'foreigners' and 'immigrants'. Because attacks on immigrants have widespread support, the government can easily get away with these measures and thus soften up public service workers to accept further cuts and reductions in services. Nationalism and racism are powerful levers for pushing through the strategy of the ruling class.

Higher education provides another example. For the past five years the state has campaigned remorselessly against overseas students: their fees were more than doubled, they were deprived of essential services and their position was made insecure. The unions, particularly the Association of University Teachers (AUT), restricted their response to verbal protests. Many lecturers were prepared to accept racial discrimination in order to save their own necks. But matters did not end with the overseas students. The recession deepened and the cuts intensified — and today thousands of lecturers and university staff face the chop. Their inaction over the victimisation of overseas students in the past renders them ineffectual today in defending their own jobs and conditions.

Higher education provides a cautionary tale. As the same approach extends to other sectors, the Department of Health and Social security leads the way. It hopes to bring in a set of racist criteria for reducing health service and benefit payments. The DHSS has authorised a survey on the nationality of people seeking NHS treatment in hospitals. A pilot project has been launched in ten hospitals to survey patients as a prelude to introducing charges for overseas visitors. Patients with 'foreign-sounding names' or of 'foreign appearance' face rigorous checks. The three main unions involved — NUPE, NALGO and COHSE — have urged their members to boycott this racist survey. Unfortunately none of the unions has organised its members to make sure that the DHSS plans are wrecked. WAR has organised a successful boycott in the Wythenshawe Hospital in Manchester. But this is only the beginning. In early 1982 the government has plans to publish regulations for introducing charges for 'overseas' patients of the NHS. *Hospital workers must organise a campaign of non-cooperation with these regulations. Racial discrimination in the hospitals will lead to even further losses of services to the working class.*

There is little time to lose. Officials representing the NHS unions have already accepted the new government policy. A special memorandum drawn up by the ASTMS divisional officer Donna Harber shows that at the NHS General Whitley Council meeting, most officials were prepared to allow the victimisation of foreign patients. To her credit, Donna Harber opposed this measure and circulated a report appealing for support:

I am circulating a full report on this subject because I consider it an extremely important one, because I think members have a right to know how their representatives acted and what odds we are up against, and because I think it vital to the future of the NHS (as well as the fight against racial discrimination) that we take every opportunity we have in whatever trade union bodies we are represented to condemn and oppose this Government initiative.' (*NHS charges to overseas nationals*, 28 October 1981)

The DHSS has also been active in attacking the rights of immigrant workers to supplementary benefits. Recently an Indian woman was disqualified from obtaining supplementary benefits because she could not speak English. The DHSS decided that she was 'failing to make herself available for work' because she did not speak English. Now the DHSS has launched a more ambitious programme for reducing benefit payments. In conjunction with the Department of Employment, a plan has emerged for identifying the ethnic origin of unemployed people before dealing with their claim. A Department of Employment circular of 4 November 1981 claims that the survey has only a statistical significance. But everybody knows that if implemented, it will put considerable pressure on immigrant claimants and potentially deprive them of their benefits.

The circular itself reveals that a major purpose of such statistics is to encourage civil service workers themselves to police immigrant workers. The Department of Employment nationality checks, like the DHSS checks in the hospitals, are part of the mechanisms the state needs to back up the new Nationality Act and set its seal on racial divisions in the working class.

The reaction from the civil service unions up to now has been muted. The Society of Civil and Public Servants, representing managers and supervisors in unemployment benefit offices, has criticised the plan for being 'insensitive and likely to breed suspicion and alarm'. And that's about all.

Trade unionists in the public sector cannot turn a blind eye to the apartheid-style regulations now being imposed in the hospitals and dole offices. They cannot become accomplices to the institutionalisation of racial discrimination in the public sector and hope to save their own necks. Workers who refuse to defend the rights of their black fellow workers will be contributing to the destruction of services which are necessary for the survival of the working class. *Supporters of WAR in the hospitals and unemployment benefit offices must campaign for resolute opposition to the introduction of public sector apartheid.*

Race checks plan for hospitals

By David Hencke
Social Services Correspondent

Nationality and residence checks for all patients admitted to hospital from next year have been approved by the Department of Health.

The recommendation goes to Mr Norman Fowler, the Social Services Secretary today, despite evidence from a survey of 10 hospitals that abuse by overseas patients is negligible. The survey was conducted for the department's committee investigating such abuses.

Protests are already building up from overseas students organisations, immigrant groups, the Commission for Racial Equality and Labour MPs. Details of the new recommendations are contained in an internal report from a Department of Health working party, passed to the Guardian yesterday.

The report recommends that everybody admitted to hospital be asked if they have lived in Britain for three years, whether they are staying permanently and whether they or their spouse works here.

If they answer "no," they will have to answer another three questions and face a detailed examination by senior staff.

The report also recommends tighter procedures to minimise abuse, with some exemptions on health grounds.

These include: passport checks at hospitals for EEC nationals, Scandinavians, nationals of Eastern bloc countries, Maltese and New Zealanders, entitled to free treatment under reciprocal arrangements.

Free treatment for people committed under the Mental

Health Act, but charges for voluntary treatment.

Free treatment in outpatient departments after accidents and emergencies, but no admittance to a National Health Service hospital bed until overseas patients agree to pay;

Free treatment for all communicable diseases if there is a danger to British citizens;

Free treatment for all for-

eign seamen working on United Kingdom ships or oil and gas rigs.

The report recommends a new guidance manual for hospital staff who deal with patients, and says deposits for medical treatment in NHS hospitals and advance charges by health authorities should also be introduced. General practitioners would also be expected to co-operate in identifying patients who could have to pay.

Last night, Mr Larry Goetin, the legal director of MIND, the national association for mental health, warned that the proposals for overseas mental patients could be "dangerous."

"It could encourage hospitals to extend the compulsory detention of immigrants and prevent people visiting Britain who suffer from mental illness from seeking treatment."

The United Kingdom Overseas Students Association warned the Government yesterday that the proposals were "impracticable and potentially discriminatory."

A platform for anti-racist workers

Workers Against Racism trade union activists stand for action against racial discrimination at the workplace, in trade unions and in the community. We stand for

No racist employment policies!

- resistance to discrimination in hiring, firing, apprenticeships, grading and promotion
- rank and file action for jobs and equality — not bureaucratic gestures such as 'positive discrimination' and 'equal opportunities'
- opposition to colour bars — to be led by the trade unions and the officials involved
- TUC action against racism at work, including support for anti-racist activists, the election of full-time anti-racist officials and the expulsion of officials who tolerate or support racist practices

No racist laws!

- opposition to all racist legislation and immigration controls
- non-cooperation with all racist surveys, inquiries and questionnaires
- full citizenship rights for migrant workers
- withdrawal of trade union backing from government work permit schemes

Workers defence!

- workers' discipline against racist workers — not measures taken by employers, the state or the bureaucrats
 - workers' defence against racist attacks — at work, at home, on the street
 - trade union action against racism among the unemployed
 - trade union support for black people against police harassment
-



To survive, we will have to fight together.

Send us money!

Help us to deal with the racists in the workplace, to fight formal and informal colour bars, to respond to passport raids and police harassment at work. Rush donations to WAR, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX.

Order extra copies of *Cleansing our ranks*: 20p plus sae, or 20 copies for £3.

Workers Against Racism

WAR
trade union
sub-committee

Help us
fight racism
in the
unions

We need information on all aspects of racial discrimination at the workplace.

Tell us about your experiences in fighting racism.

Join WAR and fight for our Platform for anti-racist trade unionists.

Write to WAR, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX.