

**‘From Birmingham to Bulawayo’: The Labour Government,
Race and Decolonisation, 1964-1970**

Thesis submitted for the degree of MPhil.

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I, Kieran O'Leary, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis examines how Harold Wilson's Labour government of 1964-1970 addressed the issues of race and decolonisation both internationally and domestically. Internationally, the thesis is primarily concerned with the Wilson government's policies and attitudes towards the former non-settler empire. The early 1960s saw most of Britain's remaining non-white colonies gain their independence, the so-called 'winds of change'. Despite this loss of empire, many senior Labour figures believed that Britain still had a key role to play with regards to its former colonial subjects. This was evident in the Wilson government's commitment to the Commonwealth and the creation of the new Ministry of Overseas Development. Although grounded in apparently noble intentions, these policies were laden with racist assumptions of Britain as a paternal figure responsible to the supposedly backward races, particularly in Africa, a legacy of the 'civilising mission'.

Domestically, the thesis will explore the Wilson government's approach to another legacy of empire: the issue of Commonwealth immigration. The post-war period saw thousands of non-white migrants arrive into Britain from the Commonwealth, predominantly from the West Indies, India and Pakistan. These migrants were permitted unrestricted entry into Britain through the British Nationality Act of 1948. However, the 1960s saw the introduction of legislation to curtail this migration. Although the Labour Party initially opposed the inaugural Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, the Wilson government upheld the Act and later introduced tougher controls. The thesis will examine the links between the Wilson government's approach to these two issues, drawing on the recent scholarly trend which has argued for the synthesis of Britain's domestic and imperial histories. Above all, the thesis will argue that the Wilson government's approach to race, both internationally and domestically, was shaped by a lingering imperial ideology that cast non-white peoples as 'uncivilised' and 'backward'.

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Introduction

“The battle against racialism here in Britain knows no boundaries, no limits. Its boundaries are not the civic limits of Birmingham or Bradford; they extend to Africa, south as well as north of the Zambezi, to Asia, to all the continents of the world.

I am not prepared to stand aside and see this country engulfed by the racial conflict which calculated orators or ignorant prejudice can create. Nor in the great world confrontation on race or colour, where this country must declare where it stands, am I prepared to be neutral, whether the confrontation is in Birmingham or Bulawayo”.¹

(Harold Wilson, 5th May 1968)

On 20th April 1968, Enoch Powell, a senior Conservative politician and writer, delivered a controversial speech on immigration to a meeting of the West Midlands Conservative Political Centre, the so-called ‘rivers of blood’ speech. Powell lamented the arrival of thousands of non-white Commonwealth immigrants, predominantly from the West Indies, India and Pakistan, to Britain since the end of the Second World War. These migrants were permitted unrestricted entry into Britain until the introduction of legislative restrictions in the 1960s. The speech provoked much criticism due to its racist language and evocative symbolism—Powell described non-white immigrant children as ‘wide-grinning piccaninnies’ and warned that if the current rate of immigration continued, ‘in 15 or 20 years’ time, the black man will have the whip hand over the white man’. The speech has often been cited as a seminal example of racism as an issue in British politics.²

¹ Harold Wilson’s speech in response to Enoch Powell’s ‘rivers of blood’ speech. Published in Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70: A Personal Record* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 524–528.

² There are several texts concerning the life of Enoch Powell and the significance of his ‘rivers of blood’ speech. See Simon Heffer, *Like the Roman: the Life of Enoch Powell* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998); Roy Lewis, *Enoch Powell: Principle in Politics* (London: Cassell, 1979); Robert Shepherd, *Enoch Powell* (London: Hutchinson, 1996) and Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

On 5th May 1968, Harold Wilson, the Labour Prime Minister, gave a speech in response to Powell. Significantly, this speech also took place in Birmingham, thus reflecting Wilson's determination to meet the issue head-on. Wilson criticised the racist rhetoric used by 'calculated orators' such as Powell. While Wilson's strong condemnation of Powell was itself noteworthy, the speech was even more intriguing given Wilson's declaration of a 'battle against racialism' that stretched from 'Birmingham to Bulawayo', thereby offering the 'rivers of blood' affair an international as well as domestic setting.³ Wilson referred to Birmingham as this was an area where the issue of race often reared its ugly head during this period. Birmingham had the second largest population of non-white immigrants after London; it was where the Birmingham Immigration Control Association, one of the main supporters of immigration controls, formed in 1961 and it was in neighbouring Smethwick where Patrick Gordon Walker, a senior Labour figure, lost his seat at the 1964 election following a controversial campaign by the Conservative candidate, Peter Griffiths, which focused almost exclusively on non-white immigration.⁴

Wilson's reference to Bulawayo—the second largest city in Rhodesia—alluded to the colonial crisis that faced the Labour government when Ian Smith's government announced its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965.⁵ The late 1950s and early 1960s saw several African colonies gain independence from Britain under majority rule. However, Rhodesia, which was governed by a white minority regime, rejected independence under such terms.⁶ While the Wilson government insisted there could be no independence before majority rule (NIBMAR),

³ Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70: A Personal Record*, 524-528.

⁴ Phillip Jones, "Some Aspects of the Changing Distribution of Coloured Immigrants in Birmingham, 1961-66," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 50 (1970): 199–219. For the Smethwick campaign see Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965); Dhani R. Prem, *The Parliamentary Leper: A History of Colour Prejudice in Britain* (Aligarh, India: Metric Publications, 1965); Michael Hartley-Brewer, 'Smethwick' in Nicholas Deakin, *Colour and the British Electorate, 1964: Six Case Studies* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965). For Griffiths' personal account of the campaign, see Peter Griffiths, *A Question of Colour?* (London: Leslie Frewin, 1966).

⁵ See Carl Peter Watts, *Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence: An International History*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Robert Blake, *A History of Rhodesia* (New York: Knopf, 1978); Elaine Windrich, *Britain and the Politics of Rhodesian Independence* (London: Croom Helm, 1978). For Smith's personal account of the crisis, see Ian Douglas Smith, *The Great Betrayal: the Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith* (London: Blake Pub, 1997). For the Wilson government's policy, see Richard Coggins, 'Wilson and Rhodesia: UDI and British Policy towards Africa', *Contemporary British History*, 20, no. 3 (2006): 363-381.

⁶ The white population of Rhodesia at its peak was 270,000, which represented about 5 per cent of the total population. Barry Schutz, "European Population Patterns, Cultural Persistence, and Political Change in Rhodesia," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 7, no. 1 (1973): 5–6.

the Smith regime sought to retain white rule in perpetuity. Although Wilson was personally repulsed by the Smith regime—according to Wilson’s private secretary, Oliver Wright, the only time Wilson really lost his temper was over the settler regime’s treatment of imprisoned black political leaders—the Labour government found itself in a difficult position on this issue.⁷ To bring down the rebellion by force carried economic costs, especially at a time when Britain faced a huge deficit on its Balance of Payments. Also, the government was faced with the uncomfortable question of whether it could fight against its white ‘kith and kin’, a common term used to describe the Rhodesian settlers.⁸ Denis Healey, the Defence Secretary, described the prospect of fighting Rhodesians of British origin as ‘a most repugnant task of our forces’.⁹ The Wilson government instead opted for an ineffectual sanctions campaign which failed to bring down the Smith regime despite Wilson’s promise to end the rebellion ‘within a matter of weeks rather than months’.¹⁰

Wilson’s linking of the issue of race at home and the colonial crisis in Rhodesia is intriguing given the way historians have traditionally approached these issues. Historians have tended to compartmentalise these two issues into separate histories—the issue of race at home within the sphere of British history and the history of race in Britain,¹¹ and the Rhodesia crisis within the sphere of imperial history and the history of decolonisation.¹² However, the emergence of the New Imperial History, which has argued for the interconnectedness of Britain’s domestic and imperial histories, has challenged this separation.¹³ Although most of the New

⁷ Steven Fielding and John W Young, *The Labour government’s 1964-70*, vol. 2 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 169.

⁸ Carl Peter Watts, “Killing Kith and Kin: The Viability of British Military Intervention in Rhodesia, 1964-5,” *Twentieth Century British History* 16, no. 4 (2005): 382–415.

⁹ CAB 130/206 MISC 4/2, Unilateral Declaration of Independence: Defence Implications, Memorandum by Denis Healey, 27th October 1964, National Archives (NA), London. Published in S.R. Ashton and William Roger Louis, eds., *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, vol. 1, British Documents on the End of Empire (London: TSO, 2004), 179.

¹⁰ J R T Wood, *A Matter of Weeks Rather Than Months: The Impasse Between Harold Wilson and Ian Smith Sanctions, Aborted Settlements and War 1965-1969* ([S.l.]: Trafford On Demand Pub, 2012).

¹¹ See Colin Holmes, *John Bull’s Island: Immigration and British society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) and Peter Fryer and Paul Gilroy, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

¹² See Ronald Hyam, *Britain’s Declining Empire: the Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1991); L. J Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2002).

¹³ See Catherine Hall, *Cultures of empire: Colonisers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: a Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Kathleen Wilson, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Imperial History literature has focused on the nineteenth century, some scholars, most notably Stuart Ward and more recently Bill Schwarz, Jordanna Bailkin and Wendy Webster, have extended the literature into the twentieth century by arguing for the enduring impact of empire on British culture.¹⁴

This thesis will draw on this historiographical trend by examining the links between the Wilson government's approach to race in the international and domestic spheres. Internationally, the thesis is primarily concerned with the Labour elite's policy towards Britain's former non-white colonies, principally through the workings of the Commonwealth association. The early 1960s saw most of Britain's remaining colonies gain their independence and join an expanded, multi-racial Commonwealth. The thesis will explore how senior Labour figures responded to this imperial decline by championing the Commonwealth as a means of ensuring Britain's continued influence over its former colonial subjects and its continued influence on world affairs. The thesis will claim that while this policy was grounded in apparently good intentions, it was nevertheless laden with racist assumptions of Britain as a paternal figure responsible to the supposedly 'backward races', particularly in Africa, this being a legacy of the 'civilising mission'. Crucially, the thesis will show that once it became clear that Britain could no longer control its former subjects and dominate the association, the Labour elite's interest in the Commonwealth quickly diminished.

Domestically, the thesis will focus on the Wilson government's approach to non-white immigration. Although the literature on race in British politics in the 1960s is dominated by Powell and the 'rivers of blood' speech, this thesis will instead examine a key period before 1968 when the Labour Party changed its stance on immigration. The Labour Party under Hugh Gaitskell's leadership strongly opposed the first Commonwealth Immigrants Act introduced by Harold Macmillan's Conservative government in 1962. However, shortly after taking office in 1964 the Wilson government renewed the Act and later introduced tougher restrictions through the 1965 White Paper, *Immigration from the Commonwealth*, and the

University Press, 2004) and Stephen Howe, *New Imperial Histories Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁴ Stuart Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2005.

Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968. While this U-turn on immigration has usually been characterised by scholars as a bow to the pressures of a supposedly hostile and prejudiced British public, this thesis will instead situate it within the broader context of Labour's changing attitude towards the Commonwealth in this period. Before outlining the thesis methodology and structure, this introductory chapter will briefly review the most relevant literature that addresses the themes of this thesis.

The New Imperial History in the Post-War Period

As this thesis looks to connect two issues that have traditionally been divided into the domestic and imperial spheres of history, the relatively limited number of scholars that have argued for the enduring impact of empire in Britain in the 1960s are especially important. The most well-known example is Stuart Ward's *British Culture and the End of Empire*.¹⁵ Ward challenges what he terms the 'minimal impact' thesis—namely, the view that Britain's imperial experience made little or no impression on British society and culture.¹⁶ For Ward, 'while the demise of the British Empire is a theme that has been well traversed in studies of post-war British politics, economics and foreign relations, there has been strikingly little attention to the question of how these dramatic changes were reflected in British culture.'¹⁷ This text uses an array of cultural sources such as films, television and literature to show that 'far from being a matter of indifference, the fall of the British Empire came as a profound shock to the British national imagination, and resonated widely in British popular culture'.¹⁸ In *Englishness and Empire*, Wendy Webster similarly uses cultural sources, principally film, to highlight the enduring impact of empire on English identity and culture.¹⁹

Bill Schwarz's *The White Man's World* has also examined the impact of the loss of empire on British culture, using the example of the Rhodesia crisis. Schwarz claims that 'the coincidence of this colonial crisis, on one hand, with an emergent domestic crisis triggered by non-white immigration, created circumstances in which, symbolically and politically, the two became superimposed'.²⁰ Schwarz argues that

¹⁵ Ward, *British Culture and the End of Empire*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*.

²⁰ Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 396.

despite the loss of empire, old imperial notions of white authority over other races endured and influenced the British public's attitude towards non-white immigrants.²¹ Schwarz places Powell, in particular, as a central figure in this 'reawakening of colonial memories in the postcolonial metropole'.²² He cites a moment during a march by London dockers on Westminster, in support of Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech, where one docker pointed at the Palace of Westminster and proclaimed Powell as 'the only white man in there'.²³ For Schwarz, this comment captured the prevailing sentiment among the marchers that immigration was a betrayal of 'the white man'. He thus sees a parallel between the language employed by Powell with regards to immigration and the language used by the Smith regime to justify its rebellion. While one London docker proclaimed Powell as the only white man in Westminster, Ian Smith liked to portray himself as 'the last white man' betrayed by politicians in Britain.²⁴ Schwarz, though, says little about Powell's views towards Rhodesia. The extent to which Powell played on this parallel is a question that could be further explored.

However, the claims put forward by these scholars are the subject of much debate among historians. In *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, Bernard Porter has challenged the view that British society was deeply affected by empire.²⁵ He argues that recent works have seen imperialism everywhere, using the analogy that cultural scholars, when 'glimpsing a flash of the dolphin's fin in the water, have assumed it belonged to an imperial shark'.²⁶ This analogy typifies a common critique of the methodology employed by scholars such as Schwarz, Webster and Ward: that they lack the empirical evidence to support their claims. John Mackenzie has claimed that there has been little attempt among recent scholars to 'anchor their work in the empirical depth of the imperial experience, resulting in vagueness and

²¹ Ibid, 11.

²² Ibid, 29–30.

²³ Ibid, 49–51.

²⁴ Ibid, 438.

²⁵ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For a survey of this debate, see Andrew S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain From the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, 1st ed (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005).

²⁶ Bernard Porter, "Edward Elgar and Empire," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29, no. 1 (2001): 7.

oversimplification'.²⁷ Schwarz, though, has responded to this criticism by arguing that 'an exclusively empirical method alone cannot reveal those many elements hidden from the naked eye', for example, the abstract notion of 'whiteness' that he refers to.²⁸ He criticises what he describes as Porter's 'intransigently literal reading of the evidence' and counters that it is 'unlikely that identities are ever as transparent and conscious as this'.²⁹

Nevertheless, some scholars have attempted to overcome this methodological quandary by using an empirical framework to supplement these cultural sources. A notable example is Jordanna Bailkin's *The Afterlife of Empire*, which looks to bring together two traditionally separate historical themes—the loss of empire and the creation of the welfare state.³⁰ Whereas Webster, Schwarz, and Ward use cultural sources to demonstrate the enduring influence of empire in the metropole, Bailkin takes a different approach. She uses sources within the National Archives such as papers from the Department of Health, which she claims have been overlooked by political historians who have tended to focus on the departments usually associated with imperial matters such as the Colonial Office. In so doing, Bailkin demonstrates connections between metropole and colony while circumventing the criticism that the New Imperial History literature lacks empirical depth.

These texts have offered new ways of thinking about the relationship between British domestic and imperial history. They have posed vital questions regarding the impact of the loss of empire on the metropole, and at the same time have extended the wider debate concerning the relationship between colony and metropole into the 1960s. Schwarz's work is especially relevant to this thesis as he links the Rhodesia crisis with the issue of non-white immigration, two key problems relating to the question of race that faced the Wilson government in this period. However, it is not just within the confines of the New Imperial History that these themes have been addressed. The issues touched on in this thesis pervade many historiographical

²⁷ John Mackenzie quoted in Robert Gildea and Anne Simonin, *Writing Contemporary History* (London: Hodder Education, 2008), 154–155.

²⁸ Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, 1–2.

domains, including the wider literature on decolonisation and the political history of the Wilson government.

Decolonisation

Within the literature on decolonisation, there is a dominant school of thought which asserts that the loss of empire left scarcely any visible trace in Britain.³¹ Larry Butler argues that compared to other colonial powers such as France and Belgium, which faced ‘quagmires’ during the end of empire in Algeria and Congo respectively, Britain’s experience of decolonisation was relatively trouble-free and ‘had a less direct impact on domestic politics’.³² John Darwin describes Britain’s experience of decolonisation through the following analogy: “It was like a man in the dentist’s chair, soothed by smiling nurses and laced with painkillers while a dentist with a manic grin probed his jaw. Only later does he find that all his teeth have gone”.³³ A commonly cited source used in support of this thesis is the Social Survey of Public Opinion in Britain on Colonial Affairs in 1948.³⁴ The survey found that only 49 per cent of those questioned could name one colony while 3 per cent named America as a British colony, thus revealing the supposed ignorance of the British public towards imperial matters.

In terms of the Labour Party, more attention could be given to its role in the end of empire. Much of the literature has focused on Macmillan’s Conservative administration of 1959-1963, which had granted independence to most of Britain’s remaining colonies before the Wilson government came to power.³⁵ Above all, it is Macmillan’s ‘winds of change’ speech that is usually seen as the landmark moment in the decline of the British Empire. In a speech to the South African parliament in Cape Town in February 1960, Macmillan indicated that Britain would soon grant independence to its African colonies. As Macmillan famously put it, ‘the wind of

³¹ Butler, *Britain and Empire*; Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: Harper Collins, 1992); Hyam, *Britain’s Declining Empire*.

³² Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 196.

³³ Darwin quoted in Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, 11–12.

³⁴ G.K. Evans, *Public Opinion on Colonial Affairs: A Survey Made for the Colonial Office* (Great Britain: Central Office of Information. Social Survey Division, 1948).

³⁵ See W.R. Louis and Ronald Hyam, *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire 1957-1964, 1, High Policy, Political and Constitutional Change* (London: The Stationery Office, 2000) and Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee, *Harold Macmillan and Britain’s World Role* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact'.³⁶

However, the incoming Wilson government in 1964 still faced the question of Britain's imperial role East of Suez and still faced a colonial crisis in Rhodesia.³⁷ Significantly, the two best-known texts dealing with the Labour Party—Stephen Howe's *Anticolonialism in British Politics* and P.S. Gupta's *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*—both end their narratives in 1964.³⁸ Howe claimed that by the time the Wilson government assumed office 'most of the bitterly contested colonial issues of the 1950s had been disposed of'.³⁹ Howe cites John Hatch, the Secretary of the Labour Party's Commonwealth Department, who claimed that it was Iain Macleod's 'enlightened policies' as Colonial Secretary (1959-1961), which enabled him to leave his post in 1961 with 'a feeling that the job was largely done'.⁴⁰ Gupta similarly argued that 'by 1964, with the formal empire practically at an end, the question really was whether there was any role beyond trying to build an equal and just society in Britain'.⁴¹

If decolonisation is defined in its narrowest sense as the process in which previously colonised territories attained their political independence, then such a periodisation is logical as most of Britain's colonies had already been granted or were on their way to independence before 1964. However, if decolonisation is defined more broadly to include the social, economic and cultural effects of this process both in the former colonies and in the metropole, then the Wilson government's role certainly merits more attention. Despite the loss of empire, senior Labour figures believed that Britain still had a key role to play with regards to its former colonies, particularly in Africa. This was evident in the Wilson government's commitment to the Commonwealth and overseas development. Furthermore, the

³⁶ L. J. Butler and S. E. Stockwell, eds., *The Wind of Change: Harold Macmillan and British Decolonisation*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

³⁷ See P. L. Pham, *Ending "East of Suez": The British Decision to Withdraw From Malaysia and Singapore, 1964-1968*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice Between Europe and the World?*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

³⁸ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: the Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002).

³⁹ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 307.

⁴⁰ Hatch's views reported in interview with author in Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 307.

⁴¹ Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964*, 386.

Wilson government had to address a domestic legacy of empire—the presence of non-white Commonwealth immigrants in Britain.

The Wilson Government and Race

Within the broader literature of the Wilson Government of 1964-1970, there are a number of texts that are critical of its approach to race, both domestically and internationally.⁴² In *The Politics of Harold Wilson*, Paul Foot argued that the period 1964-1970 saw ‘the death of Harold Wilson, Yorkshire socialist and moral crusader’ as ‘every one of his priorities had been reversed or abandoned’.⁴³ He claimed that on the issues of immigration and Rhodesia there was a wide gap between Wilson’s anti-racialist rhetoric and actual political activity. In terms of immigration, Foot cited a speech given by Wilson to the anti-Apartheid rally in Trafalgar Square on 18th March 1963, in which Wilson praised Gaitskell’s opposition to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, describing it as ‘one of his many inspiring acts’. However, Foot remarked that the ‘cheering crowd in Trafalgar Square could hardly have been aware that the same man would administer this Act with more severity and unconcern for the human beings involved than its Tory initiators would ever have dared, and then initiate a second Act in 1968 more racialist in motive and effect than its predecessor’.⁴⁴

In terms of Rhodesia, Foot cited a television broadcast on 21st December 1965, in which Wilson promised to not negotiate with the Smith regime, borrowing from Dante in suggesting that ‘the hottest place in hell is reserved for those who are neutral in a moral crisis’. Wilson argued that ‘some are prepared to negotiate with a burglar on the basis that they would allow him to retain his illegal gains, by changing the theft into a gift’.⁴⁵ This was in reference to the small group of Conservative MPs who opposed sanctions on Rhodesia and supported a compromise with the Smith regime. However, in 1966, Wilson held talks with Smith on *HMS Tiger* in which he offered concessions that would have broken all but one of his six principles for

⁴² Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 2: Labour’s Foreign Policy, 1951-2009* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); John Callaghan, Steven Fielding, and Steve Ludlam, *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Paul Foot, *The Politics of Harold Wilson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

⁴³ Foot, *The Politics of Harold Wilson*, 326.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 249–253.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 261.

independence. Leo Baron, a white Rhodesian lawyer jailed by the Smith regime for defending Africans, described these concessions as 'the blackest page in the whole of British colonial history'.⁴⁶ Foot thus declared that 'if Wilson's use of Dante was accurate, he had booked himself a reservation in the hottest place in hell'.⁴⁷

Some scholars, though, have sought to revise this negative appraisal of the Wilson government. In his biography of Wilson, Ben Pimlott argued that critics such as Foot do not take into account the difficult problems that Wilson faced upon assuming office, most notably the £800million deficit on Britain's Balance of Payments. According to Pimlott, Wilson 'came to office in 1964 with serious national and international problems unresolved and left it with a number of difficult decisions taken', for instance, the end of the East of Suez role and the crucial steps taken towards membership of the European Economic Community.⁴⁸ He claimed that on issues such as Rhodesia, Wilson often had to strike a balance between differing forces. While Wilson's decision not to use military force was condemned, most notably by Commonwealth leaders and members of the Labour left, at the same time he was criticised by some politicians, particularly on the Conservative right, for betraying British 'kith and kin' by applying sanctions on Rhodesia. Pimlott argued that Wilson had to find an acceptable balance between these 'contradictory pressures', and, when considered together, these criticisms of Wilson's policy 'cancel each other out'.⁴⁹

In *The Labour Governments 1964-70*, Steven Fielding and John Young look to revise what they describe as 'the overly grim reputation of the Wilson administration as the black sheep of Labour history'.⁵⁰ In terms of immigration policy, Fielding challenges the view that the Wilson government abandoned Labour's principles by extending controls on non-white immigrants. He claims that this view 'overlooks the differential understanding of the Labour Party's purpose'.⁵¹ According to Fielding, for many Labour activists, 'restricting black entry contradicted no

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 285.

⁴⁸ Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 563–564.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 25.

⁵⁰ Steven Fielding and John W. Young, *The Labour Governments, 1964-70. Vol. 1, Labour and Cultural Change*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003): Preface.

⁵¹ Steven Fielding, "Brotherhood and the Brothers: Responses to 'coloured' Immigration in the British Labour Party C. 1951–1965," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 3, no. 1 (1998): 79–80.

principle because, so far as they were concerned, the party's compelling purpose was to defend the material interests of the indigenous white proletariat'.⁵² He cited an appendage to the Labour Party constitution in 1960 that declared the party's central ideal to be 'the brotherhood of man', thus rejecting discrimination on racial grounds.⁵³ However, Fielding claimed that this 'brotherhood of man' principle was challenged by those who thought that non-white immigration undermined the material improvement of the working population'.⁵⁴ Fielding cited, in particular, George Pargiter, the Labour MP for Southall, who in calling for 'a complete ban on immigration to Southall', avowed that 'we are entitled to look after our own people'.⁵⁵

Fielding poses some key questions: 'whom or what did the Labour Party represent? Was it the perceived material interests of the white working class majority that voted Labour? Or was it, instead, a set of universal principles and values to which such people had to be led'?⁵⁶ While George Brown, Labour's Deputy Leader, rejected immigration controls because he could not accept that 'we only represent our constituents', Fielding claims that this was not how most party members felt.⁵⁷ Even the most ardent anti-racialists in the party did not necessarily consider the Wilson government's immigration policy as a betrayal of Labour's principles. Reginald Sorensen, a Labour MP who drafted legislation in the 1950s to tackle racial discrimination, argued that the case against controls was fuelled by an 'intoxicated idealism'.⁵⁸ Fielding's account typifies a common narrative in the wider literature which characterises Labour's changing position on immigration as a bow to the pressures of its own traditional working class electorate who were supposedly hostile towards non-white newcomers.

This thesis will differ from this view, though, by focusing on factors internal to the Labour policy-making elite. Senior Labour figures, like their constituents, were just as susceptible to racist assumptions regarding non-white immigrants, having grown up in a world where the white imperial powers subjugated other races. As Jodi Burkett put it in *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain*, 'members of the left too had gone

⁵² Fielding and Young, *The Labour Governments, 1964-70: Vol. 2, International Policy*, 139.

⁵³ Fielding, "Brotherhood and the Brothers", 87-88.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Fielding and Young, *The Labour Governments, 1964-70: Vol. 2, International Policy*, 151.

to school in places where the map of the empire was pinned on the wall and were told, both implicitly and explicitly, that white Britons were somehow superior to others... They too had to come to terms with wide-ranging changes in their understanding of the world and Britain's place within it'.⁵⁹ Above all, this thesis will argue that the Wilson government's approach to race, both internationally and domestically, was shaped by a long-standing imperial ideology that cast non-white peoples as 'uncivilised' and 'backward'. While recent scholars have looked at the enduring ties between colony and metropole in the 1960s through the prism of British society and culture, this thesis will examine these connections through the policies of the Wilson government, especially on matters relating to race.

Methodology, Sources and Structure

In terms of methodology, this thesis will primarily be a political history, focusing on the attitudes of key figures at the high-political level of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The thesis will therefore utilise mostly political archival sources such as the National Archives, the Labour Party archives, the parliamentary minutes of Hansard as well as the private papers of senior Labour figures such as Patrick Gordon Walker and Arthur Bottomley. The thesis will also use polling data and oral interviews to gain a sense of how some Britons thought about these issues. In so doing, this thesis will challenge the narrative of the hostile and racist working class Briton and argue that the 'race problem' in 1960s Britain was as much driven by the fears of an unduly anxious Labour elite. In terms of structure, the thesis will be divided into three main chapters. The first chapter will provide a historical background to the Wilson government by exploring how senior Labour figures have approached the issues of race and empire earlier in the twentieth century. The chapter will argue that the Wilson government's policy towards race, both internationally and domestically, was a legacy of these earlier Labour approaches, in particular the idea of a 'civilising mission'.

The second chapter will hone in on the Wilson government, tracing its growing disillusionment with the Commonwealth in the period 1964-1967. The chapter will argue that although the Wilson government entered office in 1964 with high hopes

⁵⁹ Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, "Race" and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.

for the Commonwealth, this was contingent on Britain retaining a special role as the 'mother country'. However, as this position was challenged by the increasingly assertive non-white members, the Wilson government's support for the Commonwealth soon waned. Crucially, this rupture in Labour's Commonwealth vision coincided with the Wilson government's application to join the European Economic Community in 1967.

The final chapter will examine the Labour Party's changing approach to immigration in the period 1964-1968. The chapter will argue that the public pressures that supposedly drove this policy change have been overstated as the issue of immigration figured in only a few constituencies and seemingly had little impact on the British electorate as a whole. The chapter will instead situate this U-turn on immigration within the context of the Labour elite's broader turn away from the Commonwealth in this period. This chapter will also argue that the issue of immigration was symptomatic of a wider problem concerning the meaning of Britishness in the 1960s. While the Wilson government, in theory, promoted a 'new' vision of Britain that was multi-racial and inclusive, in reality its approach to immigration suggested the enduring sway of an older, more restrictive idea of Britain based on 'whiteness', which drew heavily on the legacies of empire.

Chapter One: The Labour Party, Race and Empire: A Historical Background

The Labour Party was originally founded in 1900 with the specific aim of providing representation for the British working class and trade union movement in parliament. This was reflected in its original name, the Labour Representation Committee, before it adopted the name the Labour Party in 1906. Despite its origins, grounded on the seemingly narrow domestic issue of working class representation, the Labour Party, especially its leaders at the parliamentary level, had a long history of involvement in imperial affairs. Although the Conservative Party has traditionally been characterised as the party of empire, Labour leaders throughout the twentieth century have played a key role in shaping the British Empire in terms of both policy and ideology.⁶⁰ This chapter will provide a historical background to the Wilson government by examining how senior Labour figures have approached the issues of race and empire across the twentieth century. The chapter will focus on key thinkers at the high political level such as Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, Clement Attlee and Arthur Creech Jones.

The chapter will argue that while these senior Labour figures were seldom overtly racist in their approach towards imperial affairs, they nevertheless drew on a long-standing liberal approach to empire that justified the subjugation of non-white peoples.⁶¹ The characterisation of empire as a 'civilising mission', which was popular with nineteenth century liberal thinkers, informed the early Labour leadership's outlook towards imperial affairs. Rather than advocate the dismantlement of empire, leaders such as Hardie and MacDonald believed that imperial rule could be reformed

⁶⁰ For texts that deal with the British labour movement, the British left, or more specifically, the Labour Party and imperialism, see Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964*; Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*; Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism, and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011) and Billy Frank, Craig Horner, and David Stewart, eds., *The British Labour Movement and Imperialism* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010). For texts on the Labour Party and foreign policy, in which imperial affairs are a significant subset, see Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1: The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy, 1900-1951*; Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 2* and John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁶¹ For the connection between liberal thinking and empire, see Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Paul B Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics, 2nd Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Miles Taylor, "Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19, no. 1 (1991): 1-23; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Peter Mandler, "Race" and "nation" in mid-Victorian thought', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and B. W. Young, eds., *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 224-244.

for nobler ends. These Labour figures were influenced by a prevailing civilisational discourse which asserted that advanced nations such as Britain had a responsibility to help develop the more 'backward' regions of the world. However, the concept of race played a central role in this discursive framework. As these so-called backward regions were mostly populated by non-white peoples they formed part of a racialised hierarchy, which determined the extent to which the colonies could advance towards self-rule. This was reflected in the alternative approach adopted towards the white settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa, which, in contrast to the non-settler colonies, enjoyed a privileged position in the empire as Dominions with a large degree of self-government.⁶²

This notion of a civilising mission still influenced Labour leaders even as the non-settler empire began to break up after the Second World War. Although Clement Attlee's post-war Labour government granted independence to India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Burma, the remaining colonies, particularly in Africa, were still perceived by senior Labour figures as uncivilised and in need of continued imperial rule. In Africa, the Attlee government increased the scale of the British imperial presence with the arrival of hundreds of new colonial administrators, the so-called 'Second Colonial Occupation'.⁶³ Moreover, the concept of colonial development, which rose to prominence during Arthur Creech Jones' tenure as Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1946 to 1950, was in large part an extension of this civilisational tradition. Despite its apparently benign motives, the idea of colonial development was laden with racist stereotypes of non-white peoples as tribal and politically immature.

Significantly for this thesis, this fire of a civilising mission continued to burn in senior Labour circles even after the empire was largely dismantled in the 1960s. Although most of Britain's remaining colonies had achieved their independence by 1964, key figures in the Wilson government such as Arthur Bottomley, Barbara Castle, Patrick Gordon Walker and Wilson himself still believed that Britain had a

⁶² These Dominions were granted effective self-government through the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931, which renounced Britain's legislative authority over the Dominions. See Kenneth Clinton Wheare, *The Statute of Westminster and Dominion Status* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938).

⁶³ The term the 'Second Colonial Occupation' was first coined by A. Smith and D.A. Low in *The Oxford History of East Africa, Volume 3*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 12.

special role to play with regards to its former colonies. This was evident in the Wilson government's commitment to the Commonwealth and the creation in 1964 of the Ministry of Overseas Development. These policies, though based on good intentions, were imbued with an enduring notion of Britain as a paternal, benevolent force responsible to its former non-white colonial subjects. The chapter will argue that these policies were a legacy of the approach to race and empire adopted by Labour leaders earlier in the twentieth century. Before outlining this historical background, this chapter will offer a brief survey of the crucial but complex relationship between imperialism and racism.

Imperialism and Racism: Broader Perspectives

The relationship between imperialism—the policy of extending power, especially by direct territorial acquisition—and racism—the ideology that humans are divided into separate biological entities called races, and that some races are superior to others—has been addressed by scholars in several fields, including historical research.⁶⁴ The ideology of racism is often but not exclusively associated with European imperial powers such as Britain, which drew on the notion of white racial superiority to rationalise the continued subjugation of non-white peoples in the post-Enlightenment age. Many historians in recent years have argued that the ideologies of racism and imperialism were interlinked.⁶⁵ The New Imperial History literature has claimed that the construction of racial differences was a vital aspect of the British imperial experience both in the metropole and periphery.⁶⁶ Catherine Hall has argued that while the marking of difference across the empire was never only about race, 'it was nevertheless critical to imperial power because empires were constituted of diverse peoples, living in varied sites, some of whom ruled others'.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ These definitions are derived from the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Terms such as 'empire', 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' have a long, complicated history with several, contested meanings. For a short survey of the origins of these terms see Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶⁵ Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*; Jane Samson, *Race and Empire*, 1st ed, (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2005); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁶⁶ See, for example, Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Antoinette M Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, 20.

Anne Stoler has defined race as 'a foundational colonial sorting technique'.⁶⁸ Some historians have argued that imperial racism endured long after the formal end of empire and that the prejudice experienced by non-white immigrants to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s was primarily a legacy of empire.⁶⁹

The relationship between imperialism and racism is also a central theme in postcolonial literature. Although postcolonialism as an academic sub-discipline has tackled a range of issues, one persistent tenet is the idea that colonialism was not just a political phenomenon but an ideological formation.⁷⁰ Postcolonial scholars have argued that alongside the typical methods used to control people, namely military force and direct political rule, imperial powers also repressed subjects through an array of cultural devices such as literature, advertising and education. These cultural devices helped construct binaries between the coloniser and colonised such as civilised/savage and black/white, which affirmed the supposed inferiority of non-white peoples. This form of control was addressed in Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism*, which examined how European literary representations of the Orient helped shape the myth of white racial superiority. Said defined Orientalism as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.⁷¹ He claimed that such literature formed a depiction of Oriental peoples as 'under-humanised, antidemocratic, backward and barbaric'.⁷² Abdul R. JanMohamed has also stressed the importance of literature as a method of cultural control and an effective instrument in fixing non-white peoples under the designation of the 'other'.⁷³ According to JanMohamed, 'the dominant model of power in all colonial societies is the Manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native'.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Quoted in Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, 20.

⁶⁹ Schwarz, *The White Man's World*; Webster, *Englishness and Empire*; Webster, 'The Empire Comes Home: Commonwealth Migration to Britain' in Andrew Thompson, *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 122-161.

⁷⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2006), Preface, xv.

⁷¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 150.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 59–87.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

However, this association between imperialism and racism has been questioned by some scholars. Porter, the most vocal critic of the New Imperial History, has claimed that 'imperialism has furnished a convenient scapegoat in recent years to explain social phenomena such as racism'.⁷⁵ According to Porter, 'British racial attitudes are so often attributed to or connected with imperialism as to almost identify them together in some people's minds'.⁷⁶ Andrew Thompson has also questioned whether too much emphasis has been placed on empire as a causal explanation for racism. Thompson has claimed that there has been 'a recent fashion for scapegoating the empire for much of what we dislike about ourselves', including racism.⁷⁷ Thompson noted numerous examples throughout British history of racism in which 'colonial mentalities' supposedly played a minor role, such as the prejudice faced by Jewish and Irish immigrants in Britain.⁷⁸

Some scholars have pointed out examples when imperialism and racism were in conflict. In *Racism in the Modern World*, Berg and Wendt argued that racism could sometimes act as a barrier against imperialism, most notably in the United States, where the 'guardians of white supremacy were opposed to incorporating additional non-whites into the body politic'.⁷⁹ Conversely, although priding itself on its egalitarian and anti-imperial roots, the new nation sanctioned slavery until the Civil War, and arguably 'condoned racist violence, segregation, and disfranchisement' in ways that at least matched the European colonial powers.⁸⁰ Gerald Horne has claimed, provocatively, that the American revolt against British rule in 1776, 'though festooned in the finery of freedom', was 'basically a revolt by racist settlers, who were motivated in no small part by the fact that abolitionism was growing in London'.⁸¹ While the American Revolution has traditionally been portrayed as a fight for liberty, Horne instead characterised it as a 'counter-revolution fought by the

⁷⁵ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 4–5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 314–315.

⁷⁷ Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, 1st ed (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 236.

⁷⁸ Thompson, *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, 342.

⁷⁹ Manfred Berg and Simon Wendt, *Racism in the Modern World: Historical Perspectives on Cultural Transfer and Adaptation* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 5–7.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 21; Gerald Horne, *Negro Comrades of the Crown: African Americans and the British Empire Fight the U.S. Before Emancipation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 214.

founding fathers to preserve their liberty to enslave others'.⁸² He even compares the American Revolution to the Rhodesian rebellion against British rule in 1965, arguing that 'just as Ian Smith and his comrades sought to escape the logic of decolonisation, the American rebels sought to escape the logic of abolitionism'.⁸³ Although Horne's argument is by no means the orthodox view, it nevertheless adds a vital American component to the issue of racism. Clearly, it was not just within European empires that the ideology of race featured.

Linda Colley has asked if race and empire were so intrinsically linked, 'why was it Germany, which invested in overseas empire much later and to a lesser extent than Britain, which exhibited in the twentieth century a greater volume of explicitly racial politics'.⁸⁴ For Colley, while the concept of race may have helped justify empire, it does not on its own supply a comprehensive explanation for the scale of British imperial power. As Colley puts it, 'the British were not witchdoctors who could use racist ideas magically to summon up global dominion'.⁸⁵ Colley therefore suggests a broader array of factors that explain why Britain was able to exert control over non-white peoples such as materialism and local collaboration.⁸⁶ Certainly, it is important not to overstate racism as an aspect of imperial control to such an extent that we eschew other factors. Also, it is arguable that racism played as much, if not more, of a pernicious role in countries with less extensive imperial backgrounds, such as Germany, as the horror of the Holocaust testifies.

Still, as recent scholars have argued, even Nazi racism can be linked to Germany's supposedly limited imperial experience. Many historians have stressed continuities between the Holocaust against European Jews during the Second World War and earlier genocidal practices in the colonies, most notably against the Herero people in German South-West Africa.⁸⁷ Recent research has also suggested that racist practices exhibited outside the German Empire, particularly in the Americas,

⁸² Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776*, Preface.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁴ Linda Colley, *What is Imperial History Now?* in David Cannadine, *What Is History Now?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 137–138.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 144.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ David Olusoga and Casper W Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011); Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2005): 429–64.

influenced the development of racist ideologies in Germany. Claudia Bruns has used the life of Wilhelm Marr, a German intellectual and ‘founding father’ of German anti-Semitism, as an example of how racism against non-white peoples in America impacted on German racial thinking.⁸⁸ As a young man, Marr was a radical Democrat. However, after the failure of the Revolutions of 1848, he moved to the New World and spent over a decade in the US. According to Bruns, Marr’s turn to anti-Semitism after his return to Germany was greatly influenced by his experience in America.⁸⁹ This example highlights the importance of a transnational perspective when analysing the relationship between race and empire.⁹⁰

There is also a danger when examining the link between imperialism and racism to see race as a purely Western construct imposed by the European powers and the United States onto the rest of the world. Although the Western powers have undoubtedly been the chief instigators of racial ideologies in the modern period, it is important to recognise that racism also featured in non-Western cultures. As Berg and Wendt argue, ‘the notion that the West simply imposed racism on the rest of the world may well reflect a Eurocentric interpretation of a Eurocentric ideology’.⁹¹ Berg and Wendt look to challenge this dominant paradigm by offering a broader history of racism that incorporates non-Western cultures. One contributor to the Berg and Wendt volume, Frank Dikötter, has cited research on Native American cultures, which suggests that skin colour as a racial marker was not simply a European import but fitted in with pre-existing traditions.⁹² In ‘How Indians got to be Red’, Nancy Shoemaker has questioned the view that Europeans alone defined Native Americans as ‘red’. According to Shoemaker, Native Americans, particularly in the Southeast, called themselves ‘red’ well before the arrival of Europeans and it was ‘Native colour symbolism rather than European terminology’ that primarily determined its usage.⁹³

⁸⁸ Claudia Bruns, ‘Toward a Transnational History of Racism: Wilhelm Marr and the Interrelationships between Colonial Racism and German Anti-Semitism’, in Berg and Wendt, *Racism in the Modern World*, 122-139.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁹¹ Berg and Wendt, *Racism in the Modern World*, 1–2.

⁹² Frank Dikötter, ‘The Racialization of the Globe: Historical Perspectives’, in Berg and Wendt, *Racism in the Modern World*, 20-40.

⁹³ Nancy Shoemaker, “How Indians Got to Be Red,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (1997): 625–44.

While the relationship between race and empire is certainly more complex than some scholars have assumed, this should not diminish the important role that imperialism played in the conceptualisation of race in both the European metropole and colonial periphery. Although Britain largely avoided the extreme forms of racism typified by the Nazi regime, the concept of race still figured prominently, albeit in a different form. The notion of a 'civilising mission', for example, which was popular with liberal philosophers in the nineteenth century, had a significant impact on British racial thought. Crucially, this civilisational doctrine influenced the way senior Labour figures approached imperial affairs throughout the twentieth century. Labour leaders regularly drew on this liberal view of empire as a necessary step in the advancement of the non-white peoples to the supposed ideal of Western civilisation. Before examining this liberal tradition, this chapter will briefly explore the empire's relationship with 'scientific' racism in the late nineteenth century, arguably the moment when imperialism and racism were most closely linked.

'Scientific' Racism and Empire

In the late nineteenth century, the idea of race as a biological construct enjoyed popular support from the scientific community across Europe, including in Britain. Charles Darwin's ground-breaking theory of evolution, though concerned exclusively with plant and animal life, was influential in the development of what was termed 'scientific racism'.⁹⁴ Scientists such as Francis Galton, one of the principal founders of the eugenics movement, claimed that if living organisms could evolve over time according to natural laws then so could humans. In *Hereditary Genius* (1869), Galton argued that, as in animals, desirable human traits were hereditary.⁹⁵ Even Darwin, who probably would not have approved of the later misappropriation of his theory by Social Darwinists, occasionally applied his theory to humanity.⁹⁶ In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin predicted that in the not too distant future, 'the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world'.⁹⁷ By giving scientific legitimacy to racist notions of white

⁹⁴ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1860).

⁹⁵ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (London: Macmillan, 1869).

⁹⁶ Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁹⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (1871), 1st edition, 168 -169. Quoted in Samson, *Race and Empire*, 69–73.

supremacy, scientific racism helped establish race as an almost universally accepted concept. As Jane Samson put it, ‘the need to accept the inevitable extinction of inferior races was proclaimed to be self-evident and “common sense”’.⁹⁸ Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose argued that the idea of white supremacy became so widespread in the late nineteenth century that it was almost ‘taken for granted’, and that the growing authority of scientific racism was critical to this process.⁹⁹ According to Hall and Rose, ‘racism and the “scientific” authority behind the notion of biologically based difference were co-constitutive’.¹⁰⁰

Although scientific racism was used to justify a number of different imperial projects, many scholars have cited the ‘scramble for Africa’ in the late nineteenth century as a prime example of the symbiotic relationship between race and empire. Paul Rich has argued that scientific racism ‘enhanced the claims of racial superiority over black and brown races in the critical period of the 1860s before the last phase of imperial expansion into Africa’.¹⁰¹ Samson has claimed that the European colonisation of Africa ‘arose in conjunction with an increasingly biological emphasis in racism’.¹⁰² Before the 1880s, only a small portion of the African continent was under European imperial control. However, within twenty years, almost all of Africa had been colonised, with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia.¹⁰³ This ‘scramble’ marked the most intense period of empire-building since the European colonisation of the Americas. Although Britain was just one of several imperial powers involved, it emerged with the most significant gains, with new colonies in West, East, Central and Southern Africa.¹⁰⁴ The extent of the British involvement in this process was symbolised by Cecil Rhodes’ iconic vision of an empire that stretched from the Cape to Cairo.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Ibid, 59.

⁹⁹ Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Paul B Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, 13.

¹⁰² Samson, *Race and Empire*, 59.

¹⁰³ In the case of Liberia, though, there remained a complicated relationship with the United States. Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 312–315; Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man’s Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912* (London: Abacus, 1992), 1–5.

¹⁰⁴ Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man’s Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912*.

¹⁰⁵ Robert I. Rotberg, *The Founder: Cecil Rhodes and the Pursuit of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3; Antony Thomas, *Rhodes: The Race for Africa* (London: Penguin, 1997), 4-7.

While scientific racism undoubtedly played a part in the scramble for Africa, there are a broad array of factors that also help to explain this phenomenon. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper argue that ‘the explanation for this “scramble” can be found in the competitive world of empires’.¹⁰⁶ The 1870s saw the emergence of Germany as a new imperial power that rivalled the traditional powers of France and Britain. As the old frontiers of expansion—namely the Americas, Australasia and Asia—were closed off, Africa remained the last continent left to be colonised. Burbank and Cooper claimed that each imperial power ‘sought to prevent the other’s monopoly over a shrinking pool of global resources’.¹⁰⁷ Alongside these imperial rivalries, the late nineteenth century saw the development of new technologies that made the idea of colonising Africa more feasible.¹⁰⁸ The advent of steam technology provided Europeans with access to previously inaccessible regions. Henry Morton Stanley’s exploration up the Congo River, for example, was instrumental in securing King Leopold II of Belgium’s control over Congo.¹⁰⁹ Also, the development of new weapons such as the Maxim machine gun gave the European powers a significant advantage whenever they encountered African resistance.¹¹⁰

Charles Maier has argued that the ‘scramble for Africa’ was just one part of a broader historical process that took shape from around the 1860s.¹¹¹ Maier defines this as the period of ‘territoriality’, ‘where the control of bordered political space created the framework for national and often ethnic identity’.¹¹² During this period, national societies were created in the United States, Germany, Italy, Canada, Mexico and elsewhere. At the same time, technological innovations such as the telegraph, steamboats and the railways meant that more areas were opened to economic exploitation. According to Maier, these developments were tied together by ‘an enhanced concept of territory’.¹¹³ Hence, it could be argued that it was this concept of

¹⁰⁶ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 312–315.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Samson, *Race and Empire*, 59.

¹⁰⁹ Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988).

¹¹⁰ The Maxim machine gun was most notoriously used by British forces in the Battle of the Shangani during the First Matabele War of 1893-1894. 700 British soldiers fought off up to 4,000 African warriors with just four Maxim guns. See Martin Pegler, *The Vickers-Maxim Machine Gun* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2013), 50-55.

¹¹¹ Charles Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 807–31.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 808.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 814-815.

'territoriality' rather than scientific racism that provided the main context for understanding Britain's late imperial conquests, particularly in Africa.

In any case, the British Empire's association with scientific racism was short-lived as biological theories of race came under attack in the early twentieth century, most notably from within anthropology. This phenomenon is traced in Elazar Barkan's *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*.¹¹⁴ One of the most notable critics was Franz Boas, a pioneer of modern anthropology. In *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), Boas argued that it was cultural differences rather than biological characteristics that primarily determined human behaviour.¹¹⁵ Boas argued that so-called primitive societies had just as much history as civilised ones and the idea that Europeans were more advanced was ethnocentric. Scientific racism was also challenged by early anti-colonial activists. In *Colour and Democracy*, W.E.B. Du Bois, a sociologist and Pan-African activist, claimed that recent anthropological research was beginning to disprove the idea that 'colonies are filled with peoples who were never abreast with civilisation and never can be'.¹¹⁶ Du Bois cited research which suggested that non-white colonies were, historically, 'seats of ancient cultures where human civilisation began', thus undermining the myth of white racial superiority.¹¹⁷ This challenge to scientific racism was manifested on a global scale at the inaugural Pan-African Conference chaired by Du Bois in 1900. The Conference brought together activists from Africa, Europe, the United States and the West Indies to discuss issues such as racism and imperialism.¹¹⁸

However, this intellectual refutation of scientific racism did not mean the end of white imperial rule over non-white peoples, far from it. In response to questions regarding the legitimacy of race in the early twentieth century, British statesmen, including senior Labour figures, drew on a civilisational doctrine that endorsed empire as a means of securing the development of backward cultures towards the apparent ideal of Western civilisation, the so-called 'civilising mission'. Although

¹¹⁴ Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹¹⁵ Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (London: Macmillan, 1911); Sally Ledger, *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 315.

¹¹⁶ W.E.B. De Bois, *Colour and Democracy* (1945) 18. Cited in Samson, *Race and Empire*, 128.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 326. See Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement; a History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa* (New York: Africana, 1974).

superficially colour-blind, this doctrine was heavily imbued with racist stereotypes regarding non-white cultures and ethnocentric assumptions regarding the supposed supremacy of Western culture. Significantly, this idea of a civilising mission was endorsed by many of Britain's most renowned liberal thinkers, who provided an ideological framework for the Labour elite's later approach towards imperial affairs.

Liberalism and Empire

One intriguing aspect of many of Britain's most famous liberal thinkers that is now gaining more scholarly attention is their extensive involvement in imperial affairs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. British liberal thinkers such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill, who helped establish the principles of individual liberty, natural rights and equality also endorsed an empire that exercised authoritarian control over colonial subjects.¹¹⁹ John Locke, an influential thinker whose ideas concerning the natural rights of man outlined in his landmark *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) arguably laid the foundation of modern liberalism, played an active role in English colonial policy.¹²⁰ In 1669, Locke wrote the *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina*, which legalised the preservation of slavery in the American colony. The Constitution declared that 'every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves'.¹²¹ John Stuart Mill wrote numerous reports on imperial matters, particularly India, and worked at the East India Company for thirty-five years.¹²²

On the face of it, this liberal participation in empire might seem contradictory. After all, how could supporters of natural rights and 'liberty' endorse a structure that withheld these rights for certain subjects? However, as David Armitage and Miles Taylor have argued, liberalism and empire were far from incompatible. Taylor has claimed that 'eighteenth century liberals had no difficulty in supporting the growth of an Atlantic empire based on British naval prowess, the settlement of freeborn Englishmen and the expansion of trade'.¹²³ For him, the question of whether empire

¹¹⁹ Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 4–6.

¹²⁰ James Farr, "'So Vile and Miserable an Estate': The Problem of Slavery in Locke's Political Thought," *Political Theory* 14, no. 2 (1986): 263–264.

¹²¹ The Works of John Locke, vol.10 (London: Thomas Tegg, 1823), 196. Quoted in Farr, 'So Vile and Miserable an Estate', 263-264.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Taylor, "Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century, 2.

was compatible with liberty only arose with the emergence in the mid-eighteenth century of a different kind of empire based on conquest in India and elsewhere.¹²⁴ Armitage has argued that the assumed character of this later empire—an empire distinct in its racial composition, and dependent upon, rather than formally equal with, Britain—rendered it incompatible with metropolitan norms of liberty.¹²⁵

However, this view has been challenged by some scholars. In *Liberalism and Empire*, Uday Singh Mehta argues that ‘imperialism, far from contradicting liberal tenets, in part stemmed from liberal assumptions about reason and historical progress’.¹²⁶ According to Mehta, ‘the epistemological commitments of liberalism to rationality and progress constantly trumped its commitments to democracy, consensual government and limitations on the power of the state’.¹²⁷ British liberal thinkers drew upon a stadial theory of human history, which asserted that all human societies progressed through a series of stages and that some societies were at a more advanced stage than others.¹²⁸ Crucially, this notion of universal human progress was divided along racial lines, with European civilisation at the most advanced stage and the non-white peoples of Asia and Africa at a more primitive stage. Liberal thinkers such as John Stuart Mill frequently drew on this concept to justify imperial rule. Mill argued that the so-called backward peoples ‘have not got beyond the period during which it is likely to be for their benefit that they should be conquered and held in subjection by foreigners’.¹²⁹ In the case of India, Mill described British rule as a ‘government of leading strings’ that would ‘gradually train the people to walk alone’.¹³⁰ Thomas Babington Macaulay, a British historian and Whig politician, characterised the empire in India as ‘like a father who must be just and

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–4.

¹²⁶ Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 30–31.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 35.

¹²⁸ The stadial theory of human history was originally put forward by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Ferguson and John Millar. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767); John Millar, *Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1771).

¹²⁹ J.S. Mill, ‘A Few Words on Non-Intervention’ in Gertrude Himmelfarb, ed., *Essays on Politics and Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 377.

¹³⁰ J. S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), 175-76. Quoted in Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 31–32.

unjust, moderate and rapacious'.¹³¹ These quotes typified the paternal approach that British liberal thinkers adopted towards non-white colonial subjects.

Peter Mandler has stressed the importance of what he has termed the 'civilisational perspective' in underpinning this liberal approach to empire. Mandler claims that it was the idea of 'civilisation'—namely, the British or European standard to which other peoples were supposed to work towards—rather than a belief in the biological superiority of the white race that provided the main intellectual justification for empire during this period. According to Mandler, the vitality of this belief in civilisation as a universal human potential 'inhibited the development of biological racism in Britain'.¹³² He thus challenges the view put forward by historians such as Hall that imperial crises in India, Jamaica and elsewhere had a 'racialising' impact on British political thought in the mid-nineteenth century. For Hall, the violence demonstrated during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Governor Eyre controversy in Jamaica in the late 1860s revealed 'a more aggressive biological racism' that 'encoded an Englishness which celebrated hierarchy and difference'.¹³³ Mandler counters that 'it was perfectly possible, and common, to argue that Negroes or Indians were simply so primitive that they required paternal repression now to make future doses of civilisation possible'.¹³⁴ As Mandler puts it, 'the ladder of civilisation, rather than the branching tree of peoples and nations, remained the dominant metaphor'.¹³⁵

In his recent book *The Liberal Defence of Murder*, Richard Seymour outlines a long history of liberal justifications for empire based on the notions of civilisation and progress. He argues that although liberal philosophers such as John Stuart Mill were not biological racists, they still 'partook of a cultural supremacism and a self-congratulatory civilisational discourse that authorised colonial domination'.¹³⁶ Although this liberal approach to empire rejected race as a scientific phenomenon, the racist assumptions at its heart were often quite explicit. This was epitomised by Rudyard Kipling, the Anglo-Indian writer, who argued in his famous 1899 poem, *The*

¹³¹ T. B. Macaulay, *Warren Hastings* (1841), 86. Quoted in Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 31–32.

¹³² Mandler, "Race" and "Nation" in Mid-Victorian Thought', 225.

¹³³ Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 208–209.

¹³⁴ Mandler, "Race" and "Nation" in Mid-Victorian Thought', 231–232.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 233.

¹³⁶ Richard Seymour, *The Liberal Defence of Murder* (London: Verso Books, 2008), 27.

White Man's Burden, that it was the duty of the white man to bring civilisation to non-white peoples through benign imperialism.¹³⁷ This notion of a 'white man's burden' thus provided a liberal rationale for what was a fundamentally illiberal enterprise. This was particularly evident during the European colonisation of Africa in the late nineteenth century. As Burbank and Cooper argue, 'representations of Africa as a place of slave trading and tyranny, overcame much of the reluctance of European publics to get involved in what could seem too vicious an enterprise for democracies'.¹³⁸ The extent to which this civilising mission drew on racial stereotypes was further evidenced by the contrasting approach adopted towards Britain's white settler colonies.

'White Man's Countries': The Settler Empire

Despite the existence of sizable non-white native populations—in the case of South Africa, a substantial non-white native majority—the British settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa were often characterised by their leaders and by British statesmen as 'white man's countries'.¹³⁹ In contrast to the non-settler colonies, these countries enjoyed a privileged position in the empire as Dominions with a large degree of self-government. These Dominions all implemented, to varying degrees, policies of racial discrimination. In Australia and Canada, the aboriginal population was separated from the settler community through the creation of native reserves. In some cases, mixed-race children were forcibly removed from these reserves and 'assimilated' into the white population.¹⁴⁰ In South Africa, all of the provinces except for the Cape employed a racist franchise that excluded non-white voters.¹⁴¹ Though New Zealand had a more inclusive system that

¹³⁷ Chris Brooks and Peter Faulkner, eds., *The White Man's Burdens: An Anthology of British Poetry of the Empire* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), 1-3.

¹³⁸ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 315–316.

¹³⁹ See Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ Robert Manne, "The Stolen Generations," *Quadrant* 42, no. 1–2 (1998): 53–63; Toni Buti, "The Removal of Aboriginal Children: Canada and Australia Compared," *University of Western Sydney Law Review* 6, no. 1 (2002): 25–38; A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

¹⁴¹ Bernard Magubane, *The Making of a Racist State: British Imperialism and the Union of South Africa, 1875-1910* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996).

reserved parliamentary seats for the Maori population, the white settlers still enjoyed a dominant political, social, cultural and economic role in the country.¹⁴²

These policies coincided with a period from the end of the nineteenth century when the idea of ‘whiteness’ as a form of racial identity was popular with statesmen in the Dominions.¹⁴³ This phenomenon is traced in Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds’ *Drawing the Global Colour Line*. Lake and Reynolds argue that the racial policies of Australasia, British Columbia, South Africa and California were interconnected parts of this transnational spread of whiteness.¹⁴⁴ They cite, for example, the literacy test, which was first used to disenfranchise black voters in Mississippi in 1890 and later served as a model for Natal, British Columbia and other white settlements.¹⁴⁵ In *Replenishing the Earth*, James Belich unearths a ‘Settler Revolution’ that took shape from the early nineteenth century, which included the explosive settlement of the American West and its forgotten twin, the British West. Belich argued that ‘one consistent marker of this Anglo newland under recolonisation was a racially exclusive immigration policy’.¹⁴⁶ From the 1880s onwards, the British Dominions set up and maintained ‘great white walls’ through their immigration policies.¹⁴⁷ This was most evident in Australia, which from its inception in 1901, actively sought to maintain an exclusively white identity.¹⁴⁸ Two of the first acts of the first Australian government were the Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1901, which expelled thousands of Pacific Islanders who had worked in Queensland’s sugar cane fields, and the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, which limited the settlement of non-white peoples. Alfred Deakin, the Attorney General, described these measures as a

¹⁴² Samson, *Race and Empire*, 78–79.

¹⁴³ See David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007); Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, 2nd Edition (London: Verso, 2012) and Gregory Smithers, ‘The “Right Kind of White People”: Reproducing Whiteness in the United States and Australia, 1780s–1930s’, in Berg and Wendt, *Racism in the Modern World* (2013), 303–328.

¹⁴⁴ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 1–5.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 466.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Price, *The Great White Walls Are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia, 1836–1888* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974).

¹⁴⁸ In 1901, the six separate British self-governing colonies of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia formed together to become states of the new Commonwealth of Australia.

‘necessary complement of a single policy—the policy of securing a “white Australia”’.¹⁴⁹

Crucially, this ‘white Australia’ policy was influenced by the civilisational doctrine advanced by liberal thinkers in the nineteenth century. In *American Commonwealth* (1888), James Bryce, a British politician and writer, warned that the increased contact between the civilised and backward races made possible by new transport technologies ‘marked a crisis in the history of the world’.¹⁵⁰ Although Bryce focused primarily on the United States and the legacies of post-civil war reconstruction, his ideas informed early Australian statesmen. According to Lake and Reynolds, Australian leaders adopted *American Commonwealth* as their ‘bible’.¹⁵¹ In reference to Bryce’s book, Deakin declared that Australia ‘should not be false to the never-to-be-forgotten teachings from the experience of the United States’.¹⁵² In *National Life and Character* (1893), Charles Pearson, an Australian politician and writer, warned that ‘the day is not too far distant when the European observer will look around to see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of black and yellow races’.¹⁵³ According to Pearson, ‘we shall find ourselves elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside by peoples whom we looked down upon as servile’.¹⁵⁴ His book clearly influenced the Australian Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, who read a passage from *National Life and Character* during his speech in support of the Immigration Restriction Bill.¹⁵⁵

Alongside this notion of whiteness was the vision of a ‘British World’ that comprised Britain and the Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. From the 1850s to the outbreak of the First World War, about 13.5 million people emigrated from Britain, the majority of whom settled in the old Dominions.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 137–138. For the concept of a ‘White Australia’, see James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁵⁰ James Bryce, *American Commonwealth* (1888). Cited in Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 6.

¹⁵¹ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 74.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁵³ Charles Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (1893). Cited in Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 76.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 137–138.

¹⁵⁶ Gary Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) Preface, xi.

Several scholars have argued that alongside the obvious ‘push’ of unemployment and poverty, these migrants were motivated by the idea of an expanded Britain. In *The British World*, Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich claim that ‘blinded by national historiographies, and mesmerised by the exotic colonial ‘other’, we have lost contact with what was always the heart of the imperial enterprise—the expansion of Britain and the peopling and building of a transoceanic British World’.¹⁵⁷ This theme is also addressed in Robert Young’s *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, which looks at how ‘Englishness’ developed a broader identity in the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁸ Young argued that ‘Englishness was defined less as a set of internal cultural characteristics attached to a particular place, than as a transportable set of values which could be transplanted, translated and recreated anywhere on the globe’.¹⁵⁹

This concept of a British World was endorsed by British liberal writers such as Sir Charles Dilke, J. R. Green and Sir John Seeley.¹⁶⁰ In *Greater Britain* (1868), Dilke declared that it was the destiny of the ‘Anglo-Saxon race’ to conquer the so-called ‘cheaper races’.¹⁶¹ In *A Short History of the English People* (1874), Green proclaimed that ‘England is only a small part of the outcome of English history. Its greater issues lie not within the narrow limits of the mother island, but in the destinies of nations yet to be’.¹⁶² According to Green, ‘her settlers were to dispute Africa with the Kaffir, to wrest New Zealand from the Maori and to sow on the shores of Australia the seeds of great nations’.¹⁶³ This vision of a British World was reinforced by the technological advancements that took place during this period. The advent of steam travel and the telegraph, in particular, helped establish tangible networks between Britain and the settler colonies that made the idea of an expanded Britain more viable.¹⁶⁴ As Seeley argued in *The Expansion of England*, ‘in the last century, there could be no Greater Britain in the true sense of the word, because of the distance between the mother country and its colonies... This impediment exists no longer as science has given to

¹⁵⁷ Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, *The British World: Diaspora, Culture, and Identity* (London: F. Cass, 2003), 11-12.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 232.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Charles Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries during 1866 and 1867* (London: Macmillan, 1868); John Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan, 1883) and John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London: Macmillan, 1874).

¹⁶¹ Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 198.

¹⁶² Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 81–82.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 206.

the political organism a new circulation, which is steam, and a new nervous system, which is electricity'.¹⁶⁵

This idea of a British World arguably influenced the racial policies of the Dominion countries. Belich claimed that the Dominions 'cherished their racist immigration barriers because they believed it kept them British, not just white'.¹⁶⁶ As he puts it, policies such as a white Australia 'underwrote a sense of kinship with old Britain, creating a further web of crimson threads to hold the Greater British system together'.¹⁶⁷ As late as 1948, Robert Menzies, the Prime Minister of Australia, proclaimed that 'the boundaries of Great Britain are not on the Kentish coast but at Cape York and Invercargill'.¹⁶⁸ Crucially, by affirming their white British identity, these settler colonies effectively put themselves on a separate path to the rest of the empire. While these 'white man's countries' enjoyed a relatively serene pathway from colony to dominion to independent nation, the non-settler colonies found their progress thwarted. As Taylor has argued, a sharp distinction was made between 'a white liberal empire composed of self-governing settlement colonies and a non-European territorial empire, precariously dependent on the rule of imperial authority'.¹⁶⁹ This racialised separation of the Empire thus provided the dominant ideological paradigm into which the Labour Party emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Labour Party and Empire in the Early Twentieth Century

The Labour Party and, more broadly, the British labour movement's role in imperial affairs has been relatively underexamined by historians. Gupta's *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement* and Billy Frank, Craig Horner and David Stewart's *The British Labour Movement and Imperialism* present the only general surveys of the British labour movement's relationship with empire.¹⁷⁰ Although Howe's *Anticolonialism in British Politics* examines the attitudes of some Labour figures towards colonial issues, its analysis is restricted to critics of empire from inside and

¹⁶⁵ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 186–187. Quoted in Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 191.

¹⁶⁶ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 466.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Menzies quoted in Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 464.

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, "Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century," 12.

¹⁷⁰ Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964*; Frank, Horner, and Stewart, *The British Labour Movement and Imperialism*, 1-2.

outside the party, thus eschewing the significant pro-imperial sympathies, particularly among senior parliamentary figures.¹⁷¹ While Rhiannon Vickers' *The Labour Party and the World* and John Callaghan's *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy* provide extensive reviews of Labour's approach towards the wider world, imperialism only forms one of many themes within these studies.¹⁷² Vickers has argued that 'the dearth of material on Labour's foreign policy has contributed to the 'myth' that the Labour Party was not much interested in international affairs'.¹⁷³ Nye Bevan, Labour's Minister of Health (1945-1951), alluded to this problem in a speech in 1958. Bevan claimed that when he first entered Parliament in 1929 there was 'a myth which was prevalent that there were two subjects on which Labour MPs were completely ignorant: foreign affairs and how to make war'.¹⁷⁴ According to Bevan, it was always understood that those subjects 'were the special prerogatives of the Tories' and 'that attitude still had not changed very much' even though the post-war years represented an active period for Labour in terms of foreign policy and empire.¹⁷⁵

An analysis of Labour's imperial policy is also complicated by the complex structure of the party, with different groups representing different interests and priorities. From its inception in the 1900s, the Labour Party was a broad coalition of trade unionists and socialist societies such as the Independent Labour Party. These groups produced ideas about imperial affairs that were often contradictory. According to Vickers, the trade unionists tended to have a more 'materialistic' viewpoint in that they were aware of the importance of empire in protecting British jobs and providing Britain's export-based economy with access to overseas markets.¹⁷⁶ The Independent Labour Party members, in contrast, favoured international working class solidarity and were often critical of empire. Gupta claims there was 'a latent tension between the pragmatic trade union MPs and the more ideologically orientated MPs coming from an Independent Labour Party background'.¹⁷⁷ According to Gupta, critics of empire within the Labour Party

¹⁷¹ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*.

¹⁷² Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1*; Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 2*; Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy*.

¹⁷³ Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1*, 1–3.

¹⁷⁴ *Labour Party Annual Conference Report of 1958*, 186. Quoted in Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1*, 34.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1*, 32–35.

¹⁷⁷ Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964*, 7.

‘struggled with the interest of trade unions in Britain’s export-based staple industries’.¹⁷⁸

However, the notion that trade unionists were more supportive of empire has been questioned by some scholars. Nicholas Owen is critical of what he has termed the ‘social imperialist’ explanation for the absence of anti-imperialism in the Labour Party—namely, the idea that Labour was committed to an empire that delivered economic benefits to the British working class.¹⁷⁹ He argues that this view was ‘based on the assumption that the economic benefits of empire were clearly understood’.¹⁸⁰ According to Owen, these economic benefits were, in fact, contested and hard to predict. Owen cites George Orwell, the English writer, who wrote in 1946: ‘I know of people who can prove to me that we should be just as well off, or perhaps better, if all our colonial possessions were lost to us; and I know others who can prove that if we had no colonies to exploit our standard of living would slump catastrophically’.¹⁸¹ Although Owen possibly underplays the importance of material interests, he nevertheless highlights the complex nature of the Labour Party’s approach to imperial affairs. Clearly, it is too simplistic to say that the British labour movement supported imperialism purely out of economic self-interest.

Alongside material factors, ideology also played a key role in Labour’s approach to empire. Vickers argued that while Labour’s foreign policy was often confused, ‘with different progenitors bringing their own particular influence over policy’, there were still ‘certain meta-principles of Labour’s ideology’ that were fundamental.¹⁸² For Vickers, ‘these were a belief in teleological progress and change, influenced by the Enlightenment tradition’.¹⁸³ The concept of the civilising mission, in particular, influenced the way Labour leaders addressed imperial affairs. Callaghan has claimed that nineteenth century liberalism ‘supplied early Labour leaders with

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–5. For an earlier discussion of the British working class’ interest in empire see Ross McKibbin, “Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?,” *English Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (1984): 297–331.

¹⁸⁰ Owen, *The British Left and India*, 3–5.

¹⁸¹ George Orwell, ‘Do Our Colonies Pay?’, in Peter Davison, *The Complete Works of George Orwell* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 141-144. Quoted in Owen, *The British Left and India*, 3–5.

¹⁸² Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1*, 207.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

ideas about the government of empire'.¹⁸⁴ For Callaghan, the Labour Party was 'the legatee of that progressive element', which supported empire as a means of 'civilising' the backward races.¹⁸⁵ Seymour similarly claimed that 'socialists, like their liberal antecedents, drew upon Enlightenment ideals of progress, social engineering and humanitarianism to legitimise, rather than criticise, empire'.¹⁸⁶

Seymour argued that 'the heirs of liberal imperialism can be found in the Fabian Society', a socialist organisation tied to the Labour Party that advocated reform through gradual means.¹⁸⁷ The influence of the Fabian Society on Labour's imperial policy was reflected in the earliest Labour Party statement on empire, *Fabianism and the Empire*, a pamphlet written in 1900 by George Bernard Shaw, a leading Fabian member. The pamphlet justified empire on the grounds that states with a 'higher' civilisation had a right to take over primitive states.¹⁸⁸ The impact of the liberal tradition on Labour thought was alluded to by Rita Hinden, co-founder of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, a department of the Fabian Society formed in 1940 to facilitate research on colonial policy. Hinden cited a humanitarian tradition 'of ancient lineage', which typified the reactions of British socialists to empire.¹⁸⁹ She claimed that humanitarian ideas regarding the treatment of 'helpless black, brown and yellow men overseas' were originally voiced by liberal philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and were quickly taken up by socialists in the twentieth century.¹⁹⁰ This liberal tradition in part explains why Labour leaders advocated the reformation rather than the dismantlement of empire. As Hinden put it, 'they saw their duty not to escape from imperial responsibility, but to reform the empire to nobler ends'.¹⁹¹

The liberal tradition was evident during Labour's first foray into government in 1924. Although the Labour Party failed to win most seats at the General Election of December 1923, it was able to form a minority government with unofficial support from the Liberal Party. Upon assuming office, James Thomas, the Colonial

¹⁸⁴ Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy*, 15–16.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Seymour, *The Liberal Defence of Murder*, 35.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 39.

¹⁸⁸ George Bernard Shaw, *Fabianism and the Empire* (1900). Cited in Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964*, 11.

¹⁸⁹ Rita Hinden, 'Socialism and the Colonial World' in Arthur Creech Jones, ed., *New Fabian Colonial Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), 9-12.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Secretary, told his new staff that ‘I’ve been sent here to see that there’s no mucking about with the British Empire’.¹⁹² In a message for Empire Day later that year, he declared, ‘I know there are many people who assume that Labour Party leaders are against the development of Empire. It is because I am a Labour man that I believe with all my heart in that great brotherhood of free and democratic people which is building the British Empire’.¹⁹³ Ramsay MacDonald, Labour’s first Prime Minister, supported the preservation of empire but believed that it should be reformed. He called for an ‘imperial standard’ based on ‘qualities of justice, honour and administration to which all parts of the Empire should conform’.¹⁹⁴

Despite this rhetoric, the MacDonald governments of 1924 and 1929-1931 achieved little in terms of imperial reform. According to Howe, MacDonald’s idea of an ‘imperial standard’ set the tone for the Labour Party— ‘moral indignation at exploitation in the colonies, but with very little attempt to propose strategies for their removal’.¹⁹⁵ The fact that both governments enjoyed only brief spells in power as minority administrations undermined any attempts at reform. Moreover, the desire to appear to be a responsible party of government dampened any radical plans. As Callaghan put it, ‘the Labour Party entered a world in which the British public had grown accustomed to the right of Britain to intervene in the affairs of backward peoples’.¹⁹⁶ As a result, ‘Labour’s credentials as a credible prospect for government were thought to depend on a responsible approach to foreign policy’.¹⁹⁷ Howe claimed that an approach to empire that ‘validated Labour’s claims to be a responsible party of government became paramount, to the detriment if not the exclusion of plans for colonial reform’.¹⁹⁸

MacDonald’s ‘imperial standard’ fell especially short on the issue of race. As Gupta has argued, ‘given the sovereign rights of the Dominions, an “imperial

¹⁹² Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 45–46.

¹⁹³ James Sturgis, “What’s in a Name?: A Perspective on the Transition of Empire/ Commonwealth, 1918–50,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 84, no. 334 (1995): 197–198.

¹⁹⁴ Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 12; Austen Morgan, *J. Ramsay MacDonald*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 45–46.

¹⁹⁵ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 45–46.

¹⁹⁶ Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy*, 20.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 45–46.

standard” on race relations was doomed to failure’.¹⁹⁹ In the case of South Africa, the MacDonald government failed to revoke a racist franchise that excluded non-white voters. In Southern Rhodesia, where Britain held a veto over any constitutional change, the MacDonald government failed to revoke the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, which segregated land rights unfairly in favour of the white settlers. Gupta noted that the Labour Party’s Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions gave no thought to this problem and the only group in Britain to register protest was the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society.²⁰⁰ According to Gupta, senior Labour figures such as Sidney Webb, the Secretary of State for the Dominions, ‘could not shake off a hierarchical view of the human races’.²⁰¹

The Labour Party and India

However, one major imperial issue where the Labour Party could claim a distinctive voice was India. From the early twentieth century to the granting of independence in 1947, senior Labour figures took a keen interest in Indian affairs and played a supporting role in advancing the cause of Indian nationalism.²⁰² Tony Benn, a key figure in the Labour left, claimed that the general move towards independence was ‘made possible because of the links that the British labour movement and socialists had established with colonial liberation movements’.²⁰³ Labour’s earliest leaders, Keir Hardie and MacDonald, both visited India and wrote accounts of their findings. In 1909, Hardie published *India: Impressions and Suggestions* and in 1910 MacDonald published *The Awakening of India*. Both accounts made sympathetic remarks concerning the prospect of Indian self-rule.²⁰⁴ According to Vickers, both publications were ‘widely read and raised awareness of the less positive aspects of British rule in India’.²⁰⁵ Kenneth Morgan has argued that these publications ‘began the process of giving Labour a viable imperial policy, one

¹⁹⁹ Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 20.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 175.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 200.

²⁰² Mesbahuddin Ahmed, *The British Labour Party and the Indian Independence Movement, 1917-1939* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987).

²⁰³ Tony Benn, Foreword to Frank, Horner, and Stewart, *The British Labour Movement and Imperialism*.

²⁰⁴ Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy*, 15–16.

²⁰⁵ Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1*, 34.

which bore fruit in 1947'.²⁰⁶ At the Labour Party's Annual Conference of 1949, Jim Griffiths, the Labour Party Chairman, described the post-war Attlee government's decision to grant India its independence as 'the greatest of its many contributions to world progress'.²⁰⁷

Nevertheless, even in India where the Labour leadership could claim success, its policy was still imbued with ethnocentric assumptions regarding the ability of non-white peoples to advance towards self-rule. In *India: Impressions and Suggestions*, Hardie proclaimed that 'the Indian people are of the same Aryan stock as ourselves. Remove their picturesque costumes, clothe them in coat and trousers and wash the sun out of their skins, and then a stranger would have difficulty in saying whether he was in Manchester or Madras'.²⁰⁸ He argued that this 'fact' had an important bearing on whether India could be trusted with self-government.²⁰⁹ In *The British Left and India*, Owen charts the Labour Party's long struggle to form an alliance with the Indian nationalists. Owen argued that senior Labour figures only supported forms of anti-imperialism that fitted comfortably with their existing beliefs of how progressive movements should work. He claimed that India's political leaders were judged solely by their capacity to 'foster Western conceptions of progress'.²¹⁰ According to Owen, even though the Indian Congress Party was founded fifteen years before the Labour Party, Labour figures still regarded it as a junior partner.²¹¹

Consequently, as Congress under Gandhi's leadership experimented with a more indigenous anti-imperialism that rejected the supposed supremacy of Western political forms, the Labour Party's relationship with the Indian nationalists became strained. In 1929, Gandhi declared that while there was much he admired in British political institutions, he did not believe that they were 'the paragon of perfection'.²¹² Gandhi claimed that 'whatever is worth adopting for India must come to her through

²⁰⁶ Kenneth O Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), 195. Quoted in Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1*, 34.

²⁰⁷ Griffiths quoted in R.J. Moore, *Making the New Commonwealth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 192.

²⁰⁸ Keir Hardie, *India, Impressions and Suggestions* (London: ILP, 1909). Quoted in Samson, *Race and Empire*, 125.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Owen, *The British Left and India*, 13.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹² Mohandas Gandhi, 'Interviews to Foreign Visitors', 1929, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, E45/148. Quoted in Owen, *The British Left and India*, 15.

the process of assimilation, not forcible superimposition'.²¹³ Labour's relationship with Congress was further damaged by the Quit India Movement of 1942, a campaign of civil disobedience launched by Gandhi to hasten British withdrawal from India. In 1943, Attlee claimed that the Quit India campaign revealed a 'totalitarian outlook' in the nationalist movement that was 'foreign' to Britain.²¹⁴ He argued that unless the nationalists returned to the 'older, more liberal tradition of the earlier Congress leaders' then Britain should 'stand firm' on the Indian question.²¹⁵

Owen argued that even though the Attlee government honoured its commitment to end British rule, it would be 'wishful thinking to pretend that independence amounted to anything less than a defeat for most of the Labour Party's pre-war objectives'.²¹⁶ For Owen, 'Labour hopes of reforming Indian nationalism in a more socially and politically progressive direction were stillborn'.²¹⁷ Attlee himself acknowledged on the eve of independence that he was doubtful 'if things will go awfully easily now as the Indian leaders know little of administration'.²¹⁸ This comment typified the lingering paternalism that lay at the heart of Labour's approach to India. Senior Labour figures from Hardie to Attlee seemingly only accepted Indian self-rule if the nationalists moved towards a Western and, more specifically, British 'standard' of civilisation.²¹⁹ This example thus signified the enduring influence of the civilising mission on Labour Party thinking. The clearest example of the persistence of this civilisational doctrine, though, was in the Labour elite's approach to colonial development.

Colonial Development Before 1945

Although the idea of colonial development rose to prominence during the post-war period, its origins lay in the principle of trusteeship, which was popular with British statesmen in the 1920s. The principle of trusteeship was outlined by Frederick Lugard, a colonial administrator, in his 1922 book, *The Dual Mandate in British*

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ India (Situation), HC Debate, 30th March 1943, vol.388, cc.136-138, *Hansard*, London.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Owen, *The British Left and India*, 294–295.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Clement Attlee to Tom Attlee, 18th August 1947, Attlee Papers, MSS Eng. c.4792/66, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Quoted in Owen, *The British Left and India*, 295.

²¹⁹ See Benjamin Zachariah, *Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History, C. 1930-50* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Tropical Africa.²²⁰ Lugard claimed that advanced imperial powers such as Britain had a duty to extract resources in Africa that supposedly 'lay wasted and ungarnered' by primitive peoples who did not possess the requisite knowledge to develop them.²²¹ As guardians of these resources, though, Britain also had a duty to help develop the indigenous peoples. Lugard thus characterised Britain as a trustee of its African possessions until the colonial peoples reached an accepted 'standard' of civilisation. He argued that this dual mandate should be administered through indirect rule, a system whereby external affairs were operated by the British and day-to-day governmental activities were left to local chieftains. According to Lugard, denying Africans a share in their own government would 'forgo the high ideal of leading the backward races, by their own efforts, in their own way, to raise themselves to a higher plane of social organisation'.²²² However, Lugard believed that only the more advanced peoples could be trusted with self-rule. As he put it, 'the extent to which native races are capable of controlling their own affairs must vary in proportion to their degree of development and progress in social organisation'.²²³

This notion of trusteeship was manifested in the League of Nations, an international organisation formed after the First World War to promote world peace and security. The Covenant of the League of Nations declared that 'to those colonies inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation'.²²⁴ This 'sacred trust' referred specifically to the German colonies and Ottoman provinces that fell into Allied hands at the end of the war. At the Paris Peace conference of 1919, it was decided that these territories would be governed by the imperial powers under a mandate from the League of Nations. However, as Susan Pedersen has argued in *The Guardians*, the mandate territories, in practice, 'were no better governed than colonies across the board' and claims by non-white

²²⁰ Lugard served as High Commissioner of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria (1900-1906) and Governor-General of Nigeria (1914-1919).

²²¹ Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1922), 194 and 215. Quoted in William Bain, "The Political Theory of Trusteeship and the Twilight of International Equality," *International Relations* 17, no. 1 (2003): 64.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Martyn Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organisation of Peace* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2012), 11-13; Joseph Morgan Hodge, ed., *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 11.

populations under mandate rule for political rights 'were often met with repression'.²²⁵ According to Pedersen, the mandate system 'served largely to promulgate a paternalistic definition of trusteeship'.²²⁶

In the mandate territories and the non-settler colonies, imperial powers such as Britain did little to help 'develop' the colonial peoples. Frederick Cooper has claimed that prior to 1940 the European colonial powers in Africa 'rejected any development plans that would have required the significant use of metropolitan funding'.²²⁷ The limited investment that was provided tended to go towards infrastructure such as railways and roads, which benefited the economic exploitation of Africa's natural resources.²²⁸ In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney questioned whether the European imperial powers had ever contributed to the development of Africa. He claimed that 'the vast majority of Africans went into colonialism with a hoe and came out with a hoe'.²²⁹ Burbank and Cooper argue that despite talk of a civilising mission, the imperial powers in Africa invested very little in services that would help develop the native population.²³⁰ As they put it, 'while empires had never treated their subjects equally, the juxtaposition of racial divides with European rhetoric of democracy and progress was volatile'.²³¹

Significantly, it was a Labour government led by MacDonald that made the first steps in redressing this problem by introducing the Colonial Development Act of 1929. The Act made provision for the funding of development projects in the colonies, albeit with a limited budget of just £1 million per annum.²³² However, the measure was arguably aimed more at easing unemployment at home rather than improving conditions in the colonies. Sidney Webb acknowledged that the policy was 'connected with the lamentable condition of unemployment in this country and this is

²²⁵ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

²²⁷ Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17.

²²⁸ Hodge, *Developing Africa*, 16.

²²⁹ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982), 205. Quoted in Charlotte Riley, *Monstrous Predatory Vampires and Beneficent Fairy-Godmothers: British Post-War Colonial Development in Africa*, (PhD, University College London, 2013), 217.

²³⁰ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 315–316.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² George C. Abbott, "A Re-Examination of the 1929 Colonial Development Act," *The Economic History Review* 24, no. 1 (1971): 68.

an attempt to stimulate the British export trade'.²³³ This Act was followed by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940, which increased the budget to £5 million per annum and included provision for welfare services. Although the Act was introduced during the Conservative-led war ministry of the Second World War, it was a 'National Labour' Colonial Secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, who brought the bill to parliament.²³⁴ In defending the new measure, MacDonald drew heavily on the notion of trusteeship. He argued that while development mostly concerned the growth of economic resources, it also covered 'everything which ministers to the physical, mental or moral development of the colonial peoples to whom we are trustees'.²³⁵ The effectiveness of the Act, though, was impaired by the obvious preoccupation of the Second World War. Hence, it was after the war when Labour's colonial development programme really came to prominence.

Colonial Development in the Post-War Period

The link between race and empire was increasingly called into question after the war. The horrific racial policies implemented by the Nazi regime undermined the continued acceptability of racist attitudes. In *The Idea of Race in Science*, Nancy Stepan claimed that Nazi racism 'virtually destroyed the credibility of race'.²³⁶ In 1950, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) published a statement, signed by a number of leading scientists, which rejected any scientific basis to racism. The statement described race 'not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth'.²³⁷ This backlash against racism had implications for the future of empire. Burbank and Cooper argue that 'the complacency with which governments before the war accepted "white man's rule" was badly shaken by Hitler's racist empire'.²³⁸

Moreover, the contribution made by non-white colonial soldiers to the war effort helped convince British statesmen to put more effort into colonial

²³³ HL Deb, 23rd July 1929, vol.75 col.175, *Hansard*.

²³⁴ 'National Labour' was a British political group formed after the creation of the National Government in 1931 to represent the supporters of the government who had come from the Labour Party.

²³⁵ Malcolm MacDonald quoted in Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, 145.

²³⁶ Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1982). Quoted in Gavin Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society, 1930-62* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.

²³⁷ *The Race Question* (Paris: UNESCO, 1950).

²³⁸ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 420.

development.²³⁹ In *Which People's War?*, Sonya Rose challenges the idea that was prevalent in British popular culture at the time, and continues to inform post-war nostalgia, that the British were a united, standalone people fighting a people's war.²⁴⁰ Rose emphasises the differences of class and gender as well as the significance of British imperialism and racial difference. In terms of empire, she argues that the non-white colonies were 'thoroughly imbricated' in Britain's wartime national identity as they provided vital 'military, industrial, and diplomatic support to Britain' and strengthened Britain's 'self-image as a virtuous imperial power'.²⁴¹ This contribution was referenced in the famous World War II 'Together' poster which showed soldiers from different parts of the Empire marching alongside the Union Jack.²⁴² Creech Jones argued that since the colonial peoples had answered 'the war cry of "freedom" and "democracy"' and forewent 'many of their immediate wants' to help the war effort, 'it would now be hypocritical and embarrassing for any British government to show indifference to colonial progress'.²⁴³

This commitment to colonial progress was reflected in the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945. The Act increased the budget to £120 million over ten years, thus allowing longer-term planning for development schemes. The Attlee government also established two new public corporations, the Colonial Development Corporation and the Overseas Food Corporation, which were tasked with encouraging the development of colonial products for export.²⁴⁴ However, this policy was motivated as much by metropolitan demands as by concerns about colonial welfare. The production of colonial products for export was clearly advantageous to a British economy facing the strains of a post-war dollar gap and consumer product shortage. By increasing the supply of colonial products, Britain could access much-needed consumer imports and, at the same time, save dollars by

²³⁹ See Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* and Sonya O. Rose, "Race, Empire and British Wartime National Identity, 1939-45," *Historical Research* 74, no. 184 (2001): 220-37.

²⁴⁰ Sonya O Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 239. Ashley Jackson has similarly argued that the contribution made by non-white colonial forces to the war effort has been underappreciated by academics. According to Jackson, the importance of the African continent has been especially overlooked, even though 'Africa experienced a large range of military activities by land, sea and air and personnel from all over the Empire served there'. Ashley Jackson, 'The Empire/Commonwealth and the Second World War', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 100, no. 412 (2011): 65-78.

²⁴² This poster is printed on the front cover of Wendy Webster's *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*.

²⁴³ Creech Jones, *New Fabian Colonial Essays*, 19-20.

²⁴⁴ Hodge, *Developing Africa*, 22-23.

purchasing these products in sterling.²⁴⁵ This motive was alluded to by Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, who argued in 1948 that 'if we only pushed on and developed Africa, we could have the US dependent on us and eating out of our hand in four or five years'.²⁴⁶

This motive was evident in the infamous Tanganyika groundnuts scheme.²⁴⁷ In 1946, Frank Samuel, the managing director of the United Africa Company, proposed that a vast area of Tanganyika, a British colony in East Africa, be used to cultivate groundnuts for the production of vegetable oil, which was in short supply in Britain. John Strachey, Labour's Minister of Food, authorised £25 million to clear 150,000 acres of scrubland for the scheme.²⁴⁸ However, the scheme faced many difficulties. The Overseas Food Corporation, which oversaw the project, struggled to provide adequate machinery to clear the scrubland and much of the land selected was unsuitable.²⁴⁹ In 1951, when it finally became clear that the project was not going to be profitable, the scheme was abandoned. This scheme has been characterised by some as a symbol of the failure of the post-war Labour government's development policy in general. Michael Newman argued that the Conservative opposition 'made vast political capital out of the affair'.²⁵⁰ According to Newman, the Conservatives treated the scheme as a lesson in the perils of 'socialist waste and the supremacy of private enterprise'.²⁵¹ Wilson claimed that 'the groundnuts scheme, through its political and press misrepresentation, has become almost synonymous with colonial development in general, and its failure has been used by some as an excuse for advocating a reduction in colonial development plans'.²⁵²

More importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the Tanganyika groundnuts scheme epitomised the conflicting motives at the heart of Labour's post-war colonial

²⁴⁵ See Gerold Krozewski, "Sterling, the 'Minor' Territories, and the End of Formal Empire, 1939-1958," *The Economic History Review* 46, no. 2 (1993): 239-65.

²⁴⁶ Bevin quoted in Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 305.

²⁴⁷ For a personal account of the scheme, see Alan Wood, *The Groundnut Affair* (London: The Bodley Head, 1950).

²⁴⁸ For Strachey's role in the scheme, see Michael Newman, *John Strachey*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 114-118.

²⁴⁹ Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 209-213.

²⁵⁰ Newman, *John Strachey*, 115.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² Harold Wilson, *The War on World Poverty: An Appeal to the Conscience of Mankind* (Victor Gollancz, 1953), 103.

policy. Newman claimed that there was a lack of clarity regarding the original purpose of the project: 'was it a development project which would help pave the way for independence, or was it primarily a commercial venture for the benefit of the British domestic economy'?²⁵³ According to Newman, 'while Creech Jones saw it in the first sense, the Cabinet as a whole were only interested in the narrow British angle'.²⁵⁴ Gupta has argued that there was a latent conflict between the Overseas Food Corporation, 'which thought chiefly of the British housewife', and the Colonial Office, 'whose concern was development and welfare'.²⁵⁵ The scheme also highlighted the enduring stereotype of Africa as a place untouched by civilisation and filled with immense resources that could be extracted for the benefit of all mankind. In 1951, Samuel complained that there was 'a great deal of wishful thinking on the part of many writers who have since the war created an impression that Tropical Africa is an El Dorado of wealth sorely neglected in the past and capable of being developed rapidly on a grand scale'.²⁵⁶

Fabianism and Development

While domestic interests were undoubtedly vital, this should not diminish the ideological aspects of Labour's post-war development policy. The Fabian doctrine of economic and social development as a prerequisite to political independence arguably underpinned this policy. Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton argue that Labour's colonial development policy can be located in Fabian thinking.²⁵⁷ According to them, Fabianism helped formulate 'a doctrine of development which met the claims of liberalism within the contours of a socialist version of trusteeship'.²⁵⁸ Paul Kelemen claimed that 'Fabianism provided the ideological ballast for the post-war Labour government's new institutional arrangement in Africa'.²⁵⁹ Significantly, it was a senior Fabian member, Creech Jones, who served as Colonial Secretary for most of

²⁵³ Newman, *John Strachey*, 116.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 319–320.

²⁵⁶ Frank Samuel, 'Economic Potential of Colonial Africa', *Tropical Agriculture* (1951), 150. Quoted in Hodge, *Developing Africa*, 2.

²⁵⁷ Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton, "The Origin and Course of Fabian Colonialism in Africa," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4, no. 2 (1991): 143-174.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 144.

²⁵⁹ Paul Kelemen, "Individualism is, Indeed, Running Riot": Components of the Social Democratic Model of Development in Mark Duffield and Vernon Hewitt, eds., *Empire, Development and Colonialism: The Past in the Present* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2009), 199.

this period. In 1940, Creech Jones together with Rita Hinden established the Fabian Colonial Bureau. According to Kelemen, ‘through its network of contacts with colonial nationalists and a collaborative relation with the Colonial Office, the Fabian Colonial Bureau helped crystallise a consensus among colonial specialists in favour of the imperial state initiating social and economic improvements in Africa, in preparation for self-government’.²⁶⁰ Gupta has argued that this Fabian ideology of ‘modernising imperialism’ was ‘the chief explanation for the slowness with which the Labour Party abandoned the concept of imperial rule’.²⁶¹

This Fabian approach to empire drew on both the nineteenth century notion of the civilising mission and the early twentieth century concept of trusteeship. As Joseph Morgan Hodge has argued, the post-war development drive was ‘the culmination of a much deeper history whose beginning stretches back to the civilising mission doctrine of the late nineteenth century’.²⁶² The language used by Creech Jones to promote colonial development echoed the civilisational rhetoric advanced by liberal philosophers in the nineteenth century. At a Fabian Conference in 1950, Creech Jones declared: ‘the colonial people are set on the road; we have helped to build for them the machines for their progress. It is a good beginning—but it is only a beginning and we shall press on with pride in our hearts that we are extending the boundaries of freedom and enlightenment’.²⁶³ Crucially, this Fabian doctrine drew heavily on racist stereotypes regarding the non-white peoples, particularly in Africa. In a 1959 essay, Creech Jones claimed that much of what is wrong in Africa comes from ‘the poverty of nature and the backwardness of people’ who have been ‘tied by tradition and oppressed by ignorance and superstition’.²⁶⁴ According to Creech Jones, these problems are ‘not due to rapacious capitalism or modern exploiting colonialism, tragic and appalling as they have been’.²⁶⁵ Hinden similarly argued that the African territories were ‘poor and economically backward’

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 192.

²⁶¹ Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 391.

²⁶² Hodge, *Developing Africa*, 4–7.

²⁶³ Creech Jones, ‘The Labour Party and Colonial Policy, 1945-51’ in Creech Jones, *New Fabian Colonial Essays*, 36.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 23.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

even before the arrival of the European powers and if the British left, 'the result would only be a reversion to political barbarism and economic chaos'.²⁶⁶

This negative stereotype of Africans was particularly evident in Creech Jones and Hinden's approach to the colonies in East and Central Africa with minority settler populations. Creech Jones argued that progress towards independence 'may be hampered where it is necessary to reconcile different races, at different stages of political and social maturity'.²⁶⁷ According to him, in cases such as Rhodesia and Kenya where a white minority community holds power, 'communal representation in the legislatures must be regarded as an inevitable device for politically immature racial groups until conditions permit a more widely spread feeling of racial security and political stability'.²⁶⁸ Hinden also referred to the difficulties of bringing to an end imperial rule in 'plural societies where different races live side by side and refuse to mix'.²⁶⁹ In such cases, she claimed that British rule was necessary in order to 'keep the ring and help forge a nation out of what is still no more than a collection of warring and suspicious tribes'.²⁷⁰

This approach was manifested in the creation of the Central African Federation by the Conservative government in 1953. The Central African Federation merged the self-governing settler colony of Southern Rhodesia with the colonies of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. While the concept of racial 'partnership' supposedly formed the basis of the scheme, in reality the federation ensured continued white supremacy in Central Africa. Significantly, the Attlee government, led by Patrick Gordon Walker as Commonwealth Secretary, was connected to the idea.²⁷¹ Michael Collins has cited the Attlee government's role in the plan for federation as an example of 'an important moment in the decolonisation process in which both trusteeship and a new civilising mission make a return'.²⁷² Murray Steele has argued the Labour Party's inability to adopt an anti-imperialist posture despite

²⁶⁶ Hinden, 'Socialism and the Colonial World' in Creech Jones, *New Fabian Colonial Essays*, 13-18.

²⁶⁷ Creech Jones, 'The Labour Party and Colonial Policy, 1945-51' in Creech Jones, *New Fabian Colonial Essays*, 36.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Hinden, 'Socialism and the Colonial World' in Creech Jones, *New Fabian Colonial Essays*, 16.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Geoffrey Cox, "A Commonwealth Policy for Labour," *New Commonwealth (Incorporating the Crown Colonist)* 26 (October 26, 1953): 435-37.

²⁷² Michael Collins, "Decolonisation and the 'Federal Moment,'" *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24, no. 1 (2013): 28.

the evident lack of progress towards racial partnership in the Federation typified its paternalistic approach towards development in Africa.²⁷³

Anti-Imperialism in the Labour Party

While there was certainly a dominant school of thought among senior Labour figures in this period that favoured the prolongation of imperial rule, this view was by no means widely held within the party as a whole. On the Labour left, for example, there was a significant body of opinion that was critical of empire and supportive of decolonisation.²⁷⁴ Howe addresses this tendency in *Anticolonialism in British Politics*. Howe argues that while studies of the impact of decolonisation on British politics 'have tended to focus on the governing elite, parliament and party leaders', many of the most impassioned arguments concerning empire were, in fact, 'within rather than between the parties'.²⁷⁵ He claims that within the Labour Party 'anti-colonialism was perhaps the only issue on which the left seemed to score unequivocal victories during the 1950s and 1960s'.²⁷⁶ In 1954, an alternative to Fabianism emerged with the creation of the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF), a pressure group supported by many Labour MPs, which campaigned for the swift liberation of colonial subjects from imperial rule. The MCF was founded following a split in the party over the British Guiana crisis of 1953. In May 1953, the People's Progressive Party, led by Cheddi Jagan, won a general election in British Guiana, a British colony in South America. However, within five months, the Conservative government had suspended the constitution, claiming that the People's Progressive Party was a crypto-Communist party. While figures on the Labour left such as Fenner Brockway, the chairman of the MCF, supported the dismissed ministers, the Fabian Colonial Bureau, led by Hinden, urged Labour MPs to support the government's actions.²⁷⁷

Howe describes the creation of the MCF as the point at which the anti-colonial movement in Britain found its 'most unified, coherent, and forceful organisational expression'.²⁷⁸ According to Howe, 'the MCF was, in terms of range of supporters

²⁷³ Murray Steele, 'Labour and the Central African Federation: Paternalism, Partnership and Black Nationalism, 1951–60' in Frank, Horner, and Stewart, *The British Labour Movement and Imperialism*, 131–148.

²⁷⁴ Cox, "A Commonwealth Policy for Labour," 435–437.

²⁷⁵ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 17–20.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 207–210; Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 359–361.

²⁷⁸ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 231–232.

and scope of activities, among the most important post-war British political pressure groups'.²⁷⁹ The growing influence of the MCF on the Labour Party was reflected in the make-up of the Shadow Cabinet of 1955-1957. Three members, Wilson, Bevan and Anthony Greenwood, were MCF sponsors and only one member, James Griffiths, was a Fabian.²⁸⁰ In 1957, Brockway claimed that while the Labour right had 'won the internal battles on most policy fronts, the left had the high ground on colonial affairs'.²⁸¹ The growth of the MCF chronologically coincided with a rapid speed-up in the decolonisation process as several African colonies gained their independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While the extent to which the MCF contributed to this phenomenon is questionable, its development nevertheless symbolised a decline in the Fabian approach to empire among Labour leaders. Gupta argued that 'while the part the Labour opposition played in emancipating the colonies remains a matter of dispute, what cannot be disputed is that it had emancipated itself from the hierarchical view of the human races inherited from some early Fabians'.²⁸²

However, as Jodi Burkett has argued, even left-wing critics of empire were still susceptible to imperial or racist ideologies. In *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain*, Burkett has examined how the so-called 'radical left' in Britain in the 1960s struggled to come to terms with the end of empire.²⁸³ She uses the example of pressure groups such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which although outwardly anti-imperial, 'often relied unthinkingly on the "realities" of British superiority to articulate the world around them and their place within it'.²⁸⁴ According to Burkett, by calling for Britain to establish direct political control in Rhodesia in preparation for majority rule in 1966, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, along with a number of other left wing organisations, 'assumed a certain degree of British power and imperial benevolence that was not easily reconciled with their anti-imperial attitudes'.²⁸⁵ This example demonstrates how

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 368–369.

²⁸¹ Fenner Brockway, *Peace News* (11th October 1957). Cited in Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 229–230.

²⁸² Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 393.

²⁸³ Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain*, 9.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 12.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 68.

the ideologies of race and empire could permeate the whole political spectrum, even groups who classified themselves as anti-racist and anti-imperialist.

Crucially for this thesis, these ideologies of race and empire were still evident when Labour returned to power in 1964. Despite the formal end of empire, many senior figures in the Wilson government still believed that Britain had a leadership role to play with regards to its former colonies. One of Wilson's first acts upon assuming office was the creation of the new Ministry of Overseas Development, the first ministry dedicated exclusively to international development and independent of the Foreign Office. This new ministry thus affirmed Britain's continued commitment to the civilising mission. As this chapter has shown, although the idea of race as a biological phenomenon was largely discredited in the twentieth century, this did not mean the end of white domination over other races. Instead, such racial discourses morphed into a discourse of civilisation and culture which, although superficially colour-blind, still projected racialised, hierarchical ideas. As Howe puts it, 'in most imperial systems the distinction between dominant and dominated was not just one of physical location, political power, or economic clout: it was also seen in terms of cultural difference'.²⁸⁶ Specifically, the belief that 'the dominant core people were clearly culturally different from, and superior to, the politically subordinate ones' underpinned the endurance of empire in the twentieth century.²⁸⁷ The following chapters will explore the persistence of this discursive framework in the Wilson government's approach towards race, both internationally and domestically. Far from emancipating themselves from the hierarchical view of the human races, as Gupta has suggested, the following chapters will demonstrate how old imperial notions of white authority endured in the policies of the Wilson government.

²⁸⁶ Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*, 18.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter Two: ‘Vipers Clutching to Britain’s Bosom’: The Labour Party and the Commonwealth, 1964-1967

The Wilson government entered office in 1964 with a firm commitment to the Commonwealth. This commitment was striking as it occurred at a time of uncertainty regarding Britain’s role in the world following the relinquishment of most of its empire. This uncertainty was epitomised by Dean Acheson, the former US Secretary of State, who argued in 1962 that ‘Britain had lost an empire and had not yet found a role’. He believed that ‘a role based on being the head of a Commonwealth which has no political structure, unity or strength, and enjoys a fragile and precarious economic relationship is about played out’.²⁸⁸ Nevertheless, for the Wilson government, particularly senior figures such as Patrick Gordon Walker, Arthur Bottomley, Barbara Castle and Wilson himself, the Commonwealth still had significant value for Britain. For these figures, the Commonwealth in its new multi-racial guise, following the addition of a number of newly independent non-white countries in the early 1960s, provided an opportunity for the Labour Party to continue to promote social and economic progress on an international scale.

Allied to this support for the Commonwealth was a commitment to international development. In 1964, a new Ministry of Overseas Development was established, headed by Barbara Castle.²⁸⁹ This new ministry was a long-held ambition for Wilson as demonstrated by his 1953 book, *The War on World Poverty*. Wilson argued in this text that although ‘the days of imperialism are over’, this ‘does not mean the end of Britain’s influence in world affairs’.²⁹⁰ He claimed that while the first half of the twentieth century saw independence for the South Asian colonies and advances towards self-government in Africa, the challenge in the second half of the twentieth century will be whether ‘we can match political progress with the harder and less glamorous task of economic advance’.²⁹¹ According to Wilson, the ‘war on world poverty, which must be Britain’s historic mission, is the only way in which we in

²⁸⁸ Dean Acheson Speech at West Point, 5th December 1962, in *Vital Speeches of the Day* (Pelham, NY: City News Publishing, 1963), 163. For a survey of the reaction in Britain to this speech, see Emily Lowrance-Floyd, *Losing an Empire, Losing a role?: The Commonwealth Vision, British Identity, and African Decolonisation, 1959-1963*, (PhD, University of Kansas, 2012) and James Barber, “Britain’s Place in the World,” *British Journal of International Studies* 6, no. 2 (1980): 93–110.

²⁸⁹ Castle served as Minister of Overseas Development from 1964 to 1965.

²⁹⁰ Harold Wilson, *The War on World Poverty*, 202–203.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

the more favoured countries can fulfil our obligations to people all over the world'.²⁹² He thus believed that Britain still had an important role to play with regards to its former colonies, despite the end of formal empire. This sentiment was echoed by Castle who, in calling for an independent development ministry, argued that 'the wind of change is not only blowing politically, it is also blowing economically, and it is for this potentially influential country to give the lead'.²⁹³

This commitment to international development, though, was imbued with an enduring notion of Britain as a paternal figure responsible to its former colonial subjects. In August 1965, the Overseas Development Ministry published a paper outlining the purpose of the new department. It argued that development was not only about reducing poverty, it also meant 'fulfilling aspirations towards continued social and economic progress' and 'the transformation of traditional societies into modern ones'.²⁹⁴ This statement thus signified the persistence of the civilising mission in the Labour elite's approach towards the former empire. Foot claimed that although Labour arguments in favour of the Commonwealth were often phrased 'in terms of "a bridge between the rich and poor nations" and other apparently admirable sentiments, it is impossible to avoid their chauvinist content'.²⁹⁵ According to Foot, 'citizens of a country which has been conquered by Britain are, in the eyes of many well-meaning Labour parliamentarians, superior in some way to citizens of countries conquered by foreigners'.²⁹⁶ This 'inverted chauvinism' was reflected in the allocation of the overseas aid budget. In 1965, Castle informed Wilson that 'for historical reasons and because of their great needs the main volume of our effort is bound to go to Commonwealth countries'.²⁹⁷ Although the Overseas Development Ministry was responsible for distributing aid throughout the world, about 90 per cent of bilateral aid in this period went to the Commonwealth.²⁹⁸ The Wilson government's

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ International Aid Development Association Bill, HC Deb, 3rd February 1964, vol. 688, cc.846, *Hansard*.

²⁹⁴ *Overseas Development: The Work of the New Ministry* (Cmnd. 2736), (HMSO: London, 1965) 6. Quoted in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Part 1: Introduction, cxviii.

²⁹⁵ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 190–191.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ 14th June 1965, minute by Castle to Wilson on the provision of technical assistance, PREM 13/183, ff14-16, NA. Published in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Part 3, 474.

²⁹⁸ Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Part 1: Introduction, cxviii.

development policy, therefore, went hand in hand with its commitment to the Commonwealth.

Crucially, this vision of development within the contours of the Commonwealth was contingent on Britain retaining a special role as the 'mother country', a legacy of the imperial period. Consequently, as Britain found its authority increasingly challenged by the new non-white members, particularly over the Rhodesia crisis, the Wilson government's commitment to the Commonwealth soon waned. The Commonwealth, previously seen as an institution that ensured Britain's continued influence on world affairs, was quickly deemed a nuisance. In 1967, the non-white members were branded by Herbert Bowden, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, as 'vipers clutching on to Britain's bosom'.²⁹⁹

This chapter traces the Wilson government's growing disillusionment with the Commonwealth in the period 1964-1967. The chapter will show how senior Labour figures regularly drew on a self-congratulatory and Anglo-centric narrative that cast British statesmen, particularly in the post-war Attlee government, as the chief catalysts behind the development of the multi-racial Commonwealth. This narrative, though, masked the reality in which the leaders of the non-white nations had to assert themselves in order to force the pace of decolonisation and reshape the Commonwealth association. The chapter will argue that the persistence of this narrative among senior Labour figures helps explain the Wilson government's negative response to the political challenges it faced from the Commonwealth—namely, the backlash over Britain's Rhodesia policy at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meetings of 1966 and the influence of the new Commonwealth Secretariat, which was formed in 1965. The chapter will also show how economic problems such as Britain's Balance of Payments deficit would have serious implications for Labour's Commonwealth vision, particularly in regards to development. The chapter will argue that these economic problems, coupled with the political challenges, contributed to Labour's diminishing interest in the Commonwealth, which coincided with Britain's second application to join the European Economic Community in 1967.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ 'The Value of the Commonwealth', Memorandum by Herbert Bowden, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, 24th April 1967, CAB 129/129/9, NA.

³⁰⁰ For the 1967 EEC application see Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role, 1964-1967*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); Oliver J. Daddow,

While the next chapter will examine the Wilson government's approach to race through the domestic 'problem' of non-white immigration, this chapter will instead focus on the international dimensions. Specifically, it will look at how senior Labour figures initially responded to the loss of empire by championing the Commonwealth; an institution they believed would ensure Britain's continued influence over its former colonies and its continued influence on world affairs. The chapter will argue that while this support for the Commonwealth may have been based on good intentions, it was nevertheless laden with imperialist overtones, particularly in relation to Africa, hence the Wilson government's contempt when faced with criticism from Britain's former non-white colonial subjects over the Rhodesia crisis. Firstly, this chapter will trace the transformation of the Commonwealth from a small 'white man's club' to a multi-racial association spanning many continents.

The Transformation of the Commonwealth: From 'Old' to 'New'

The Commonwealth was originally comprised of Britain and the white Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the Irish Free State and Newfoundland. These Dominions were granted an 'equal status' with Britain through the Balfour Declaration of 1926, which stated that Britain and her Dominions were 'in no way subordinate to one another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations'.³⁰¹ This Declaration was ratified by the Statute of Westminster of 1931, which renounced Britain's legislative authority over the Dominions. The Statute of Westminster also introduced the term 'Commonwealth of Nations' into official function, thereby signifying the beginning of the Commonwealth association. After the Second World War, the Commonwealth was expanded as India, Pakistan and Ceylon became full members following their independence from Britain.³⁰² This development not only marked the end of the Commonwealth as an exclusively 'white man's club', it also meant the end of

ed., *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC* (London: Frank Cass, 2003) and Stephen Wall, *The Official History of Britain and the European Community: From Rejection to Referendum, 1963-75*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013).

³⁰¹ Peter Marshall, "The Balfour Formula and the Evolution of the Commonwealth," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 90, no. 361 (2001): 541-53.

³⁰² Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon until 1972.

allegiance to the Crown as a criterion of membership. The London Declaration of 1949 permitted India's membership despite her intention to become a republic. Although the Crown would have no constitutional authority over India, the Indian government accepted the Crown as 'the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such the Head of the Commonwealth'.³⁰³ This Declaration thus established the principle that republicanism was compatible with membership.³⁰⁴

In 1957, the Commonwealth was further expanded as Ghana and Malaysia joined as republican members. Also, from 1960 to 1964, a number of newly independent African republics joined.³⁰⁵ This meant that the non-white countries became a majority in the association for the first time. These predominantly republican countries were branded the 'New' Commonwealth, thereby differentiated from the Dominion countries, which were labelled the 'Old' Commonwealth.³⁰⁶ This rapid expansion was not welcomed by everyone. Robert Menzies, the Prime Minister of Australia from 1949 to 1966, described the 'New' Commonwealth as 'a cluster of republics that were spiritually more akin to Moscow than to London'.³⁰⁷ According to Menzies, the end of the Crown Commonwealth 'finished the intimate association'. Thereafter, the Commonwealth became, in his view, an association that was 'now only functional and occasional'.³⁰⁸ Enoch Powell, who would later become a vocal critic of non-white immigration, argued in 1964 that the Commonwealth had become 'a gigantic farce'.³⁰⁹ He claimed that 'not merely the non-European members, increasing at a rate of six or a dozen a year, but the so-called "old Dominions" have no present real ties with Britain other than such as history might have left between any two foreign nations'.³¹⁰

³⁰³ S.A. De Smith, "The London Declaration of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, April 28, 1949," *The Modern Law Review* 12 (1949): 351–54.

³⁰⁴ The issue of the British monarchy's relationship with the Commonwealth is addressed in Philip Murphy's recent book *Monarchy and the End of Empire*. Philip Murphy, *Monarchy and the End of Empire: The House of Windsor, the British Government, and the Postwar Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁰⁵ This period saw several newly-independent African countries join: Nigeria in 1960, Sierra Leone and Tanzania in 1961, Uganda in 1962, Kenya in 1963 and Zambia and Malawi in 1964.

³⁰⁶ The origin of the terms 'Old' and 'New' Commonwealth is unclear. Yet, they remain commonplace in the literature as a means of differentiating the non-white countries from the white settler Dominions.

³⁰⁷ Menzies quoted in Bridge and Fedorowich, *The British World*, 11–12.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Enoch Powell, 'Patriotism Based on Reality Not on Dreams', *The Times*, April 2nd 1964.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, in the 1950s and 1960s, there was an abundance of texts that celebrated the transformation of the Commonwealth into a multi-racial association.³¹¹ According to these accounts, the end of formal empire was not a failure for Britain as it was always the intention of British statesmen to lead the colonies to independence and to a continued relationship with Britain through the Commonwealth. In his *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, Keith Hancock argued that ‘it is best to regard the British Commonwealth as the nature of the British Empire defined, in Aristotelian fashion, by its end’.³¹² In *The Name and Nature of the British Commonwealth*, Nicholas Mansergh claimed that ‘if the nature of the Commonwealth may be described teleologically, its end is conceived to be the widening of a circle of self-governing peoples of differing cultural and racial origins with a community or a brotherhood of equal nations, linked by history, sharing some common interests and loyalties’.³¹³ In *The Commonwealth in the World*, Bruce Miller declared that ‘a country becomes a Commonwealth member partly by an act of will, but mainly as a culmination of a process of growth and adaptation, the end of which is the status of a sovereign state’.³¹⁴ These writers thus saw Commonwealth membership as the culmination of the civilising mission. As Miller put it, Commonwealth membership was ‘the mark of political maturity’.³¹⁵

The Labour Party and the Transformation of the Commonwealth

A recurrent theme in these accounts is the praise given to the Attlee government’s role in the creation of the modern Commonwealth. In *Making the New Commonwealth*, Robin James Moore argued that ‘the retention of South Asia to the Commonwealth has been regarded as the Labour government’s greatest contribution to civilisation’.³¹⁶ Moore noted that following the London Declaration of

³¹¹ See J.D.B. (Bruce) Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); J.D.B. Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs. Problems of Expansion and Attrition 1953-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience. Vol. 2, From British to Multiracial Commonwealth*; Nicholas Mansergh, *The Name and Nature of the British Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954); Keith Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); Kenneth Clinton Wheare, *The Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); Charles Herbert Currey, *A Brief History of the British Commonwealth since Waterloo* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1954).

³¹² Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 13.

³¹³ Mansergh, *The Name and Nature of the British Commonwealth*, 30.

³¹⁴ Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World*, 302-303.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ Moore, *Making the New Commonwealth*, 192.

1949, 'the Labour government basked in the warmth of press and public approval'.³¹⁷ *The Times* praised Attlee's 'great achievement of far and away the most civilised grouping of sovereign states which the world has known'.³¹⁸ At the Labour Party's Annual Conference of 1949, Jim Griffiths, the Labour Party Chairman, described the government's handling of the Indian problem as 'the greatest of its many contributions to world progress'.³¹⁹ Alongside this scholarly literature, there were a number of texts by senior Labour figures in this period that celebrated the transformation of the Commonwealth.³²⁰ In *The End of Empire*, John Strachey challenged the view that Britain was 'done for' and was 'committing national suicide' by relinquishing her imperial possessions.³²¹ For Strachey, Britain still had a role to play in assisting in the economic and social development of her former colonies. He believed that it was the Commonwealth, above all, that provided the institutional mechanism for Britain to achieve this. As he put it, 'in this field Britain is called upon to lead the world, for she has succeeded in creating an institution which gives the promise of providing the necessary institutional and emotional links to fulfil her destiny: the Commonwealth'.³²²

One of the most vocal Labour supporters of the Commonwealth in this period was Patrick Gordon Walker. As Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations (1947-1950), Gordon Walker played a key role in the decision to grant membership to the South Asian countries. Gordon Walker claimed that he originally devised the formula for India's membership that was adopted at the 1949 Conference.³²³ Robert Pearce argued that Gordon Walker's contribution to this settlement 'earned his elevation to the position of Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations'.³²⁴ In *The Commonwealth*, Gordon Walker argued that the

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ *The Times*, 28th April. Cited in Moore, *Making the New Commonwealth*, 192.

³¹⁹ Moore, *Making the New Commonwealth*, 192.

³²⁰ Clement Attlee, *Empire into Commonwealth: The Chichele Lectures Delivered at Oxford in May 1960 on "Changes in the Conception and Structure of the British Empire during the Last Half Century"* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); Harold Wilson, *The War on World Poverty*; Patrick Gordon Walker, *The Commonwealth* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1962); John Strachey, *The End of Empire* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959).

³²¹ Strachey, *The End of Empire*, 204-205.

³²² Ibid, 246-247.

³²³ Patrick Gordon Walker, "The British Labour Party and the Commonwealth," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 240 (1970): 507

³²⁴ Robert Pearce, ed., *Patrick Gordon Walker: Political Diaries 1932-1971* (London: Historians Press, 1991) 19.

transformation from empire to Commonwealth went forward in 'a historically determined order'.³²⁵ According to Gordon Walker, 'the movement towards independence inevitably started first in the settler Dominions' and the emergence of these new nations 'set a process in train that could not be halted'.³²⁶ He thus characterised the expansion of the Commonwealth as a teleological process, with the move towards a multi-racial association seen as 'a measured and cumulative march of events' as the non-white countries 'grew into membership'.³²⁷

Crucially, Gordon Walker claimed that the inclusion of the non-white countries did not destroy the Commonwealth because 'a multi-racial Commonwealth was a fulfilment of its inherent nature'.³²⁸ He therefore challenged the view that the Commonwealth had lost its original purpose as the non-white members became a majority. As he put it, 'the evolution of the multi-racial Commonwealth did not destroy a community of 'kith and kin', for this had never existed'.³²⁹ He cited Britain's relationship with French-speaking Canadians and Afrikaners in South Africa as examples of how the Commonwealth was never restricted solely to people of 'British stock'. His account epitomised the self-congratulatory narrative supported by many senior Labour figures in this period—namely, that Commonwealth membership was a natural outcome of a long civilising process in which first the white Dominions, and then the Asian and African colonies, grew towards political maturity. This narrative was based on the assumption that the end of empire was a planned, peaceful and Anglocentric process. This assumption was typified by Attlee's complacent assertion in 1961 that the British Empire was the only empire in the history of the world:

'where, without external pressure or weariness at the burden of ruling, the ruling people has voluntarily surrendered its hegemony over subject peoples and has given them their freedom, where also the majority of the people so liberated have continued in political association with their former rulers'.³³⁰

³²⁵ Gordon Walker, *The Commonwealth*, 23-24.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ Attlee, *Empire into Commonwealth: The Chichele Lectures*, 1.

However, this narrative overlooked the influence of nationalist movements and eschewed the significant moments during the decolonisation process when British policy was far from benign. During the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1964, Duncan Sandys, the Conservative Commonwealth Secretary, gave a speech that commended Britain's record of bringing its colonies to independence. According to Arnold Smith, a Canadian diplomat who became the first Secretary-General of the Commonwealth in 1965, the speech was 'pure Britannia nutrix, the proud mother who had nursed her infants to strength and independence'.³³¹ Following this speech, Hastings Banda, the leader of Malawi, countered that although Britain may have in time recognised what is inevitable, 'it has not been all voluntary'. Banda argued that 'there has been a significant element of persuasion, and many of us have been among the persuaders'.³³² He then went around the table listing the prison sentences of himself and his fellow leaders.³³³ This moment exemplified the tendency of British statesmen to overlook the less savoury aspects of British decolonisation. This narrative of a benign transition has been largely discredited in recent historiography. Howe has criticised this narrative for being 'Whiggish, teleological, Anglocentric', and 'imbued with the mystique of a stillborn dream of Commonwealth'.³³⁴ John Darwin has described this narrative as 'Whig history large as life and twice as shameless'.³³⁵ For Darwin, 'far from there being a considered transformation from empire to Commonwealth, what actually occurred was the unpredictable erosion of position after position and foothold after foothold'.³³⁶

While British withdrawal may not have been as protracted as some of the other imperial powers, this should not mask the numerous instances where British policy was far from peaceful. The most notable case of violence during Britain's withdrawal from empire was Kenya, where up to 20,000 Kenyans were killed in the colonial government's detention camps during the Mau Mau uprising.³³⁷ In 2011,

³³¹ Arnold Smith, *Stitches in Time: The Commonwealth in World Politics* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1981), 2–3.

³³² Ibid. Malawi gained its independence just three days prior to this conference.

³³³ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 2–3. Banda himself had been in prison in Southern Rhodesia for thirteen months; others had been in British jails for much longer.

³³⁴ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 7 and 14.

³³⁵ John Darwin, "British Decolonisation since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12, no. 2 (1984): 189–190.

³³⁶ Ibid, 206.

³³⁷ David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005); Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in*

following a High Court case brought by four survivors of the detention camps, the Foreign Office was forced to reveal the existence of a vast archive of files that had been secretly 'migrated' to Britain from several colonies prior to independence.³³⁸ These files at Hanslope Park exposed numerous cases of official violence in colonies such as Malaya, Cyprus and Kenya.³³⁹ The discovery of these files thus serves to further undermine the myth of a benign disengagement.

This narrative also fails to account for the alternative forms of colonial governance considered by British governments in this period. This narrative asserted that it was always the intention of British statesmen to lead the colonies towards political maturity as independent nation-states. However, during this period, British governments explored alternatives to the nation-state as a means of sustaining and revitalising empire. At the same time as the Attlee government granted independence to the South Asian colonies, Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, formulated a plan in which Britain would pool its colonial resources with France to create a 'Third Force' or 'Euro-Africa' through the middle of the planet.³⁴⁰ Ryan Irwin has argued that after the Second World War 'Europeans tried to recast empires as power-sharing modernization projects'.³⁴¹ He notes how the Attlee government 'introduced power-sharing constitutions in the Gold Coast, among other locales, and

Kenya (London: Random House, 2005). For the use of violence in central Africa, see Philip Murphy, 'Acceptable Levels? The Use and Threat of Violence in Central Africa, 1953–64' in Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and António Costa Pinto, eds., *The Ends of European Colonial Empires: Cases and Comparisons*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 178-196. For a wider perspective on British coercion in several territories during its decolonisation, see Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Imperial Endgame: Britain's Dirty Wars and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³³⁸ Stephen Howe, "Flakking the Mau Mau Catchers," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 695–97; David Anderson, "Mau Mau in the High Court and the Lost British Empire Archives: Colonial Conspiracy or Bureaucratic Bungle?," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 699–716; Caroline Elkins, "Alchemy of Evidence: Mau Mau, the British Empire, and the High Court of Justice," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 731–48.

³³⁹ Howe, "Flakking the Mau Mau Catchers," 696. In May 1961, the Colonial Office sent out a telegram to Britain's colonies concerning the disposal of classified records and accountable documents. The telegram urged the colonial administrations to 'destroy or send to Britain any files might embarrass HMG or other governments'. Anthony Cary, "Report on Migrated Files", (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2011).

³⁴⁰ John Kent, 'Bevin's Imperialism and the Idea of Euro-Africa, 1945-49', in M. L. Dockrill and John W. Young, eds., *British Foreign Policy, 1945-56* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate*, 25; Sean Greenwood, ed., *Britain and European Integration Since the Second World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 4.

³⁴¹ Ryan Irwin, 'Decolonisation and The Cold War' in Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Craig Daigle, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of The Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 95–96.

worked to balance relations among traditional collaborators and urban elites who wanted better wages, fairer trade policies, and greater autonomy'.³⁴²

As a recent work by Michael Collins has shown, the most notable alternative to the nation-state considered by British governments in this period was federation.³⁴³ In the 1950s, Britain experimented with or planned federations for Central Africa, East Africa, the West Indies, Malaysia and South Arabia.³⁴⁴ Although out of office during most of this period, the Labour Party still helped contribute to this 'federal moment'. Collins has argued that there is a 'misperception of Labour's approach to and support for decolonisation'.³⁴⁵ He argues that the Labour elite's tacit support for federation in Central Africa, in particular, 'ran counter to a broad if loosely defined acceptance of the emergence of African nationalism by senior Labour figures'.³⁴⁶

An underlying factor behind the creation of the Central African Federation was the apparent threat of South Africa. Ronald Hyam has claimed that the explanation for the creation of federation was 'as nearly monocausal as any historical explanation can ever be': 'to erect a counterpoise to the expansion of South Africa'.³⁴⁷ The National Party's victory in the South African General Election of 1948 under the mandate of apartheid heightened the fear among British statesman that Southern Rhodesia could be incorporated into this racist regime. This concern was evident in the Attlee government's deliberations on federation. In March 1951, Gordon Walker visited Southern Rhodesia in his capacity as Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations. Following the visit, he told cabinet of 'his surprise at the extent of pro-Union feeling' and estimated that one-third of the white settlers would

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Michael Collins, "Decolonisation and the Federal Moment," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24, no. 1 (2013): 21–40.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 36. Cf. Jason Parker, 'The Failure of the West Indies Federation', in William Roger Louis, ed., *Ultimate Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009); A.J. Stockwell, "Malaysia: The Making of a Neo-Colony?," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26 (1998): 138–56; Matthew Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961-1965: Britain, the United States, Indonesia and the Creation of Malaysia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Colin Leys and Peter Robson, eds., *Federation in East Africa: Opportunities and Problems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

³⁴⁵ Collins, "Decolonisation and the Federal Moment", 28.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ronald Hyam, "The Geopolitical Origins of the Central African Federation: Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa, 1948–1953," *Historical Journal* 30 (1987): 169. Cf. Philip Murphy, 'Government by Blackmail: The Origins of the Central African Federation Reconsidered' in Martin Lynn, ed., *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 53-73.

vote to unite with South Africa.³⁴⁸ He argued that the need to ‘contain South Africa’ and to ‘prevent the spread of its influence northwards’ meant that Britain could not regard ‘the emancipation and political advancement of the African’ as its ‘sole objective’.³⁴⁹

The extent to which South Africa would influence Labour’s African policy was further illustrated by the Seretse Khama affair.³⁵⁰ In 1947, Seretse Khama, the heir to the Chieftainship of the Bangwato, the largest tribe in the Bechuanaland Protectorate—one of Britain’s three High Commission territories in Southern Africa—married a white English girl, Ruth Williams. The South African government, which had outlawed interracial marriages under its apartheid system, strongly opposed an interracial couple ruling across its border. General Byers, the Chief of the South African General Staff, warned the British government that recognition of Khama would ‘light a fire through all the British colonial territories in Africa which would not soon be quenched’.³⁵¹ Fearing the possible costs of a confrontation with South Africa, the Attlee government decided to expel Khama from the Protectorate in 1951. Initially, Gordon Walker denied that this decision was influenced by South African pressure. However, he later acknowledged that if the British government had ‘put its official seal upon a mixed marriage in the midst of South African territory, there would be such a wave of insensate rage that co-operation would be withdrawn, and we would lose the three territories’.³⁵² This affair thus highlighted how the spectre of South Africa would compromise Labour’s supposed commitment to African political emancipation.

Although the fear of a confrontation with South Africa undoubtedly influenced the Attlee government’s policy, it does not on its own explain the indifferent attitude of senior Labour figures towards political change in the African colonies. As the previous chapter demonstrated, while the Attlee government granted independence to the South Asian colonies and accepted their inclusion in an expanded Commonwealth, the future of the African empire was seen in a different light. The

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 154.

³⁴⁹ Patrick Gordon Walker, Memorandum: ‘Relations with the Union of South Africa’, CAB 129/42/14, NA. Cited in Hyam “The Geopolitical Origins of the Central African Federation”, 154.

³⁵⁰ Ronald Hyam, “The Political Consequences of Seretse Khama: Britain, the Bangwato and South Africa, 1948–1952,” *Historical Journal* 29 (1986): 921–47.

³⁵¹ Collins, “Decolonisation and the ‘Federal Moment,’” 29–33.

³⁵² Pearce, *Patrick Gordon Walker: Political Diaries 1932-1971*, 24-27.

non-white African peoples were still regarded as uncivilised and in need of continued imperial tutelage. Irwin claims that ‘having been brought into the modern international system by the slave trade, the African continent was cast as a uniquely backward place—a region supposedly devoid of the heritage that marked the Levant and South and East Asia’.³⁵³ This attitude was epitomised by Gordon Walker who argued in 1953 that independence in Africa would be ‘a greater turning point even than the independence of India, Pakistan and Ceylon; for these were ancient states and civilisations that could be helped by British rule to renew and revive themselves as nations’.³⁵⁴

Crucially, Gordon Walker supported the Central African Federation not just because he thought that it would act as a bulwark against South African expansion, but also because he believed that there was a ‘time-gulf’ between the white settler and African native and, therefore, a period of ‘partnership’ was needed before the African majority could gain independence.³⁵⁵ He argued that the black African was ‘contemporary on two different planes’. According to Gordon Walker, ‘he is contemporary with the white African of today’ and, therefore, ‘must possess the rights and claims that appertain to all human beings’. However, he claimed that the black African was also ‘contemporary with the remote ancestors of these same white Africans, say in the epoch before the Roman conquest of Britain’.³⁵⁶ Although Gordon Walker believed that the ultimate objective of federation was ‘to create democratic states in which the majority rules’, he warned that ‘progress towards this goal must be practical and empirical’.³⁵⁷ He argued that ‘for a considerable time to come the whites will clearly be the dominant race’.³⁵⁸

These comments typified the persistence of a civilisational doctrine that divided the ‘advanced’ and ‘backward’ peoples of the empire along racial lines. In as

³⁵³ Irwin, ‘Decolonisation and The Cold War’, 99.

³⁵⁴ ‘Gold Coast request poses problems for Commonwealth’, *Cape Argus*, South Africa, 15th October 1953 in Patrick Gordon Walker (GNWR) 5/2 Articles by GNWR on Commonwealth affairs, 1953–1958, Churchill Archives Centre (CAC), Cambridge.

³⁵⁵ Gordon Walker, ‘The White Man’s Place in Africa’, *African World*, April 1953 in GNWR 5/4 Articles by GNWR on Commonwealth Affairs, 1953–1967, CAC.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ Gordon Walker, ‘Partnership and Apartheid: Repercussions of Two Opposed Policies in Africa’s Multi-Racial Areas’, *African World*, London, July 1955 in GNWR 5/3, Articles by GNWR on Commonwealth affairs, 1953–1960, CAC

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

late as 1961, Attlee still cautioned against a swift withdrawal from Africa. He argued that ‘one must regard Africa as still in the stage of experiment’ as, unlike Asia, it lacked ‘any background of indigenous civilisation’.³⁵⁹ He claimed that ‘it would be optimistic to expect any easy transference from a tribal organisation to a democracy on the Westminster model’.³⁶⁰ Hence, far from advocating independence, senior figures such as Gordon Walker and Attlee believed that Britain still had a senior role to play in Africa. Africa represented for these Labour figures a physical and discursive space in which the fires of the civilising mission still burned. However, five years after Attlee’s speech, all of Britain’s African colonies with the exception of Rhodesia gained their independence and joined the Commonwealth. This development clearly did not fit the narrative of a planned withdrawal. It is, therefore, important to consider other factors that explain the transformation of the Commonwealth in the 1960s, in particular the influence of the non-white leaders.³⁶¹

Asian and African Assertiveness

While senior Labour figures often cast Asia and Africa as separate genealogies, the leaders of the newly independent Asian nations believed that it was their duty to extend their struggle for independence to other territories. This attitude was epitomised by India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who argued in 1946 that ‘the kernel of our policy is the ending of colonialism all over Asia, or for that matter, in Africa and elsewhere’.³⁶² This desire to end colonialism was manifested in the historic Bandung Conference of 1955. The conference saw representatives from 29 Asian and African nations meet to discuss a range of issues, including economic cooperation, the Cold War and decolonisation.³⁶³ The conference signified the new nations’ determination to hold a separate identity from the West by steering a ‘third

³⁵⁹ Attlee, *Empire into Commonwealth: The Chichele Lectures*, 49–50.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ For a discussion on the extent to which Britain was in control of the decolonisation process see Bernard Porter, “Trying to Make Decolonisation Look Good,” *London Review of Books* 29, no. 15 (2007): 6–10 and Butler and Stockwell, *The Wind of Change: Harold Macmillan and British Decolonisation*.

³⁶² Nehru, 26th September 1946, *The Indian Annual Register, 1946, Vol. II* (Calcutta: N.N. Mitra, 1947), 251–252.

³⁶³ Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008).

way' through the Cold War.³⁶⁴ This conference was a key moment in the later development of the Non-Aligned Movement.³⁶⁵ At the conference, Nehru asked, 'are we, the countries of Asia and Africa, devoid of any positive position except being pro-communist or pro-capitalist? Has it come to this that the leaders of thought who have given religion and all kinds of things to the world have to tag on to this group or that, and be hangers-on of this party or the other'?'³⁶⁶ The conference issued a final communique that declared an array of objectives, including the end of 'colonialism in all its manifestations'.³⁶⁷ Although colonialism was only one of many issues that were discussed, the conference signified the non-white leaders' determination to assert their values on the world stage.

This growing assertiveness was evident in the workings of a number of international institutions that were formed after the Second World War, including the UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. According to Ryan Irwin, these new institutions were the brainchild of American planners who after the war sought to create a 'liberal world order' in which nation states would be linked together in an economic and political network based on international interdependence.³⁶⁸ Crucially, the leaders of these new nations perceived these institutions to be 'an agent of empowerment rather than as a vehicle of imperialist exploitation'.³⁶⁹ According to K.M. Munshi, an Indian writer and political activist, 'the United Nations gave members a chance to mobilise incalculable moral opinion and form the conventions of world self-rule'.³⁷⁰

This notion was put into practice when the Indian delegation attempted to put South Africa in the dock at the UN because of its racial policy.³⁷¹ Although the Indian government was concerned about racial discrimination worldwide, the apartheid

³⁶⁴ Irwin, 'Decolonisation and The Cold War', 97-98.

³⁶⁵ See Peter Willets, *The Non-Aligned Movement: The Origins of a Third World Alliance* (London: Frances Pinter Limited, 1982).

³⁶⁶ Nehru quoted in Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World*, 148-149.

³⁶⁷ Lee, *Making a World after Empire*, 14.

³⁶⁸ Irwin, 'Decolonisation and The Cold War', 95-96.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 99.

³⁷⁰ K.M. Munshi, 'Our Greatest Need and Other Address' (Bombay, 1958), 214-16. Quoted in Irwin, 'Decolonisation and The Cold War', 95-96.

³⁷¹ Lorna Lloyd, "A Most Auspicious Beginning: The 1946 United Nations General Assembly and the Question of the Treatment of Indians in South Africa," *Review of International Studies* 16, no. 2 (1990): 131-53; Newell M. Stultz, "The Apartheid Issue at the General Assembly: Stalemate or Gathering Storm?," *African Affairs* 86, no. 342 (1987): 25-45.

system in South Africa was particularly emotive. After all, it was in South Africa where Gandhi began his campaign of civil disobedience.³⁷² In 1949, Nehru argued that if the kind of inequality practised in South Africa was allowed to continue, 'then there is bound to be a conflict on a big scale'.³⁷³ At the first sitting of the UN General Assembly in 1946, the Indian delegation asked that the treatment of Indians in South Africa be placed on the agenda. South Africa responded that it was a domestic matter and, therefore, contravened Article 2.7 of the UN Charter, which decreed that the UN should 'not intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state'.³⁷⁴ The British government supported the South African regime on the basis of this principle. However, despite the objections of Britain and South Africa, the General Assembly agreed to discuss the issue of the treatment of Indians in South Africa.³⁷⁵ According to Nehru, India had made 'a most auspicious beginning on the stage of international politics' and the UN's decision was a 'convincing demonstration that the UN will be a real force for peace and for the improvement of human relations'.³⁷⁶

Following the National Party government's implementation of apartheid, the Indian government broadened its campaign to include all victims of racial discrimination in South Africa. In 1952, India put forward the first motion concerning the issue of apartheid.³⁷⁷ This campaign eventually resulted in the UN General Assembly's adoption of Resolution 1598 following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960.³⁷⁸ Resolution 1598 decreed that the apartheid regime was 'reprehensible and repugnant to human dignity'.³⁷⁹ The Indian government's campaign against South Africa thus demonstrated how these new nations could use international institutions

³⁷² See Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

³⁷³ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence and After: A Collection of Speeches, 1946-1949* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 258-259. Quoted in Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World*, 148.

³⁷⁴ Lloyd, "A Most Auspicious Beginning," 131-133.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 151.

³⁷⁷ Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle Against Apartheid* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 43-44.

³⁷⁸ The Sharpeville massacre occurred on March 21st 1960, when South African police opened fire on black protesters, killing 69 people. See Tom Lodge, *Sharpeville: An Apartheid Massacre and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁷⁹ Klotz, *Norms in International Relations*, 43-44; United Nations, General Assembly, Official Records, Fifteenth Session, Supplement No. 16A, Resolution No. 1598 (XV), 5-56.

to pressurise the older, more established countries and force their values onto the international agenda.

Significantly, these non-white leaders also used the UN to promote anti-colonialism. In numerous sittings of the General Assembly, the representatives of the African and Asian nations pressed for an official declaration that would call for an end to colonialism. This pressure culminated in the 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples', which was adopted by the General Assembly in December 1960.³⁸⁰ The declaration proclaimed 'the necessity of bringing, to a speedy and unconditional end, colonialism in all its forms and manifestations'.³⁸¹ The declaration also asserted that 'inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence'.³⁸² The UN thus not only declared its official opposition to colonialism, it also rejected the notion that certain colonies required a continued period of imperial rule before they could gain independence. This declaration thus confounded the view taken by senior Labour figures such as Gordon Walker who insisted that Britain's remaining African colonies were not yet ready for independence.³⁸³

A key figure in the implementation of this declaration was Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of Ghana, whose country became the first African colony to gain its independence from Britain in 1957. Similar to Nehru, Nkrumah saw his country's independence as part of a wider struggle. In his Autobiography, he acknowledged that he 'never regarded the struggle for independence as an isolated objective but always as part of a general historical pattern'.³⁸⁴ According to Nkrumah, 'our task is not done and our own safety is not assured until the last vestiges of colonialism have been swept from Africa'.³⁸⁵ He identified the UN, above all, as a platform to advance this cause. In a speech to the UN General Assembly in 1960, he described the UN

³⁸⁰ 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples' adopted by General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), December 14th 1960.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ See William Roger Louis, 'Public Enemy Number One: The British Empire in the Dock at the United Nations, 1957-71', in Lynn, *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?*, 186-213.

³⁸⁴ Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: International Publishers, 1981), 290.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

‘as the only organisation that holds out any hope for the future of mankind’ and warned that ‘possession of colonies is now quite incompatible with membership of the United Nations’.³⁸⁶ By participating in institutions such as the UN that tied sovereign nations together, these leaders helped establish nationhood as an almost universal value. While British governments toyed with alternative forms of governance such as federation, the success that these non-white leaders had in the UN set a benchmark for other nationalists to follow. As a result, it quickly became an accepted norm, internationally, that the end result of empire would be the creation of independent nation-states. As Irwin put it, ‘decolonisation could now be contextualised as United Nations membership’.³⁸⁷

The assertiveness displayed by these new leaders was not just confined to the international institutions that made up the ‘liberal world order’. The Commonwealth was also seen by leaders such as Nehru as a platform for the former colonised to promote wider causes. Nehru justified India’s membership of the Commonwealth not just because of the domestic benefits for India, but also because of the opportunity it gave Indian leaders to assert their values on the world stage. He argued that ‘we join the Commonwealth obviously because we think it is beneficial to us and to certain causes in the world we wish to advance’ and ‘it offers the possibility that we may also greatly influence others in the right direction’.³⁸⁸ This theme was touched on by Mansergh, who claimed that after the inclusion of the South Asian countries, ‘the voice of anti-colonialism was henceforward to be heard in the innermost councils of the Commonwealth, both persistently and powerfully’.³⁸⁹ According to Mansergh, ‘it was that, rather than events in Africa itself, which predisposed British and other Commonwealth statesmen to rethink their attitudes to the dependent empire’.³⁹⁰

Initially, though, these new leaders promoted anti-colonialism within the contours of the Commonwealth only to a limited degree. Miller, writing in 1969,

³⁸⁶ “Osagyefo at the United Nations,” 23rd September 1960. Quoted in Irwin, ‘Decolonisation and The Cold War’, 99.

³⁸⁷ Irwin, ‘Decolonisation and The Cold War’, 95.

³⁸⁸ Nehru quoted in Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience. Vol. 2, From British to Multiracial Commonwealth*, 232–233 and 159.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 239.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

looked back kindly on what he labelled the 'Nehru Commonwealth'.³⁹¹ According to Miller, the 'Nehru Commonwealth', which existed from 1947 to 1960, was a 'relatively cosy arrangement' in which 'the principle of respect for domestic jurisdiction was closely preserved'.³⁹² However, one issue in which these new leaders were clearly determined to assert themselves was South Africa. Just as it had been at the UN, the apartheid regime was a constant source of friction for the non-white nations. This issue came to a head at the 1961 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting, when the non-white leaders along with John Diefenbaker of Canada rejected South Africa's application for continued membership as a republic due to its policy of apartheid. Although South Africa's racial policy was abhorrent to most members, this decision broke the principle that members should not interfere in the domestic affairs of another country. As a result, South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1961 and did not return until the end of apartheid in 1994.

The rejection of South Africa was a momentous moment as it marked the first time the Commonwealth had directly censured one of its own members and the first time in which British policy had not prevailed on a key matter of significance, the Macmillan government having endorsed South Africa's application prior to the conference.³⁹³ This rejection also signified that the assertiveness displayed by the non-white leaders at the UN was now spilling over into Commonwealth meetings. The potential ramifications of this were not lost on Gordon Walker. Although he accepted the decision because of 'the abhorrence felt by all other members at South Africa's policy of apartheid', he argued that 'from a constitutional point of view, this case should be considered as wholly exceptional'.³⁹⁴ Gordon Walker claimed that the exclusion of South Africa on the grounds of her domestic policy meant that the Commonwealth had 'turned itself into a sort of court that sat in judgement upon

³⁹¹ J.D.B. Miller, "Reluctance about the Commonwealth: Sights Fixed on Southeast Asia," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 59, no. 235 (1969): 308–12.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 310.

³⁹³ Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience. Vol. 2, From British to Multiracial Commonwealth*, 186.

³⁹⁴ Patrick Gordon Walker, "The British Labour Party and the Commonwealth," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 240 (1970): 346 and 350.

another member'.³⁹⁵ He warned that if this kind of interference became a precedent, 'the nature of the Commonwealth would be undermined'.³⁹⁶

While Gordon Walker acknowledged that the exceptionally brutal nature of apartheid justified a break from the tradition of non-interference, he feared the potential ramifications, particularly for Britain, if such censure became a norm. This concern would later come to bear when Britain faced criticism from other Commonwealth nations over its Rhodesia policy. Consequently, while senior Labour figures lauded the expansion of the Commonwealth into a multi-racial association, there were changes taking place under the surface—namely, the growing assertiveness of the non-white members—that would later force senior Labour figures to rethink their commitment to the Commonwealth. This new generation of Commonwealth leaders, inspired by the success they had at the UN, sought to redefine the Commonwealth as a platform for the new members to influence their past 'colonial master' rather than a platform for Britain to retain an influence over its former colonial subjects. As Philip Murphy has put it, 'in so far as the rapid expansion of the Commonwealth had created something of a moral vacuum at its heart, this was ultimately filled not by Britain but by an extraordinary generation of independence leaders'.³⁹⁷ According to Murphy, 'their notion of the role of the Commonwealth was clear: it was to complete the liberation struggle they had begun in their own territories'.³⁹⁸ These changes, though, seemingly went unbeknownst to senior Labour figures who continued to endorse the Anglocentric narrative when Labour returned to power in 1964. The persistence of this narrative among Labour figures in part explains the Wilson government's indignation when faced with political challenges from the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth and the Rhodesia Crisis

The Labour Party's commitment to the Commonwealth was outlined in its election manifesto of 1964, which avowed that 'though we shall seek to achieve closer links with our European neighbours, the Labour Party is convinced that the

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Philip Murphy, "Britain and the Commonwealth: Confronting the Past—Imagining the Future," *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 100, no. 414 (2011): 270–71.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

first responsibility of a British government is still to the Commonwealth'.³⁹⁹ The manifesto included a sub-section titled 'The End of Colonialism', which lauded the Attlee government's 'act of creative statesmanship' in granting independence to the South Asian countries; an act which the manifesto claimed 'began the process of transforming a white colonial empire into a multi-racial Commonwealth'.⁴⁰⁰ The manifesto cast the incoming Wilson government as heirs to the Attlee administration and believed its task was to complete this 'noble transformation'.⁴⁰¹ After all, many of the new ministers including Wilson had served in the Attlee government.⁴⁰² Wilson himself held a strong personal attachment to the Commonwealth.⁴⁰³ In 1963, he put forward a ten-point plan for the Commonwealth, which included 'a Commonwealth programme of higher education; exchanges of scientific information between countries; a Commonwealth youth programme dedicated to aiding Commonwealth economic and social development and guaranteed markets in Britain for Commonwealth primary products'.⁴⁰⁴

Wilson's commitment to the Commonwealth was reflected in his decision to appoint Arthur Bottomley, a vocal enthusiast for the Commonwealth, as Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations. Bottomley had a long history of association with Commonwealth affairs and was particularly renowned for his knowledge of India.⁴⁰⁵ As Under-Secretary of State for the Dominions (1946-1947), he suggested that the Dominions Office be renamed the Commonwealth Relations Office, thus reflecting his commitment to the Commonwealth.⁴⁰⁶ Bottomley believed that the Commonwealth, with its broad scope across many continents, could play a key role as a progressive force throughout the world. In 1963, he argued that 'when

³⁹⁹ "The New Britain", 1964 General Election Manifesto, (London: Labour Party, 1964).

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Wilson served as Secretary for Overseas Trade (1947) and President of the Board of Trade (1947-1951).

⁴⁰³ Harold Wilson, *The War on World Poverty*.

⁴⁰⁴ 'Harold Wilson's Ten-point Plan for Commonwealth Development', 1963, DO 163/8, NA. Quoted in S.R. Ashton, "British Government Perspectives on the Commonwealth, 1964-71: An Asset or a Liability?," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35, no. 1 (2007): 76-77.

⁴⁰⁵ Bottomley was part of a special parliamentary delegation to India in 1945, which acted as a fact-finding mission for the Attlee government. According to Wilson, 'the parliamentary delegation's findings were of vital importance in the creation of an independent, self-governing country within the Commonwealth. No less was it a sign to any future party leader that Bottomley was a tailor-made future Commonwealth Secretary'. Wilson foreword to Arthur Bottomley, *Commonwealth, Comrades, and Friends* (Mumbai: Somaiya Publications, 1985).

⁴⁰⁶ Bottomley, *Commonwealth, Comrades, and Friends*, 41-43.

discussing the future of the Commonwealth, it is as well to remember that it covers a quarter of the world's land surface and contains a quarter of its population. These people are to be found in every one of the five continents of the world, and they represent every colour, race and creed'.⁴⁰⁷ He claimed that 'if the Commonwealth countries co-operated to the full and spoke with one voice, they could be the most powerful unit and influence for good in the world today'.⁴⁰⁸ In his memoirs, *Commonwealth, Comrades, and Friends*, he declared that 'while its members differ in race, religion and language, the Commonwealth is accepted by all as a valuable and proven instrument for international co-operation and an agency for social and economic progress'.⁴⁰⁹ Bottomley thus epitomised the optimistic view of the Commonwealth held by senior Labour figures in this period—namely, that it provided an institutional mechanism for Britain to continue its civilising mission.

However, Bottomley's high hopes for the Commonwealth would be tested by the Rhodesia crisis. In a speech in 1965, he commended Britain's 'enlightened policy' of 'bringing peoples of all races and colour to independence, and in creating peaceful multi-racial societies'.⁴¹⁰ He warned that Britain 'cannot allow this mission to be frustrated by a handful of intolerant fanatics believing in a discredited doctrine of white supremacy and living in a world that is fifty years out of date'.⁴¹¹ According to Bottomley, Britain's 'fine record' would be tarnished if it disregarded the rights of the African majority and handed them over to 'a small group of white racials who have no sympathy with the aims of our great Commonwealth'.⁴¹² Above all, he feared that if Britain appeared to be sympathetic to its white 'kith and kin' in Rhodesia, it would undermine all the work done by the Attlee administration and would potentially mean the end of the Commonwealth. As he put it, 'Smith and his friends want a complete capitulation by Britain, to continue to build up white supremacy, and blatantly to discriminate against the non-white citizens of Rhodesia. To concede their right to do

⁴⁰⁷ 'Commonwealth Co-Operation', HC Deb, 26th April 1963, vol.676, cc. 612-616, *Hansard*.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Bottomley, *Commonwealth, Comrades, and Friends*, 103.

⁴¹⁰ 'Tougher Line on Rhodesia' Speech, Middlesbrough, 31st December 1965 in Bottomley/10, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), London School of Economics (LSE), London.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹² 'Legacy Left to Labour' Speech, 22nd October 1968, in Bottomley/10, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

this would mean the end of the Commonwealth and the loss of our moral leadership in world affairs'.⁴¹³

Consequently, when Bottomley visited Rhodesia with Gerald Gardiner, the Lord Chancellor, in February 1965 for talks with the Smith regime, he was partly on a mission, so he believed, to save the Commonwealth. When he touched down at Salisbury Airport, Bottomley was met by thousands of Africans, who displayed banners and chanted, 'Bottomley, our saviour'.⁴¹⁴ During this visit, Bottomley met with some of the imprisoned African nationalist leaders, including Joshua Nkomo, the leader of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union which was banned by the Smith regime. He assured the African leaders that Britain would only grant independence to Rhodesia 'if there were constitutional guarantees of majority rule'.⁴¹⁵ However, the high expectations that greeted Bottomley at Salisbury Airport were stillborn as the Smith regime announced its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on 11th November 1965.

In a speech to parliament the next day, Bottomley stated that when he first met with Smith he realised how fundamental the differences were between the British and Rhodesian positions. Still, he claimed that throughout these talks 'Smith stood out as a man of character and integrity'.⁴¹⁶ Bottomley also noted that during the visit, he met with 'all shades of opinion' to get their views on the independence issue. According to Bottomley, 'we had, sadly, to recognise that the broad masses of people supported the Rhodesian Front government and the policy of UDI'.⁴¹⁷ In unison, several MPs corrected Bottomley by saying the white people. Bottomley replied: 'Yes, the white people'.⁴¹⁸ While Bottomley's claim that the broad masses of people supported UDI was clearly a slip of the tongue, his description of Smith as a man of character and integrity made him appear naively sympathetic to the settler regime. Tam Dalyell claimed that this speech signed his death warrant as a Cabinet minister.⁴¹⁹ In August 1966, Bottomley was demoted to the post of Minister of

⁴¹³ 'Is Mediation Possible?', 1967 in Bottomley/15, *The Papers of Arthur Bottomley*, BLPES.

⁴¹⁴ Bottomley, *Commonwealth, Comrades, and Friends*, 143.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*, 148.

⁴¹⁶ 'Rhodesia', HC Deb, 12th November 1965, vol.720, cc. 523-532, *Hansard*.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴¹⁹ Tam Dalyell, Obituary: Lord Bottomley, *The Independent*, November 7th 1995.

Overseas Development and in August 1967 Wilson demanded Bottomley's resignation from government on the grounds of a 'retirement at sixty' policy.⁴²⁰

Although Bottomley was just one of many notable Commonwealth supporters in the Wilson government, his demotion so soon after coming to office was undoubtedly a setback for Labour's commitment to the Commonwealth. This was evidenced by the more indifferent attitude towards the Commonwealth adopted by Bottomley's successor Herbert Bowden in the new post of Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs. Bottomley had warned of the grave implications for the Commonwealth if Britain failed to resolve the Rhodesia crisis, yet he appeared powerless to stop the Smith regime from issuing its UDI. Just one year after Bottomley was proclaimed as 'our saviour' by thousands of Africans at Salisbury Airport, he was out of office, and the Rhodesia crisis was no closer to being resolved. The grave implications forecast by Bottomley would be put to the test when Britain faced two tumultuous Commonwealth meetings in 1966.

The Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meetings of 1966

In January 1966, a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting was held in Lagos, Nigeria to discuss the Rhodesia crisis. This was the first meeting held outside of Britain and the first organised by the new Commonwealth Secretariat, thus reflecting Britain's diminishing authority over the association.⁴²¹ According to James Barber, 'the conference took on the air of a trial, with Mr Wilson in the dock facing his Commonwealth accusers'.⁴²² Wilson was criticised for not using military force to end the rebellion and was accused of allowing 'kith and kin' sympathies to influence his decision. Two African members, Tanzania and Ghana, broke off diplomatic relations with Britain prior to the conference. In September 1966, another meeting was held, this time in London, and Britain's Rhodesia policy again came under fire. Oliver Wright, Wilson's Private Secretary, claimed that 'each Prime Minister, when he spoke, seemed to feel that he had to outdo his predecessor in abuse. It was quite sickening to me; it must have been far worse for Wilson'.⁴²³ The Zambian Minister,

⁴²⁰ Wilson foreword to Bottomley, *Commonwealth, Comrades, and Friends*.

⁴²¹ James Barber, "The Impact of the Rhodesian Crisis on the Commonwealth," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 7, no.2 (1969): 89.

⁴²² *Ibid*, 85.

⁴²³ Sir Oliver Wright to the author in Philip Alexander, "A Tale of Two Smiths: The Transformation of Commonwealth Policy, 1964–70," *Contemporary British History* 20, no. 3 (2006): 307–308.

Simon Kapwepwe, walked out on the meeting and said before leaving London that 'this conference makes us know that Mr Wilson is coming to be a racist'.⁴²⁴ Wilson described the meeting as a 'nightmare' and admitted that he 'feared for the future of the Commonwealth' following both tumultuous meetings in 1966.⁴²⁵

The September 1966 meeting, in particular, exposed a growing division between the 'old' and 'new' members. At the end of the conference, two separate groups of countries sat down to write their final statements. Representatives from seventeen countries, mostly the non-white nations, called for Wilson to make an unconditional acceptance of the NIBMAR principle; while representatives from five countries, mostly the Dominions with the exception of Canada, issued a more watered-down statement.⁴²⁶ Ultimately, Wilson agreed to a final communique that reaffirmed Britain's support for NIBMAR and declared that Britain would seek mandatory sanctions against Rhodesia at the UN unless the Smith regime took steps to end the rebellion by the end of the year.⁴²⁷ This communique thus symbolised the growing power of the non-white nations.

Senior Labour figures, though, sought to play down the wider implications of these meetings. Although Bottomley acknowledged that Tanzania and Ghana's decision to break off diplomatic relations with Britain was 'very sad and unnecessary', he claimed that 'the heartening thing is that so many African countries have refused to follow them and break diplomatic relations with us'.⁴²⁸ According to Bottomley, 'this reaffirms the strength of the Commonwealth relationship and confounds those who consider the Commonwealth nothing but a farce'.⁴²⁹ In response to the strong criticism that Britain faced, he countered that 'it is a merit, and strength, of the Commonwealth that franker criticism of each other can be made than would be tolerable outside the circle'.⁴³⁰ Gordon Walker also looked to put a positive spin on the heated exchanges. According to Gordon Walker, while the meetings

⁴²⁴ 'Ministers fail to break Rhodesia deadlock', *The Times*, 14th September 1966.

⁴²⁵ Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70: A Personal Record*, 277 and 287.

⁴²⁶ 'Ministers fail to break Rhodesia deadlock', *The Times*, 14th September 1966

⁴²⁷ 'September 1966 Communique' in *The Commonwealth at the Summit: Communiqués of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, 1944-1986* (London: The Secretariat, 1987) 121-127.

⁴²⁸ 'Speech at a Labour Party Meeting in Billericay', 22nd January 1966 in Bottomley/2, *The Papers of Arthur Bottomley*, BLPES.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

were deplorable, 'they were at least an unanswerable demonstration and proof of the sovereign equality of all members'.⁴³¹ Despite these attempts to play it down, the perception of Britain in the dock at the Commonwealth did not sit well with senior Labour figures. During the London meeting, Wilson complained that Britain was being treated as if it were 'a bloody colony'.⁴³² Although Wilson accepted that the new members wished to assert their newly-found independence, he argued that 'Britain, too, was independent and had a right to ask for the support of the whole Commonwealth on this issue'.⁴³³ Wilson thus feared that British authority was being undermined at these Commonwealth meetings.

This view was echoed by Bottomley who argued that 'in an association as varied and far-flung as this, there are bound to be differing approaches to world problems. It is, therefore, inevitable that Britain should from time to time pursue policies of which some of our Commonwealth friends disapprove'.⁴³⁴ By emphasising Britain's decision-making independence, and dismissing its impact on other members, Bottomley arguably undermined the idea of the Commonwealth as an influential organisation. While senior Labour figures such as Bottomley often spoke of the opportunity that the Commonwealth gave Britain to maintain an influence over its former colonies, the idea that this influence could work the other way round was clearly not so appealing. Significantly, it was three years till the next Commonwealth meeting was arranged in 1969, thus signifying the Labour elite's disillusionment following the heated exchanges in 1966. In terms of Labour's Rhodesia policy, the supposed grave consequences for the Commonwealth were seemingly outweighed by the graver consequences for Britain if the British government appeared to be dictated to by the Commonwealth. This concern was further reflected in the Wilson government's attitude towards the Commonwealth Secretariat.

⁴³¹ Gordon Walker, 'Commonwealth Fact and Fiction', *Cyprus Mail*, 8th Jan 1969 in FCO 26/191, NA.

⁴³² Wilson quoted in W. David McIntyre, *A Guide to the Contemporary Commonwealth* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 166.

⁴³³ Wilson quoted in Krishnan Srinivasan, *The Rise, Decline, and Future of the British Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 54.

⁴³⁴ 'Speech at a Labour Party Meeting in Billericay', 22nd January 1966 in Bottomley/2, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

The Commonwealth Secretariat

The Commonwealth Secretariat was established at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting of June 1965.⁴³⁵ It became the main intergovernmental agency of the Commonwealth, facilitating consultation and cooperation among members and organising, amongst other things, the Prime Ministers' meetings. A new position of Secretary-General was also created in order to head the Secretariat and, in effect, become the leader of the Commonwealth. The creation of the Secretariat was therefore a significant step in reducing Britain's administrative control over the association. In 1964, Sir Burke Trend, the Cabinet Secretary, warned that the creation of the Secretariat would be 'the first formal step of an administrative kind along the road which leads away from the concept of the United Kingdom as the mother country and towards the new concept that all the members are entitled to an equal say in matters of Commonwealth concern'.⁴³⁶ The idea of a secretariat was initially put forward by Nkrumah at the July 1964 meeting. Nkrumah criticised the older members for their preoccupation with the Cold War and claimed that 'the real problem was the gap between the Haves and the Have-Nots'.⁴³⁷ He proposed a 'central clearing house' for the Commonwealth, with a primary function of preparing plans for trade, aid and development.⁴³⁸ This idea was supported by the Prime Minister of Trinidad, Eric Williams, who formally recommended the formation of a secretariat.⁴³⁹

While the idea of the Secretariat was accepted in principle by most Commonwealth members, there was much debate concerning its precise role and function. The 'old' Commonwealth countries, including Britain, were lukewarm to the idea and sought to limit its power.⁴⁴⁰ Arnold Smith, the Secretary-General, claimed that there was a resentful feeling among British officials who feared that the

⁴³⁵ For the creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat see W. David McIntyre, "Britain and the Creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 28, no. 1 (2000): 135–58 and Margaret Doxey, *The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Contemporary Commonwealth* (London: MacMillan, 1989).

⁴³⁶ 'Consideration of proposal to set up Commonwealth Secretariat', Sir Burke Trend to PM, 1964, PREM 11/4637, NA. Quoted in McIntyre, "Britain and the Creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat," 135.

⁴³⁷ W. David McIntyre, *A Guide to the Contemporary Commonwealth*, 21–24.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ Stephen Chan, *The Commonwealth in World Politics: A Study of International Action, 1965-1985* (London: Lester Crook Academic Pub, 1988), 7.

Secretariat would 'undermine the Commonwealth Relations Office's raison d'être as a separate department from the Foreign Office'.⁴⁴¹ These fears had substance as the Commonwealth Relations Office was merged with the Foreign Office in 1968. This indifference was also evident among senior Labour figures. Bottomley warned that the Secretariat could leave Britain open to attack as it could act as 'a focus for pressure-group activity' on issues such as Rhodesia.⁴⁴² Although the Wilson government accepted the idea of a secretariat, it tried to restrict its role, and, above all, prevent it from serving an executive function. The precise role of the Secretariat was outlined in an 'Agreed Memorandum' that was published after the 1965 Prime Ministers' meeting.⁴⁴³ The memorandum declared that 'the Secretariat should not arrogate to itself executive functions' and stated that though the Secretariat 'should have a constructive role to play', 'it should operate initially on a modest footing, and its staff and functions should be left to expand pragmatically in the light of experience, subject always to the approval of governments'.⁴⁴⁴

Despite these limitations, Arnold Smith believed that it was part of his duty as Secretary-General to influence British policy, particularly with regards to Rhodesia. According to Smith, when some African countries, most notably Tanzania, threatened to leave the Commonwealth over the Rhodesia crisis, he helped persuade them to remain in the association. He told Tanzania's leader, Julius Nyerere, that the African leaders 'should use the Commonwealth to help rally international action to deal with the Rhodesian situation rather than putting on an act, in their revulsion against British inaction, by withdrawing from the Commonwealth'.⁴⁴⁵ Smith, therefore, defied his purely administrative function by persuading African leaders to utilise the institutional mechanisms of the Commonwealth to influence British policy. He claimed that 'although we lacked direct authority and had to work

⁴⁴¹ Arnold Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 6.

⁴⁴² 'Memorandum by Bottomley for the Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy Committee', 11th December 1964, CAB 148/17, NA. Cited in S.R. Ashton, "British Government Perspectives on the Commonwealth, 1964–71", 82.

⁴⁴³ 'Agreed Memorandum on the Commonwealth Secretariat' in Commonwealth Secretariat, *The Commonwealth at the Summit*, 105–111.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 27–30.

always by persuading Britain to act, our collective voice was established as the most powerful influence on Britain in favour of securing majority rule'.⁴⁴⁶

One of the ways in which Smith sought to influence British policy was through his involvement in the Commonwealth Sanctions Committee. Before the Lagos meeting, Smith and Lester Pearson, the Canadian Prime Minister, considered the idea of a committee that would review the progress of sanctions against Rhodesia. Pearson put this idea forward at the meeting and the Sanctions Committee was established soon after.⁴⁴⁷ The Sanctions Committee appointed a working party of seven Commonwealth representatives who met with Smith to consider ways in which sanctions could be made more effective. In 1967, the working party issued a report which concluded that 'the existing sanctions were only being partially applied (and in some cases not applied at all) by some countries, and that they could and should be tightened'.⁴⁴⁸ The idea of British policy being monitored by the Commonwealth did not sit well with senior Labour figures. The Secretary-General's role in this committee, in particular, was a source of tension. Although the Wilson government accepted the proposal of a sanctions committee, it disagreed with Smith over who would act as chairman. Bottomley insisted that as Commonwealth Secretary he should be chairman, while Smith believed that as Secretary-General he should chair the committee.⁴⁴⁹ Savile Garner, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Commonwealth Relations Office, claimed that the Wilson government feared the effects of an 'unfriendly' chairman if the policy of sanctions proved to be unsuccessful.⁴⁵⁰ Eventually, a compromise was reached as Lionel Chevrier, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, was made chairman.

Despite his failed bid to become chairman, Smith still played a prominent role in the committee. During a meeting in May 1966, he proposed that the Commonwealth members of the UN Security Council co-sponsor a resolution, which would call on the Portuguese government to stop the passage of oil from Mozambique to Rhodesia.⁴⁵¹ Following the meeting, Smith had what he described as

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ 'Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, 1966-68', FCO 26/191, NA.

⁴⁴⁹ Smith, *Stitches in Time*, 59.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 60-61.

a 'stormy meeting' with Bottomley, who complained that he had become less happy about the whole idea of the Secretariat and claimed that Smith was putting ideas into the heads of some of the African representatives.⁴⁵² This moment typified the fear among senior Labour figures that Britain was beginning to be dictated to by its former colonial subjects. Just as India had used the UN to put South Africa in the dock after the war, the non-white Commonwealth leaders, together with the Secretary-General, utilised the institutional mechanisms of the Commonwealth to put Britain in the dock over Rhodesia.

The Commonwealth and Economic Constraints

Along with these political challenges, the Wilson government's commitment to the Commonwealth was also undermined by economic constraints. Within his first 100 minutes in office in 1964, Wilson was exposed to what he described as the 'grimmet of news'.⁴⁵³ The Treasury informed Wilson that Britain faced an £800million deficit on its Balance of Payments.⁴⁵⁴ This deficit would have serious implications for Labour's Commonwealth policy, and in particular Wilson's own ideas regarding trade, originally outlined in his ten-point plan for the Commonwealth. In October 1964, James Callaghan, the Chancellor, introduced a 15 per cent surcharge on all 'non-essential' imports despite requests from Commonwealth countries such as Pakistan and India that their exports be exempted.⁴⁵⁵ Anthony Greenwood, the Colonial Secretary, noted that Britain's remaining colonies were equally shocked to find themselves included in the surcharge as it 'represented the first time in history that a British government had applied sweeping measures of this kind to dependent territories'.⁴⁵⁶

The Ministry of Overseas Development was especially affected by these economic limitations. In her memoir, *Fighting All the Way*, Castle referred to her department's long battle with the Treasury over its budget. She claimed that 'only one form of reckoning was used in drawing up the budget; that of the accountant

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70: A Personal Record*, 2-3.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Alexander, "A Tale of Two Smiths: The Transformation of Commonwealth Policy, 1964-70," 306-308.

⁴⁵⁶ 'Anthony Greenwood to George Brown', 23rd October 1964, CO 967/430, NA. Quoted in Ashton, "British Government Perspectives on the Commonwealth, 1964-71: An Asset or a Liability?," 81.

with his short-term arithmetical calculations and short-sighted decisions on public expenditure'.⁴⁵⁷ According to Castle, 'we were all prisoners to the government's commitment to maintain the value of the Sterling at all costs'.⁴⁵⁸ In January 1965, Callaghan suggested that the government may have to abandon its objective of increasing the proportion of national income devoted to overseas aid. He argued that 'this expenditure bears directly and heavily on the balance of payments, and the rate at which it will be possible in practice to increase aid expenditure over its present level during the next five years will be dependent on the position of the balance of payments'.⁴⁵⁹ In August 1965, Sir Andrew Cohen, the Permanent Secretary of the Overseas Development Ministry, informed the Colonial Office that the aid budget would have to be reduced by £2million a year following the Sterling crisis in the summer of 1965.⁴⁶⁰ These decisions thus reveal how Labour's Commonwealth vision, particularly in regards to development, was checked by the seemingly more pressing problem of Britain's fiscal situation.

Alongside these budgetary constraints, the Overseas Development Ministry also clashed with other departments over the purpose of aid. In *East of Suez and the Commonwealth*, Stephen Ashton and William Roger Louis argue that the Overseas Development Ministry 'found itself increasingly isolated' as other departments such as the Commonwealth Office and the Board of Trade believed that the purpose of aid was 'not simply development for its own sake, but the promotion of British interests'.⁴⁶¹ In July 1968, the Commonwealth Office issued a survey in which recipients of aid were assessed upon the basis of actions they had taken that were beneficial or harmful to British interests. The survey cited, for example, Zambia's strong criticism of Britain's Rhodesia policy and, in particular, Ali Simbule, the Zambian High Commissioner in London, who described Britain as a 'toothless bulldog'.⁴⁶² Thus, just as it had been under the Attlee administration, Labour's

⁴⁵⁷ Barbara Castle, *Fighting All the Way* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 342.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ 'James Callaghan Memorandum', 26th January 1965, CAB 129/120/10, NA.

⁴⁶⁰ Letter from Sir Andrew Cohen to Sir H. Poynton on reductions in CD&W allocation, OD 20/416, No. 148, 6th August 1965, NA. Cited in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Part 3: 476.

⁴⁶¹ Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Part 1: Introduction, cxviii.

⁴⁶² Assessment of aid recipient conduct in relation to British interests: Circular letter from K C Christofas, Commonwealth Financial Policy Department, to Commonwealth Posts, OD 20/447, No.1, 16th July 1968., NA. Cited in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Part 3: 501.

development plans were judged by the extent to which they were beneficial to British interests, particularly with regards to the domestic economy.

This balance between Commonwealth and British interests was reflected in the Wilson government's controversial decision to sell arms to the Nigerian government during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. The war began in July 1967 when the south-eastern province of Biafra declared its secession from Nigeria. The war became notorious for the mass starvation of around one million civilians, primarily the Igbo people of the Biafra region.⁴⁶³ As reports of the humanitarian crisis emerged in Britain, strong pressure was put on the Wilson government to halt its supply of arms to Nigeria. However, the government stood firm. In a parliamentary debate, George Thomson, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, acknowledged that 'against this sombre background', he can understand the clamour against the decision to supply arms.⁴⁶⁴ Nevertheless, he avowed that Britain was obliged to protect a fellow Commonwealth country that was facing a so-called 'internal revolt'.⁴⁶⁵

This view was echoed by Wilson, who argued that he 'cannot accept the doctrine of neutrality in this matter because here we have a Commonwealth country facing a secessionist revolt'.⁴⁶⁶ Although Wilson admitted 'there were one or two unfortunate incidents on which we have had reports from the observers', he denied that the weapons supplied by Britain in any way contributed to the list of civilian casualties. As he put it, these 'unfortunate incidents' were 'not affected either way by the traditional role of Her Majesty's government in supplying to the Federal government'.⁴⁶⁷ Significantly, Thomson defended Labour's policy by citing the possible ramifications for the rest of the African Commonwealth if Nigeria was broken up. Above all, Thomson feared that the secession of Biafra could set a precedent for other African states with similar 'tribal divisions'.⁴⁶⁸ Thomson asked,

⁴⁶³ See Raph Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War: Facing the Future* (Victoria, B.C.: Trafford, 2004) and Alfred Obiora Uzokwe, *Surviving in Biafra: The Story of the Nigerian Civil War: Over Two Million Died* (New York: Writers Advantage, 2003); Brian Edward McNeil, *Frontiers of Need: Humanitarianism and the American Involvement in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*, (PhD, University of Texas, 2014).

⁴⁶⁴ 'Nigeria', HC Debate 27th August 1968, vol. 769 cc.1443-1446, *Hansard*.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶⁶ 'Nigeria (Supply of Arms)', HC Debate, 24th October 1968, vol. 770 cc.1587-9, *Hansard*.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Nigeria', HC Debate 27th August 1968, vol. 769 cc.1443-1446, *Hansard*.

‘what effect would our action have had on the rest of Africa, struggling to create modern nation states in the face of traditional tribal rivalries and fears’?⁴⁶⁹ This quote highlighted the enduring stereotype of Africa as uncivilised, backward and tribal among senior Labour figures.

Along with these political concerns, there were key economic considerations that also influenced Labour’s policy. Nigeria, with its large oil reserves, was of vital economic interest to Britain. During this period, Nigeria contributed a tenth of all oil imports into Britain.⁴⁷⁰ It was thus economically imperative for Britain that Nigeria remained united. The decision to supply arms to Nigeria was also commercially beneficial to Britain. Following independence in 1961, the new Nigerian government cancelled an agreement to receive military supplies from Britain.⁴⁷¹ However, when the Nigerian government required an increase in military supplies for the war in 1967, it turned back to Britain. The obvious commercial benefits of this deal were not lost on Thomson, who noted that ‘a favourable response to this request ought to give us every chance of establishing ourselves again as the main suppliers of the Nigerian forces after the war and more generally, should help our commercial and political relationship with post-war Nigeria’.⁴⁷² The idea of arms sales as a possible remedy to Britain’s economic problems was not just restricted to Nigeria. In 1964, the Wilson government pledged to end arms sales to the South African government. However, following the devaluation of the Sterling in 1967, the Cabinet considered resuming arms sales to the apartheid regime.⁴⁷³ Although the proposal was rejected, the fact that such a policy was even considered, despite the obvious disapproval it would have met from other Commonwealth members, indicates how far economic interest dictated Labour’s policy.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 2*, 25.

⁴⁷¹ Alexander, “A Tale of Two Smiths: The Transformation of Commonwealth Policy, 1964–70,” 313–315.

⁴⁷² ‘George Thomson to Denis Healey (Defence Secretary)’, 4th December 1967, PREM 13/2257, NA. Cited in Alexander, “A Tale of Two Smiths: The Transformation of Commonwealth Policy, 1964–70,” 313–315.

⁴⁷³ Hyam, *Britain’s Declining Empire*, 337–339; Alexander, “A Tale of Two Smiths: The Transformation of Commonwealth Policy, 1964–70,” 306–308; Mark Phythian, *The Politics of British Arms Sales Since 1964: “To Secure Our Rightful Share”*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

The Value of the Commonwealth

Within this context of economic problems and political challenges, the Wilson government looked to reassess its commitment to the Commonwealth. This was demonstrated by the more indifferent approach adopted by Herbert Bowden as Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs. In April 1967, Bowden presented a memorandum to Cabinet titled 'The Value of the Commonwealth'. According to Bowden, the report was prompted by the tumultuous Commonwealth meetings of 1966, after which he claimed many senior Labour figures 'were worried about whether the value of the Commonwealth association to us might be outweighed by the extent to which it affects adversely our own policies and interests'.⁴⁷⁴ The report argued that 'the Commonwealth can no longer be regarded as an association in which Britain could count on getting her own way'.⁴⁷⁵ The report stated that all but five Commonwealth nations now fall within the 'Afro-Asian world' and many of these members 'seek to exert pressure-group tactics' on Britain, particularly on issues such as Rhodesia that had 'racial connotations and aroused strong emotions'.⁴⁷⁶

Bowden's report thus recognised that the 'new' Commonwealth nations had undermined Britain's assumed role as the 'mother country'. The report especially lamented the changing atmosphere at the Prime Ministers' Meetings. The report claimed that 'Britain had for long benefited from the ability largely to stage-manage Commonwealth meetings ourselves'. However, in recent years, 'the meetings have contained examples of Britain clutching vipers to her bosom—and paying for it'.⁴⁷⁷ This metaphor was in reference to the Aesop fable in which a kindly farmer helped revive a viper in his chest only to be bitten and killed. This reference symbolised the enduring narrative of Britain as a paternal figure that had supposedly been betrayed by those it had 'nurtured'.

Bowden's report described the Commonwealth as 'a ready-made forum for pressures to be brought to bear on the British government to make concessions' and criticised Arnold Smith, in particular, for 'giving this concept support and publicity'.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ 'The Value of the Commonwealth', Memorandum by Herbert Bowden, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, 24th April 1967, CAB 129/129/9, NA.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

The report claimed that ‘it will be to our advantage if there are fewer Commonwealth meetings on policy issues’ and urged the government ‘not to initiate proposals for Commonwealth-wide meetings on high policy matters and on occasion if necessary to oppose them’.⁴⁷⁹ Hence, the Wilson government’s refusal of further meetings until 1969. Bowden’s report concluded that ‘while the Commonwealth was still considered “a good thing”, Britain should not be forced to maintain the association at all costs, especially if it was seen to be detrimental to British interests’. Bowden claimed that ‘in calculating our interests, the maintenance of the Commonwealth association is an important factor to be weighed, but not the only one’.⁴⁸⁰

European Economic Community

Bowden’s report coincided with Britain’s second failed application to join the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1967.⁴⁸¹ Britain first applied to join the EEC under the Macmillan government in 1961. However, both applications were vetoed by the French President, Charles De Gaulle, who was concerned, amongst other things, with Britain’s close links with the United States and its preferential trade agreements with Commonwealth countries.⁴⁸² Edward Heath’s Conservative government submitted Britain’s third application after De Gaulle left office, and Britain finally became a member of the EEC in 1973. The potential ramifications of European membership on Britain’s relationship with the Commonwealth were not lost on Bowden. Bowden argued that ‘Britain’s membership of EEC is likely to lead to a diminution of our function as the lynch-pin of the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth’s continued vitality will depend, more than in the past, on the importance which other Commonwealth Members attach to it’.⁴⁸³

Significantly, it was on this basis that the Labour Party under Gaitskell’s leadership opposed Britain’s first application in 1961. E.J.B. Rose argued that the

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Helen Parr, *Britain’s Policy Towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain’s World Role, 1964-1967*.

⁴⁸² Kristian Steinnes, “The European Challenge: Britain’s EEC Application in 1961,” *Contemporary European History* 7, no. 1 (1998): 61–79; George Wilkes, ed., *Britain’s Failure to Enter the European Community, 1961-63: The Enlargement Negotiations and Crises in European, Atlantic, and Commonwealth Relations* (London: F. Cass, 1997); N. Piers Ludlow, *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s: Negotiating the Gaullist Challenge* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁸³ Bowden, ‘The Value of the Commonwealth’.

1961 debate on the Common Market marked 'the apogee of the Labour Party's commitment to the Commonwealth'.⁴⁸⁴ In his speech against British membership, Gaitskell declared that Britain was 'not just a part of Europe'; it also had 'ties and links which run across the whole world'.⁴⁸⁵ Above all, Gaitskell cited the modern Commonwealth, which he claimed 'owed its creation fundamentally to those vital historic decisions of the post-war Labour government', as something he wanted to 'cherish'.⁴⁸⁶ Gaitskell thus saw British membership of the EEC as incompatible with its commitment to the Commonwealth. As he put it, 'we cannot associate ourselves with the other states in Western Europe with our links with the Commonwealth fully maintained, if at the beginning you sell the Commonwealth down the river'.⁴⁸⁷ The language used by Gaitskell epitomised the kinship that many senior Labour figures felt towards other Commonwealth members, particularly in the Dominions. Gaitskell referred to the contribution made by New Zealand, Australia and Canada in two world wars and declared that 'we do not intend to forget Vimy Ridge and Gallipoli'.⁴⁸⁸

This sentiment was echoed by Wilson, who cited the New Zealand government's generous trade agreement with Britain after the Second World War when Britain looked to obtain the food and raw materials it needed with little to offer in return. Wilson quoted Walter Nash, the leader of the New Zealand delegation, who opened trade proceedings with Britain by declaring: 'We have not come to ask you "what can you give?" but simply "what do you need?" When you stood alone you preserved our freedom for us. Whatever the sacrifice may be for the New Zealand people we will supply it'.⁴⁸⁹ Wilson argued that 'we cannot with the honour of this country take any action now that would betray friends such as those'.⁴⁹⁰ As he put it,

⁴⁸⁴ E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 222.

⁴⁸⁵ Speech by Hugh Gaitskell against UK membership of the Common Market, 3rd October 1962 in *Britain and the Common Market, Texts of speeches made at the 1962 Labour Party Conference by the Rt. Hon Hugh Gaitskell M.P. and the Rt. Hon. George Brown M.P. together with the policy statement accepted by Conference*. (London: Labour Party, 1962), 3-23.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Vimy Ridge was a battle fought in France in 1917 during the First World War in which the main combatants were the Canadian Corps. Gallipoli was a battle that took place in the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1916 during the First World War, which involved a significant number of combatants from Australia and New Zealand.

⁴⁸⁹ European Economic Community, HC Deb, 3rd August 1961, vol. 645 cc1664-1665, *Hansard*.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

'we are not entitled to sell our friends and kinsmen down the river for a problematical and marginal advantage in selling washing machines in Dusseldorf'.⁴⁹¹

However, the idea that EEC membership would undermine the Commonwealth relationship was not shared by all senior Labour figures. Bottomley believed that the Commonwealth could co-exist with and indeed be enriched by British membership of the EEC. In 1959 he wrote a pamphlet titled 'Why Britain Should Join the Common Market', which argued that EEC membership was essential in order to provide further investment for the Commonwealth.⁴⁹² According to Bottomley, 'our weak economy prevented us from meeting this traditional role on our own' and these fellow European powers would help assist 'our obligations to the developing world'.⁴⁹³ His vision of the Commonwealth and Europe working together, though, was largely discredited.⁴⁹⁴ Wilson, who by 1967 had changed his mind on the issue of European integration, claimed that Bottomley's 'idealism went too far' on this matter as 'not all European statesmen shared his high ideals'.⁴⁹⁵

The EEC application also coincided with a revision of Britain's defence plans. Although the Wilson government was initially committed to maintaining Britain's military bases 'East of Suez', the economic difficulties that beset Britain in this period eventually led to a rethink. In July 1967, Denis Healey, the Defence Secretary, submitted a white paper that announced Britain's intention to withdraw from its 'East of Suez' bases by the mid-1970s.⁴⁹⁶ The paper declared that 'Britain will cease to play a worldwide military role' and will 'increasingly become a European power'.⁴⁹⁷ The devaluation of the Sterling in 1967 forced Healey to bring this deadline forward and in January 1968 he announced that Britain would withdraw from all its existing military bases 'East of Suez' by 1971 despite pleas from Commonwealth members such as Singapore, Malaysia and Australia for Britain to maintain its bases.⁴⁹⁸ The Wilson government's disillusionment with the Commonwealth can, therefore, be

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Bottomley, *Commonwealth, Comrades, and Friends*, 99.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ 'Arthur Bottomley Obituary', *The Times*, November 6th 1995

⁴⁹⁵ Harold Wilson foreword in Bottomley, *Commonwealth, Comrades, and Friends*.

⁴⁹⁶ Steven Fielding and John W Young, *The Labour Governments, 1964-70*, vol. 2, 48–53.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Jeffrey Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal From East of Suez: The Politics of Retrenchment* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 147.

located within the broader context of Britain's shift away from a world role and towards Europe in this period. This connection has been touched on by Murphy who argues that the battering that Britain received over Rhodesia 'convinced Wilson and his colleagues that the Commonwealth could not provide an effective basis for British global power, and helped to reconcile them to a second application for membership of the EEC'.⁴⁹⁹

This chapter has demonstrated that, while the Wilson government came to power in 1964 with high hopes for the Commonwealth, this was soon quashed by the reality of an £800million Balance of Payments deficit. Within this context, economic interests often took priority over Labour's plans for the Commonwealth. This was reflected in the decision to introduce an import surcharge to help reduce the deficit, despite the potential adverse impact it would have on other member nations. This chapter has shown that these economic constraints, together with political challenges, led to a decline in the Labour Party's commitment to the Commonwealth. Crucially, this chapter has argued that this support for the Commonwealth was in the first place contingent on Britain playing a special role as the 'mother country'. This condition stemmed from a misguided narrative of the development of the Commonwealth as an Anglocentric process, which was popular with senior Labour figures in this period. This narrative was in many ways an extension of the civilisational doctrine advanced by nineteenth century liberal thinkers and Labour statesmen in the early twentieth century. Despite the end of formal empire, senior Labour figures still believed that Britain had a duty to help 'civilise' the supposedly backward races, particularly in Africa. The chapter has shown that this vision of the Commonwealth failed to account for the changes that were taking place both inside and outside the association as the new non-white nations looked to assert themselves on the world stage. As a result, once it became clear Britain could no longer control its former non-white colonial subjects, the Wilson government's interest in the Commonwealth quickly diminished.

⁴⁹⁹ Murphy, "Britain and the Commonwealth: Confronting the Past—Imagining the Future," 270–71.

Chapter Three: 'From Equality to Integration': The Labour Party's Changing Approach towards Commonwealth Immigration, 1964-1968

The Labour Party returned to power in 1964 facing the difficult question of Britain's role in the world following the relinquishment of most of its empire. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the Labour policy-making elite responded to this problem by championing the Commonwealth, an institution they believed would ensure Britain's continued status as a world power. Many senior Labour figures including Wilson had a strong personal attachment to the Commonwealth. For these figures, the Commonwealth, particularly after its expansion into a multi-racial association, provided an institutional mechanism for the Labour Party to continue to promote social and economic progress on an international scale. However, one difficulty that emanated from this commitment to the Commonwealth was the issue of non-white immigration. Since the end of the Second World War, thousands of so-called 'coloured' migrants had arrived in Britain from the 'New' Commonwealth. These migrants were granted unrestricted entry into Britain through the British Nationality Act of 1948, which established a common Commonwealth citizenship. The 1960s, though, saw the introduction of legislation to curtail this migration. The Macmillan government introduced the inaugural Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which limited the number of Commonwealth migrants arriving each year through an employment voucher system.

The Labour Party led by Gaitskell strongly opposed this new measure. Gaitskell described the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill as 'a plain anti-Commonwealth measure in theory and a plain anti-colour measure in practice'.⁵⁰⁰ However, shortly after taking office, the Wilson government renewed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act and then introduced tougher controls through the 1965 White Paper, *Immigration from the Commonwealth* and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968.⁵⁰¹ This U-turn has commonly been explained by scholars as a response to the pressures of a supposedly hostile British public. Richard Crossman, a senior minister in the Wilson government, justified Labour's rethink on immigration by claiming that 'if we hadn't done this we would be faced with certain

⁵⁰⁰ Commonwealth Immigrants Bill HC Debate, 16th November 1961 vol. 649 col.794, *Hansard*.

⁵⁰¹ Expiring Laws Continuance Bill, HC Debate, 17th November 1964, vol. 702 cc332-97, *Hansard*.

electoral defeat in the West Midlands and the South-East'.⁵⁰² The most notorious example of such public pressure was the 1964 Smethwick election, where Patrick Gordon Walker, the incoming Foreign Secretary, lost his traditionally safe Labour seat following a controversial campaign by the Conservative candidate, Peter Griffiths, which focused almost exclusively on immigration. The campaign was epitomised by the slogan, 'If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Liberal or Labour', which was unofficially used in support of Griffiths.⁵⁰³

This chapter will examine Labour's changing approach to immigration in the period 1964-1968. The chapter will survey the policies introduced by the Wilson government that affected non-white migrants, specifically the tightening of immigration controls and the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation. The chapter will explore the main motives behind these policies. The chapter will argue that the electoral pressures that allegedly drove this policy change have been overstated by scholars. The chapter will cite opinion polls and electoral surveys during this period which indicate that the immigration issue featured strongly in only a few constituencies and seemingly had little impact on the British electorate as a whole. The chapter will focus on other factors that were equally if not more important such as the broader context of declining interest in the Commonwealth among senior Labour figures as well as the enduring influence of the civilisational doctrine. Above all, the chapter will argue that, even prior to the 1960s, Labour leaders were worried about the possible implications of non-white immigration to Britain. These anxieties were shaped by an imperial ideology that cast non-white peoples as uncivilised, backward and, therefore, ill-suited to British society. This was even evident in the Attlee government's response to the first wave of non-white migrants to Britain after the Second World War.

The chapter will show that while senior Labour figures initially defended non-white immigration as part of their broader ideological commitment to the Commonwealth, the practicalities that emerged from this—namely, the problems that supposedly emanated from integrating these former colonial peoples into British

⁵⁰² R. H. S Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Vol. 1* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 477. Crossman was a key figure in the Wilson government. He served as Minister of Housing (1964-66), Leader of the House of Commons (1966-68) and Minister of Health and Social Services (1968-70), all of which are recorded in his three volume diary account of the period.

⁵⁰³ 'Vile- it's all in Black and White', *The Times*, 13th October 1964, 18.

society—forced Labour policy-makers to introduce measures that they would have rebuked only a few years previously. This changing approach was epitomised by Bottomley, who argued in 1966 that the issue ‘is not one of equality, it is one of integration’.⁵⁰⁴ This chapter will argue that the issue of immigration was symptomatic of a wider problem concerning the meaning of Britishness in the 1960s. While the Wilson government sought to promote a ‘new’ vision of Britain that was multi-racial and inclusive, in reality its approach to immigration suggested the enduring sway of an older, more restrictive idea of Britain based on ‘whiteness’, which drew heavily on the legacies of empire. Before exploring these themes, the chapter will briefly survey the wider literature on immigration and race in British politics.

‘A Surrender to Racism’? Immigration and Race in British Politics

Within the historiography on race in British politics, there is a dominant view that the Conservative and Labour governments of the 1960s were provoked into introducing controls on non-white immigrants by the pressures of a racist and hostile British public.⁵⁰⁵ In *John Bull’s Island*, Colin Holmes argued that ‘when discussing official responses to immigration it is insufficient to concentrate solely upon a political elite operating in an independent and arbitrary fashion as they responded to pressures which influenced official responses’.⁵⁰⁶ Scholars have cited the 1958 race riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham, in particular, as a key moment in convincing a supposedly reluctant Conservative administration to introduce immigration

⁵⁰⁴ Speech at a Labour Party Meeting in Billericay, 22nd January 1966 in Bottomley/2, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

⁵⁰⁵ The issue of immigration and race in British politics has attracted a considerable amount of interest from historians. Here is a list of the most relevant texts: Colin Holmes, *John Bull’s Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988); Peter Fryer and Paul Gilroy, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2010); Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Charles Husband, *‘Race’ in Britain: Continuity and Change, 2nd Edition* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Paul B Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics, 2nd Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965); Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain* (London: Grafton Books, 1991); Ian R. G Spencer, *British Immigration Policy Since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: ‘Race’ and ‘Race’ Relations in Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992); Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control: Subject to Examination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997) and Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea, *White Man’s Country: Racism in British Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

⁵⁰⁶ Holmes, *John Bull’s Island*, 310.

controls.⁵⁰⁷ E.J.B. Rose claimed in *Colour and Citizenship* that the display of racial violence during these riots forced the Macmillan government to 'relinquish its grip on the principle of free entry to Commonwealth citizens'.⁵⁰⁸ In *Staying Power*, Peter Fryer argued that the race riots acted as a 'wake-up call' to the British governing elite.⁵⁰⁹ He described the introduction of immigration legislation as 'a surrender to racism'.⁵¹⁰

In terms of the Labour Party, the Smethwick result has traditionally been seen by scholars as the decisive moment in convincing the party to rethink its policy on immigration. Fryer described the Smethwick result as a 'turning point' as 'Labour was not going to let itself be outflanked' by the Conservatives.⁵¹¹ The realisation that Labour could lose significant electoral support over this issue, especially from within its traditional working class base, allegedly forced the Labour elite to abandon its official opposition to controls. As Evan Smith has observed, 'the notion of the Labour Party yielding in the face of racist public opinion has been well documented in the history of race relations in Britain'.⁵¹² Kathleen Paul argued that 'if, according to the traditional historiography, the riots of Notting Hill provided the contextual tinder for the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, then the Smethwick result seems concrete proof that popular anger at rising immigration shaped subsequent official immigration policy'.⁵¹³ This argument is seemingly validated by Crossman, who claimed that 'ever since the Smethwick election it has been quite clear that immigration can be the greatest potential vote-loser for Labour'.⁵¹⁴ Crossman believed that the Labour elite should respond to such public fervour, however distasteful, by altering its position on immigration. As Crossman put it, 'racialism is

⁵⁰⁷ The Notting Hill and Nottingham riots were a series of racially motivated riots, in which gangs of white youths attacked predominantly West Indian immigrants over several nights in the summer of 1958. See Edward Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country: West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988); Robert Miles, *The Riots of 1958: The Ideological Construction of 'Race Relations' as a Political Issue in Britain* (London: Cass, 1984).

⁵⁰⁸ Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 220.

⁵⁰⁹ Fryer and Gilroy, *Staying Power*, 381–383.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² Smith and Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control: Subject to Examination*, 33.

⁵¹³ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 177.

⁵¹⁴ Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Vol. 1*, 299.

endemic and one has to deal with it by controlling immigration when it gets beyond a certain level'.⁵¹⁵

However, the notion that the British public was mostly hostile towards immigrants has been questioned by some scholars. Mica Nava argues that although in the 1950s and 1960s there existed 'a relatively small group of xenophobes and outright racists of all classes, their extremely prejudiced views did not constitute a majority'.⁵¹⁶ Tony Kushner claimed in *We Europeans* that 'when public opinion is cited by governments, it has tended to be represented as negative, with the focus primarily on the minority of the population that is violently opposed to newcomers'.⁵¹⁷ Kushner has criticised academics, in particular, for reinforcing this approach. He noted that while 'there is an extensive literature on racism and discrimination in Britain', there has been 'a dearth of material on those who have fought prejudice or worked systematically with immigrant and minority groups'.⁵¹⁸ Nava has cited the 'ardently sympathetic' responses to non-white newcomers, which were evident in numerous cinematic and fictional accounts of the period.⁵¹⁹ She thus suggested a wider spectrum of responses to immigrants during this period, which ranged from outright hostility at one end, to hospitality and identification at the other.⁵²⁰

This argument is supported by the 1966 Survey of Race Relations in Britain, which sought to measure 'the incidence of colour prejudice in the white population'.⁵²¹ The survey interviewed about 2,500 people within five local government areas known to contain a sizable population of non-white immigrants.⁵²² The survey included four attitudinal questions and, based on the responses to these questions, the interviewees were divided into four groups: tolerant (non-hostile answers to all four questions); tolerant-inclined (only one hostile reply); prejudiced-inclined (two

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, 477.

⁵¹⁶ Mica Nava, "'Sometimes Antagonistic, Sometimes Ardently Sympathetic': Contradictory Responses to Migrants in Postwar Britain', *Ethnicities* 14, no. 3 (2013): 460–462.

⁵¹⁷ Tony Kushner, *We Europeans? Mass-Observation, 'Race' and British Identity in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 5.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Nava, "'Sometimes Antagonistic, Sometimes Ardently Sympathetic': Contradictory Responses to Migrants in Postwar Britain," 464. Also see Mica Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

⁵²⁰ Nava, "'Sometimes Antagonistic, Sometimes Ardently Sympathetic': Contradictory Responses to Migrants in Postwar Britain', 471.

⁵²¹ E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 551–552.

⁵²² Ibid. The study concentrated on the London boroughs of Lambeth and Ealing and the county boroughs of Wolverhampton, Nottingham and Bradford.

hostile replies) and prejudiced (three or four hostile replies). The survey found that just 10 per cent of those interviewed were outright prejudiced, while 35 per cent were tolerant and 38 per cent were tolerant-inclined.⁵²³ Thus, in these areas with sizable immigrant populations, over one-third of respondents expressed views with practically no trace of racial prejudice, and another two-fifths seemed to be strongly disposed in the direction of tolerance.⁵²⁴ This survey thus undermined the view that racist attitudes were prevalent in British society during this period.

Moreover, some scholars have challenged the narrative of a hostile British public pushing an otherwise liberal British political elite into enforcing immigration controls. In *Whitewashing Britain*, Paul claims that ‘the increasingly harsh restrictions on immigrants were driven, not by the explosion of race and immigration into the electoral arena, but by imperatives internal to the governing elite’ and that the racism of British ministers ‘led rather than followed public opinion’.⁵²⁵ Paul argues that even before the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, British governments were ‘never liberal with regard to immigration and, in fact, tried very hard to prevent it’.⁵²⁶ Ian Spencer suggests in *British Immigration Policy* that British governments did not welcome non-white immigration at any stage, but they ‘were both unwilling and unable to prevent’ it.⁵²⁷ Spencer noted how successive governments sought to restrict immigration through non-legislative means, for example by persuading Commonwealth countries such as India and Pakistan to introduce higher passport application fees.⁵²⁸ According to Spencer, it was only when these unofficial attempts at controlling migration failed that the British government felt the need to legislate.⁵²⁹

Paul contends that even the post-war Attlee government, which oversaw the arrival of the first significant wave of non-white migrants to Britain on Empire Windrush in 1948, ‘did all in their power to prevent further arrivals’ but were

⁵²³ E.J.B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 551–552.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁵ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 177–178.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵²⁷ Spencer, *British Immigration Policy Since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain*, Preface.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 152. This argument was earlier put forward by Oscar Gish, who claimed that the chief catalyst for controls was the breakdown of measures set by the Indian and Pakistani governments to hold back the number of migrants going to Britain. Oscar Gish, ‘Colour and Skill: British Immigration, 1955–1968’, *International Migration Review* 3, no. 1 (1968): 19–21.

'hamstrung by the dictates of formal nationality policy'.⁵³⁰ The formal nationality policy that Paul referred to was the British Nationality Act of 1948, which introduced a common citizenship to all citizens of the United Kingdom and its colonies. This Act thus allowed all Commonwealth citizens the theoretical right of 'free entry' to Britain. Nevertheless, as Rieko Karatani argues in *Defining British Citizenship*, it was never the intention of the Attlee government that those citizenship rights be enforced freely by Commonwealth citizens outside Britain.⁵³¹ One month after the arrival of Windrush, George Isaacs, the Minister of Labour, stated, 'I hope no encouragement will be given to others to follow their example'.⁵³² Creech Jones claimed in response to a parliamentary question regarding the Windrush inflow that 'it is very unlikely that a similar event to this will occur again in the West Indies'.⁵³³ These quotes therefore highlight the conflict between the Attlee government's formal immigration policy and its informal view of who should be allowed into Britain.

The internal imperatives that influenced the Attlee government's immigration policy have been touched on by some scholars. Shirley Joshi and Bob Carter argued that 'race as a "problem" had already been essentially structured by the post-war Labour government, which undertook policies and propounded ideas that significantly influenced the creation of a racist Britain'.⁵³⁴ They claimed that 'the Labour Party, steeped in traditions of colonialism and its accompanying racism, saw only "problems" caused by the importation of numbers of "uncivilised", culturally "backward" coloured colonials'.⁵³⁵ Although Britain required a significant amount of migrant labour to help rebuild its economy after the war, the Attlee government was reluctant to recruit non-white immigrants and preferred, instead, to attract white European workers. According to Joshi and Carter, this 'partly reflected ethnocentric assumptions about the alleged similarities of "white" cultures and the difficulties of

⁵³⁰ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 111. The arrival of 492 Jamaicans on the *Empire Windrush* in June 1948 marked the beginning of the first significant wave of 'coloured' migration into Britain from the New Commonwealth. See Onyekachi Wambu, *Empire Windrush* (London: Phoenix, 1999) and Peter Fryer, *The Politics of Windrush* (London: Index Books, 1999).

⁵³¹ Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 126–127.

⁵³² HC Debate, vol.451, col.1851, 8th June 1948, *Hansard*. Quoted in Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 126–127.

⁵³³ West Indies (Unemployment), HC Deb 16th June 1948 vol. 452 cc421-2, *Hansard*. Quoted in Shirley Joshi and Bob Carter, 'The Role of Labour in the Creation of a Racist Britain', *Race and Class* 25, no. 3 (1984): 57–58.

⁵³⁴ Joshi and Carter, 'The Role of Labour in the Creation of a Racist Britain', 69–70.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid*, 56.

assimilating other cultures'.⁵³⁶ In 1946, James Chuter Ede, the Home Secretary, argued that 'he would be much happier if the intake could be limited to entrants from the Western Countries, whose traditions and social background were more nearly equal to our own'.⁵³⁷ Nevertheless, according to Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, 'concerns about the supposed social upheaval that "coloured" migrants would cause were offset by the economic requirements that needed a steady influx of migrants to fill gaps in the labour market'.⁵³⁸

This balance between the economic benefits and the supposed social problems of non-white migrant labour was manifested in a review arranged by the Attlee government in 1950. The review was tasked with considering 'the means which might be adopted to check the immigration of coloured peoples into this country'.⁵³⁹ The review concluded that 'in view of the comparatively small scale of coloured immigration into this country and the important and controversial issues of policy involved in legislation to control it, we consider that no such legislation should at present be introduced'.⁵⁴⁰ Although it rejected controls at the present time, the review did not rule out future legislation. It claimed that 'a very large increase in such migration in the future might produce a situation in Britain rendering legislation for its control essential, despite the very strong opposing considerations'.⁵⁴¹ This Cabinet document, therefore, supports Paul's assertion that it was internal considerations rather than public pressure that primarily dictated British policy. As Joshi and Carter put it, 'this was a question of expediency rather than principle; control of non-white immigration was not rejected, but laid aside until it was deemed politically appropriate'.⁵⁴² Although this view arguably underplays the impact of events such as the Smethwick election on British policy-making, it nevertheless exposes the myth that racism was a phenomenon exclusive to the British public and alien to a liberal

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ CAB 134/301, CFLC Minutes, 14th March 1946, NA. Quoted in Joshi and Carter, 'The Role of Labour in the Creation of a Racist Britain', 56.

⁵³⁸ Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, "The Myth of Sovereignty: British Immigration Control in Policy and Practice in the Nineteen-Seventies," *Historical Research* 87, no. 236 (2014): 347–348; Lydia Lindsey, "Halting the Tide: Responses to West Indian Immigration to Britain, 1946-1952," *Journal of Caribbean History* 26, no. 1 (1992): 62–96.

⁵³⁹ 'Immigration of British Subjects into the United Kingdom', CAB 129/44, NA. Cited in Joshi and Carter, 'The Role of Labour in the Creation of a Racist Britain', 61–64.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Joshi and Carter, 'The Role of Labour in the Creation of a Racist Britain', 64.

political elite. Labour and Conservative statesmen were also susceptible to racist assumptions regarding non-white immigrants, despite their official pro-immigration stance until the 1960s.

Another recurrent theme in the literature is to situate the issue of immigration within the wider context of decolonisation. In *The Afterlife of Empire*, Jordanna Bailkin has explored the numerous ways in which decolonisation transformed British society in the 1950s and 1960s, most notably in terms of its impact on the welfare state.⁵⁴³ She has argued that official approaches towards non-white immigrants were shaped by what she termed ‘the life cycle concept’—namely, the idea that nations, families or individuals ‘pass through irreversible stages of development in which progression is made with age’.⁵⁴⁴ According to Bailkin, this life cycle concept had a specific grounding in imperial history as ‘colonial authorities routinely depicted colonised societies as childlike in order to naturalise situations of conquest and rule’. She claims that in the 1950s and 1960s this concept was ‘galvanised and transformed into the postcolonial metropole’ as it served to govern ‘high-stake issues such as when people could leave or enter countries’.⁵⁴⁵

Consequently, just as many of Britain’s non-white colonies were considered too ‘backward’ to be granted independence, non-white migrants were deemed to be too immature to be properly integrated into British society. Bailkin has cited, for example, how British migration experts drew on their colonial experiences as anthropologists in Africa.⁵⁴⁶ Kenneth Little, a British anthropologist, argued that the techniques he used in Africa could be redeployed to study ‘enclaves of coloured people in this country, who provide a special kind of problem in the impact, culturally and socially, between colonial peoples and our western society’.⁵⁴⁷ Chris Waters’ *“Dark Strangers” in Our Midst* has also addressed this theme, examining the race relations discourse that emerged in Britain in the 1950s, pioneered by anthropologists and sociologists such as Little, Michael Banton and Sheila Patterson.⁵⁴⁸ Although these scholars outwardly opposed racial discrimination, they

⁵⁴³ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, 1–2.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15–18.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 25–28.

⁵⁴⁷ Kenneth Little quoted in Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, 25–28.

⁵⁴⁸ Chris Waters, “‘Dark Strangers’ in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947–1963”, *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 2 (1997): 207–38.

often employed racial stereotypes, especially regarding sex. Patterson's *Dark Strangers*, for example, argued that real differences emerged strongly in the matter of values and norms associated with sex and family life.⁵⁴⁹ Waters argues that by consistently depicting black migrants as 'dark strangers', these race relations experts helped 'consolidate apparently common-sense notions of race and, as a consequence, the post-war boundaries of national belonging'.⁵⁵⁰ This approach towards non-white immigrants thus drew on a nineteenth century imperial ideology, which divided the 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' parts of the empire along racial lines. As Michael Kearney claimed, 'Victorian notions of progress and the dichotomisation of the world into 'traditional' and 'modern' zones live on in orthodox approaches to migration and development'.⁵⁵¹

Some scholars have claimed that this backdrop of decolonisation also shaped the British public's attitude towards immigrants. Paul Foot claimed that non-white migrants were specifically targeted because they were 'symbols not only of strangeness but also of failure'.⁵⁵² By failure, Foot referred to the impact of the loss of empire on how ordinary Britons responded to immigrants. He argued that when 'the British working class felt anger at unemployment and poverty, they were drugged with stories of conquest in foreign lands, where the subjects were uncivilised and backward coloured people and all great men, they were led to believe, were white'.⁵⁵³ According to Foot, if the end of empire 'was not cruel enough for those imaginations, the stream of former subjects into the mother country as equals before the law was a final insult'.⁵⁵⁴ He thus locates the British public's attitude towards immigration within the framework of a long-standing imperial ideology, which cast white men as inherently superior to others, an ideology that supposedly resurfaced as former non-white colonial subjects became a sizable presence in the metropole.

In "*There'll Always Be an England*", Wendy Webster has explored the ways in which colonial wars, particularly the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and the Mau

⁵⁴⁹ Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* (Penguin Books, 1965). Quoted in Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst", 156–159.

⁵⁵⁰ Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst", 209.

⁵⁵¹ Michael Kearney, 'From the Invisible Hand to Visible Feet: Anthropological Studies of Migration and Development', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 335.

⁵⁵² Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 229-232.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

Mau Uprising in Kenya (1952-1960), were documented in the mainstream British media in the 1950s.⁵⁵⁵ According to Webster, these wars were widely reported in British newspapers during the 1950s and represented in a range of films, including *The Planter's Wife* (1952), set in Malaya, and *Simba* (1955), set in Kenya. She argues that the images used in films such as *Simba* of Mau Mau 'ransacking and burning white farms, and butchering farmers', fitted with the narrative at home of 'black men invading white territory' and threatening British 'domestic order'.⁵⁵⁶ In "*Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me a Mau Mau*", Joanna Lewis has similarly studied the sensationalist reporting of the Mau Mau uprising in newspapers such as the Daily Mail.⁵⁵⁷ She claims that the narrative of Mau Mau as a 'racial terror of black men wielding carving knives to mutilate domestic pets and close family members' was a source of the twentieth century West's representation of Africa as a 'dark continent' engulfed in 'savage barbarism'.⁵⁵⁸

However, the idea that empire was the main prism through which Britons responded to non-white immigration has been challenged by some scholars. Bernard Porter argues in *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* that 'decolonisation—like the original empire it was dismantling—did not have much of an impact on British society and culture'.⁵⁵⁹ According to Porter, 'the majority of Britons seemed uninterested' in its demise, which was 'borne out by the equanimity with which most Britons appeared to accept this fate in the post-war period'.⁵⁶⁰ He has also questioned the extent to which empire influenced the racism that supposedly manifested itself in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. For Porter, 'the beginnings of that racism coincided with the new phenomenon of mass immigration from the West Indies, which would seem to offer an adequate explanation for 'poor white' resentment on its own'.⁵⁶¹ Kushner argued that 'a simplistic focus on empire alone obscures other factors which both created and provided the context for debates about race and immigration'.⁵⁶² He

⁵⁵⁵ Wendy Webster, "'There'll Always Be an England": Representations of Colonial Wars and Immigration, 1948-1968', *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 557–84.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 360-361 and 365.

⁵⁵⁷ Joanna Lewis, 'Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me a Mau Mau': The British Popular Press and the Demoralisation of Empire' in E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale, eds., *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration* (Oxford: Ohio University Press, 2003), 227-250.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 227-229.

⁵⁵⁹ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 318–319.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁵⁶² Kushner, *We Europeans?*, 35.

has explored the range of influences affecting ordinary people's racial attitudes as evidenced by the findings of the Mass-Observation project. Mass-Observation was a social research organisation that ran, initially, from 1937 to the early 1950s. It aimed to record everyday life in Britain through a panel of around 500 volunteer observers who replied to questionnaires, which were known as directives.⁵⁶³ According to Kushner, Mass-Observation put immense energy into 'racial research' through these directives. From 1937 to 1951, eight directives were carried out with a specific focus on attitudes to Jewish and black people.⁵⁶⁴

Kushner claimed that whilst much has been made of the impact of colonial mentalities, the responses to these directives suggest 'the equal if not greater importance of America on contemporary race thinking'.⁵⁶⁵ In the June 1939 directive, Paul Robeson, the black American film actor, was frequently mentioned by respondents. One observer wrote that 'whenever I think of negroes I always think first of Paul Robeson, whom I admire and respect very much'. Another wrote: 'the first thing that comes into my head is Paul Robeson. He's alright—therefore I'm alright with negroes'.⁵⁶⁶ For Kushner, Robeson, in particular, was used 'as an exception to the "rule" of black inferiority' and as 'an indication of what the non-white races could achieve if given the chance'.⁵⁶⁷ Kushner also cited the 1943 race directive which coincided with the US military's controversial attempt to segregate black American troops who were stationed in Britain during the Second World War. Mass-Observation reported widespread animosity against such a blatant example of the 'colour bar' operating in Britain. Three-quarters of the sample said that they disapproved and 'there was a very real feeling of displeasure that this sort of thing should be allowed to happen in this country'.⁵⁶⁸

While Kushner, importantly, points out other factors that informed the attitudes of ordinary Britons towards race, his analysis extends only up to the end of the war. Unfortunately, the Mass-Observation project, from which Kushner derives his

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 24.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, 105.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, 110-112.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, 124-126. Barbara Bush also cited the example of Paul Robeson, a black American who was readily accepted into British 'aristocratic circles'. See Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race, and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 1999), 214-215.

⁵⁶⁷ Kushner, *We Europeans?*, 124-126.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, 129-130.

analysis, was discontinued in the early 1950s and, therefore, missed the crucial period of the 1950s and 1960s when Britain faced a sustained inflow of non-white immigrants. Despite these important alternative influences, an examination of race in 1960s Britain would be incomplete without taking into account the legacy of Britain's imperial past. As Dominic Sandbrook put it in his general account of Britain in the 1960s, *White Heat*: 'Racism did not exist in a vacuum: it was based on old ideas of British imperial predominance and by the late 1960s it had become interwoven with broader anxieties about cultural change and national decline'.⁵⁶⁹ Before addressing this imperial connection, the chapter will examine the specific policies introduced by the Wilson government in response to the issue of immigration.

A 'Package Deal': The Wilson Government's Immigration Policy

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 limited the number of migrants arriving from the Commonwealth through a voucher system that divided applicant migrants into three groups: Category 'A' for people requested by employers, Category 'B' for special skilled workers and Category 'C' for unskilled workers. Although the Act, in theory, dealt with all Commonwealth citizens irrespective of colour, the voucher system that formed the basis of the controls was clearly aimed at non-white immigrants. In the period 1962-1965, there was a 91 per cent application success rate for Category 'A' Vouchers from the predominantly white, 'old' Commonwealth countries compared to a 47 per cent success rate from the predominantly non-white, 'new' Commonwealth nations.⁵⁷⁰ A note by the Ministry of Labour recognised that the voucher system, in practice, 'would interfere to the minimum extent with the entry of persons from the old Commonwealth'.⁵⁷¹ In 1968, William Deedes, a minister in the Macmillan government, admitted that 'the Bill's real purpose was to restrict the influx of coloured immigrants' and that the government was 'reluctant to say as much openly'.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁹ Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat* (London: Little, Brown, 2006), 664.

⁵⁷⁰ 'Britain Accepts the Colour Bar', *New Statesman*, Aug 6th 1965, 19-22.

⁵⁷¹ LAB 8/2704. Curtailment of Immigration by Employment Control, Note by the Ministry of Labour, 28th April 1961, NA. Quoted in Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 128-130.

⁵⁷² William Deedes, *Race Without Rancour: A Re-Examination of Race and Immigration Problems* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1968), 10. Cited in Smith and Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control: Subject to Examination*, 30.

Although Labour under Gaitskell's leadership strongly opposed the measure, when the Act came up for renewal in November 1963, the party, now led by Wilson, moved towards a more compromised position. Wilson stated that Labour 'does not contest the need for control of immigration into this country' but that if it were in power it would 'enter into negotiations with Commonwealth countries to work out agreed quotas and arrangements for their implementation'.⁵⁷³ Hence, while the Labour Party still opposed the Act on the basis that it was introduced without consulting other Commonwealth nations, the principle of controls was finally conceded.⁵⁷⁴ Shortly after taking office, the Wilson government renewed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act through the 1964 Expiring Laws Continuance Bill.⁵⁷⁵ The Wilson government was not just content with maintaining controls, though. In January 1965, Frank Soskice, the Home Secretary, issued a memorandum, which urged the government to tighten the existing measures.⁵⁷⁶ Soskice used immigration statistics for the period 1962-1964 that separated Commonwealth countries into 'old' and 'new'. According to Soskice, by 'old', he meant Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and by 'new', he meant 'broadly those countries in which the populations are coloured'.⁵⁷⁷ This differentiation thus exposed the façade that immigration controls were aimed at Commonwealth citizens as a whole.

Soskice noted that there were around 800,000 non-white immigrants in Britain and this figure would soon rise as 'the majority of the breadwinners who enter may be expected in due course to bring dependants'.⁵⁷⁸ Soskice argued that if this figure continued to rise then 'great harm will be done to the government'. Soskice accepted that it was 'an extremely invidious position for a Labour Home Secretary as one of the government's first steps is to ask for additional powers to tighten up the immigration control' and that some of his Cabinet colleagues were 'very uneasy' about the proposal.⁵⁷⁹ This move towards even tighter controls was manifested in the

⁵⁷³ Schedule, HC Debate, 27th November 1963, vol.685 col.365-368, *Hansard*.

⁵⁷⁴ Deakin, *Colour and the British Electorate, 1964: Six Case Studies*, 8.

⁵⁷⁵ Expiring Laws Continuance Bill, HC Debate, 17th November 1964, vol. 702 cc332-97, *Hansard*.

⁵⁷⁶ PREM 13/382, 'Commonwealth Immigration: Memorandum by Frank Soskice to Harold Wilson proposing measures to tighten existing controls and to assist the integration of immigrants', 4th Jan 1965, NA. Published in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971, Pt. 3*, 547.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

August 1965 White Paper, *Immigration from the Commonwealth*. The white paper discontinued the Category 'C' Voucher for unskilled workers and reduced the total number of vouchers issued to 8,500 per year, with a condition that only 15 per cent of vouchers issued could be given to one Commonwealth country. This meant that a country such as Australia could receive as many vouchers as India, even though the Indian population was 40 times greater.⁵⁸⁰

The white paper also included a special provision of 1,000 vouchers for Malta. In June 1965, Borg Olivier, the Maltese Prime Minister, urged the Commonwealth Secretary, Bottomley, to consider a special exemption for Malta because of Britain's role in 'disrupting her economy through the drastic rundown of its Defence establishments'.⁵⁸¹ The Mountbatten mission, whose recommendations would form the basis of the white paper, also advocated a special provision for Malta because '9 per cent of the Maltese working population were unemployed, a direct result of the run-down of Malta's dockyards brought about by Britain'.⁵⁸² The Mountbatten mission also justified this provision 'with the fact that the Maltese are Europeans', thus reflecting enduring ethnocentric assumptions regarding the similarities of white cultures.⁵⁸³ The Jamaican government criticised the provision for being 'based on colour rather than economic considerations'.⁵⁸⁴ A Commonwealth Relations Office note recognised that Jamaica was just as dependent on emigration as unemployment in Jamaica stood at 14 per cent of the working population, compared to only 9 per cent in Malta.⁵⁸⁵ This concern was also expressed by Dalton Murray, the British High Commissioner to Jamaica, who suggested that Britain offer a technical aid programme to help mitigate the effect of the new measure on the Jamaican economy.⁵⁸⁶ However, this proposal was rejected by the Commonwealth Relations Office because it was deemed 'politically undesirable'.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁰ Harry Bourne, *Racialism; Cause and Cure*, Communist Party Pamphlet, 1965, 11, Labour Party Archive (LAB), People's History Museum, Manchester.

⁵⁸¹ DO 175/195, Letter from Borg Olivier to Arthur Bottomley, 29th June 1965, NA.

⁵⁸² HO 344/175, July 1965, Report of the Mountbatten Mission, 7-8, NA.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ HO 344/295, 12th August 1965, Commonwealth Relations Office Background Note on Visit of Jamaican Government Delegation, NA.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ DO 200/181, Letter from Dalton Murray to Commonwealth Relations Office, 6th Sept 1965, NA.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

This measure was followed three years later by an even more controversial piece of legislation. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 extended controls to citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies without a 'close connection' with Britain. This Act was introduced in response to the Kenyan Asians crisis, where increasing numbers of migrants of Asian origin fled to Britain due to the Kenyan government's policy of 'Africanisation', which made it increasingly difficult for Asians to obtain employment in certain professions.⁵⁸⁸ Randall Hansen argues that the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill of 1968 was 'among the most divisive and controversial decisions taken by any British government' and it was seen by some as 'the ultimate appeasement of racist hysteria'.⁵⁸⁹ According to Hansen, the Act 'marked the end of any credible claim on Labour's part to be the party of the Commonwealth'.⁵⁹⁰ As he puts it, 'a party that had claimed a profound commitment to the Commonwealth ideal of multi-racialism effectively stripped British citizens, whose entry was controversial only because of their skin colour, of one of citizenship's basic rights'.⁵⁹¹

The Act stipulated that only Commonwealth citizens with at least a grandparent who was born, naturalised or adopted in Britain could be exempted from controls. This meant that Kenyan Asians, who previously had the right of free entry as British passport holders, were restricted, while Commonwealth immigrants with a proven familial connection to Britain remained exempt from controls. The Act thus created an official distinction between white Commonwealth citizens who could claim lineage with Britain and non-white Commonwealth citizens who could no longer claim to be 'British'.⁵⁹² The Wilson administration was well aware of this racialised differentiation of Commonwealth citizens. In 1967, government officials acknowledged the belief in Britain that 'Canada, Australia and New Zealand suffer

⁵⁸⁸ CAB 128/43/13 (68) 4, Cabinet Meeting on Kenyan Asians Crisis, 15th February, 1968, NA. Cited in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971, Part. 3*, 571.

⁵⁸⁹ Randall Hansen, 'The Kenyan Asians, British Politics, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1968', *The Historical Journal* 42, no. 3 (1999): 810.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 833.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹² Smith and Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control: Subject to Examination*, 37–38.

because of the need for the British government to erect a barrier to a flood of coloured immigrants seeking permanent settlement here'.⁵⁹³

Although the Bill was rushed through Parliament in three days, the idea of extending controls to Kenyan Asian migrants was actually considered three years earlier. In April 1965, Soskice recommended that a Bill should be introduced that would 'deprive East African Asians of their exemption from control'.⁵⁹⁴ The General and Migration Department of the Commonwealth Relations Office, though, argued that such a restriction 'cannot be contemplated as it would be clearly seen for what it was, a move on purely racial grounds'.⁵⁹⁵ However, when the proposed measure reached Cabinet in 1968, only George Thomson, the Commonwealth Secretary, registered protest. Although Thomson recognised the potential problems that a continued influx of Kenyan Asians might cause, he argued that 'such legislation would be wrong in principle, clearly discriminatory on grounds of colour, and contrary to everything that Labour stood for'.⁵⁹⁶

Together with tougher immigration controls, the Wilson government introduced the first official measures to outlaw racial discrimination in Britain. The Race Relations Act of 1965 prohibited racial discrimination in public places and set up the Race Relations Board to ensure the compliance of the new provisions. This Act was followed by the Race Relations Act of 1968, which extended the provisions to include discrimination in housing and employment.⁵⁹⁷ The fact that these Acts were both introduced in the same year as immigration legislation suggested that the Wilson government saw these two issues as interlinked. In his 1965 memorandum, Soskice argued that the best way to handle the issue of immigration is by implementing what he described as a 'package deal'.⁵⁹⁸ Soskice defined this 'package deal' as 'the more or less simultaneous announcement of a number of measures, designed not merely to make control more effective, but also to integrate

⁵⁹³ CAB 134/2460, The Special Considerations Applying to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, 20th July 1967, NA. Cited in Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship*, 152–154.

⁵⁹⁴ HO 344/92, Note before Home Secretary meeting with Prime Minister, 28th April 1965, NA.

⁵⁹⁵ DO 211/48, General and Migration Department to Secretary of State, 7th July 1965, NA.

⁵⁹⁶ CAB 128/43/13 (68) 4, Cabinet Meeting on Kenyan Asians Crisis, 15th February, 1968, NA. Cited in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Pt. 3, 571.

⁵⁹⁷ Res.119, April 1967, Labour Party Race Relations Working Party, 1-2, LAB.

⁵⁹⁸ PREM 13/382, 'Commonwealth Immigration: Memorandum by Frank Soskice, 4th Jan 1965, NA. Cited in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Pt. 3, 547.

the coloured immigrants in a genuine sense into the community'.⁵⁹⁹ This 'package deal' thus meant tougher measures to curtail further immigration to Britain and legislation to help integrate migrants who were already here.

In 1966, Bottomley claimed that 'probably the most important principle on which the Commonwealth rests is the principle of complete racial equality'.⁶⁰⁰ However, he claimed that 'this question of racial equality has clouded the issue of immigration' as the issue here 'is not one of equality, it is one of integration'.⁶⁰¹ Bottomley noted that there was 'a national shortage of housing and severe pressure on hospitals, schools and other services'. He believed that 'it would be the height of folly to exacerbate the effect of these shortages by opening the floodgates to unrestricted immigration'.⁶⁰² This 'package deal' was thus based on the assumption that race relations in Britain would only improve if the number of immigrants arriving was significantly reduced. As Evan Smith observed, 'the emphasis of the Labour government's platform on immigration during this period was on the notions of "integration" and "absorption", but the government believed that integration could not occur without immigration controls'.⁶⁰³ As Roy Hattersley, the Labour MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook, put it in 1965, 'without limitation, integration is impossible'.⁶⁰⁴ This assumption was evident in the Cabinet's deliberations on the Kenyan Asians crisis. The Cabinet concluded that unless the inflow of migrants was greatly reduced, 'there was a very real risk that our efforts to create a multi-racial society in this country would fail'.⁶⁰⁵ The Cabinet argued that the passage of the Race Relations Bill, in particular, 'would be jeopardised if nothing were done to reduce the present inflow'.⁶⁰⁶ David Ennals, the Home Office Parliamentary Under-Secretary, claimed that the main motive behind the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Speech at a Labour Party Meeting in Billericay, 22nd January 1966 in Bottomley/2, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BL PES.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Smith and Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control*, 33–34.

⁶⁰⁴ Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 229.

⁶⁰⁵ CAB 128/43/13 (68) 4, Cabinet Meeting on Kenyan Asians Crisis, 15th February, 1968, NA. Cited in Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971*, Pt. 3, 571.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

‘was to avoid a worsening situation for race relations in Britain’ as the continued inflow of Kenyan Asians would have ‘stimulated racial prejudice’.⁶⁰⁷

However, the notion that tougher immigration controls would help reduce racism in Britain was challenged by some. David Winnick, a Labour MP, claimed that ‘by constantly raising the question whether or not we want more Commonwealth immigrants here, we tend to make it all the more difficult to integrate those immigrants who have been in our country for some years’.⁶⁰⁸ Rose contended that ‘the emphasis on the need for control helped to create the anxieties it was intended to calm, with the curious result that public concern was eventually prayed in aid of policies that had helped to create it’.⁶⁰⁹ Thus, despite its apparently benign motives, this ‘package deal’ of limitation and integration represented a marked departure from Labour’s principled position on immigration while in opposition. In order to understand the reasons for this changing approach, we must, first of all, examine the precise basis on which the Labour Party opposed controls in 1961—namely, the importance that senior figures attached to the Commonwealth ideal.

Immigration and the ‘Commonwealth Ideal’

One of the striking aspects of Labour’s original opposition to immigration controls was the emphasis given to its ramifications for the Commonwealth. The idea of immigration control was first discussed in Parliament following the race riots of 1958, when Cyril Osborne, a right-wing Conservative MP, introduced a motion calling for restrictions.⁶¹⁰ Bottomley, leading Labour’s opposition to the motion, claimed that such legislation would violate the principle of free movement, which he believed lay at the heart of the Commonwealth ideal since the British Nationality Act of 1948. As he put it, ‘the central principle on which our status in the Commonwealth is largely dependent is the “open door” to all Commonwealth citizens... If we believe in the importance of our great Commonwealth, we should do nothing in the slightest degree to undermine that principle’.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷ HO 376/118, 1968, David Ennals Letter to Liaison Officials on Commonwealth Immigrants Act, NA.

⁶⁰⁸ Acts Continued Till End of December 1968, HC Deb, 15th Nov 1967 vol.754 cc.508-509, *Hansard*.

⁶⁰⁹ Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 228.

⁶¹⁰ Immigration (Control) HC Deb, 5th December 1958, vol.596, cc.1552-97, *Hansard*.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid*, cc.1574-79.

Bottomley repeated this argument in a speech to the new Ghanaian parliament in 1959. Bottomley declared, 'in my parliament last year I had the opportunity of supporting the British Nationality Act. By that Act, we recognise the citizenship of Ghana and Commonwealth citizenship at the same time'.⁶¹² He recited the Calvin Case of 1608, which proclaimed that 'anyone from within the King's allegiance, wheresoever and whensoever, should enjoy all the legal rights of a free-born denizen of England'.⁶¹³ The Calvin Case that Bottomley referred to addressed the question of whether people born in Scotland following the succession of the Scottish King James VI to the English crown in 1603 would be considered 'subjects' in England. This case resulted in the declaration that all persons born within any territory held by the King of England were subjects.⁶¹⁴ The fact that Bottomley cited this famous case demonstrated the importance that he ascribed to the 'open door' principle as well as the long lifespan of Britain's imperial citizenry.

The potential impact of immigration controls on the Commonwealth relationship remained a central concern for senior Labour figures when the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill was brought to Parliament in 1961. Foot argued that 'the fundamental argument which ran through every speech in opposition to the Bill from all sections of the Parliamentary Labour Party heralded Bottomley's rallying cry about "our great Commonwealth"'.⁶¹⁵ Rose claimed that the Bill was debated 'almost exclusively by reference to its impact on the Commonwealth' and that other criticisms of the Bill 'were not developed at any length'.⁶¹⁶ Gaitskell described the Bill's introduction as a 'tragic and very sad day for the Commonwealth' as it was 'saying to the world that we cannot absorb or integrate into our community more than 1 per cent of the population'.⁶¹⁷ Gordon Walker argued that the more he studied the Bill, the more he came to the conclusion that 'it is ill-conceived and that it will do irreparable damage to the Commonwealth'.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹² Ghana Parliamentary Debates, 20th February 1959, col.20-22, Welcoming of Delegation to present a Speaker's Chair to the National Assembly of Ghana in Bottomley/8, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Polly J. Price, 'Natural Law and Birthright Citizenship in Calvin's Case (1608)', *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 9, no. 1 (1997): 73-99.

⁶¹⁵ Paul Foot, 'Immigration and the British Labour Movement', *International Socialism* 22 (1965): 8-9.

⁶¹⁶ Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 220.

⁶¹⁷ Commonwealth Immigrants Bill HC Debate, 16th November 1961 vol. 649 col.794, *Hansard*.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid, cc.705-708.

However, this devotion to the Commonwealth and the principle of free movement was not shared by all senior Labour figures. In a broadcast on the BBC Hebrew Service, Crossman recognised that ‘one of the proudest claims of our Commonwealth was the assertion that everyone who could claim citizenship of a British colony was a British citizen’, and, therefore, ‘had the right to live in the most overpopulated island in the world’.⁶¹⁹ Yet, Crossman noted that prior to 1948 this privilege was only used by ‘a minuscule minority’ and ‘we were able to boast that the motherland was open to everyone, precisely because so few came’.⁶²⁰ He argued that since the war the situation had changed and non-white immigration posed an especial problem as migrants ‘tended to concentrate in areas where labour and housing are in shortest supply’.⁶²¹ Crossman also challenged Gaitskell’s view that the Bill would do irreparable damage to the Commonwealth, at a time when he believed ‘its future was anyway in doubt’.⁶²² Significantly, 1961 was also the year of Britain’s first application to join the EEC. Although Crossman’s argument was at odds with the official Labour position at this time, his approach to immigration would later come to the fore when Labour returned to power in 1964.

Another recurrent aspect of Labour’s opposition to controls was the argument that Britain had a moral obligation to allow the free entry of non-white Commonwealth citizens because of the historical legacy of empire. In his response to Osborne’s motion, Bottomley declared that Britain has ‘a special place’ in the Commonwealth ‘as the most industrialised community’ and, therefore, has a direct responsibility for its former colonial subjects ‘when they are poor, badly housed or unemployed’.⁶²³ He claimed that since ‘a great deal of our standard of living is possible because of our association with these backward people, we cannot shirk our responsibility towards them when they, in their turn, ask for some help’.⁶²⁴ This argument was echoed by Lord Royle, a Labour peer, who opposed the renewal of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act because he believed that Britain ‘cannot be very proud of the economic and social conditions that it left, for example, in Jamaica after

⁶¹⁹ MSS.154/4/BR/9/097, International Commentary. 205, BBC Hebrew Service, Transcript of broadcast. 17th November 1961, Modern Records Centre (MRC), University of Warwick.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Immigration (Control) HC Deb, 5th December 1958, vol.596, cc.1574-79, *Hansard*.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

300 years'.⁶²⁵ Fenner Brockway similarly claimed in 1965 that 'these immigrants are economic refugees, driven here by a poverty which our forefathers had a great responsibility for'.⁶²⁶

However, this argument was criticised by other politicians, particularly on the Conservative right. Norman Pannell, a Conservative MP and critic of immigration, condemned what he termed the 'guilt complex' that was displayed by Labour politicians—namely, the idea that 'because during the colonial era Britain grossly exploited the countries from which the immigrants come, it is poetic justice that this country should endure them in retribution for the sins of the past'.⁶²⁷ He posited that 'without colonisation, these countries would have remained backward and under-developed'.⁶²⁸ Griffiths also touched on this 'guilt complex' in his personal account of the Smethwick election. Griffiths claimed that Britain owed no special debt to its former colonial subjects and if anything, 'the debt owed is one of gratitude to the men and women who brought prosperity in place of poverty, education in place of ignorance and health in place of disease'.⁶²⁹ He argued that now these countries have their independence, 'we too demand independence'.⁶³⁰ Griffiths thus implied that Britain's ties with its former colonies through the Commonwealth association was undermining British decision-making sovereignty, in this case by influencing the way policy-makers approached the question of immigration.

Significantly, Bottomley also drew on this notion of 'independence' to justify Labour's immigration policy. Although Bottomley recognised that Britain's immigration policy had been 'frequently criticised by those to whom we have recently handed over political power', he played down the implications of this criticism.⁶³¹ Bottomley claimed that it was 'inevitable that Britain should from time to time pursue policies of which some of our Commonwealth friends disapprove'.⁶³² The language used by Bottomley in this speech also symbolised his declining commitment to the

⁶²⁵ Expiring Laws Continuance Bill HL Debate, 1st December 1964 vol. 261 cc.1022-24, *Hansard*.

⁶²⁶ Fenner Brockway and Norman Pannell, *Immigration, What Is the Answer? Two Opposing Views* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 59.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43–44.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁹ Peter Griffiths, *A Question of Colour?* (London: Leslie Frewin, 1966), 199.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶³¹ Speech at a Labour Party Meeting in Billericay, 22nd January 1966 in Bottomley/2, *The Papers of Arthur Bottomley*, BLPES.

⁶³² *Ibid.*

Commonwealth. Bottomley argued that 'we are criticised for not fully opening our doors to all who wish to crowd into our tiny island'.⁶³³ Hence, for Bottomley, Britain was no longer 'a special place' at the heart of the Commonwealth, rather a 'tiny island' that could no longer admit non-white citizens without restraint. The 'our' in 'our tiny island', in particular, signified a narrower definition of British citizenship compared to the one that Bottomley had defended so passionately just a few years earlier.

Bottomley was not the only senior Labour figure to seemingly relinquish his support for the Commonwealth after 1964. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the Wilson government's enthusiasm for the Commonwealth quickly waned once it became clear that Britain could no longer retain a special role as the 'mother country'. The criticism that Britain faced by the non-white countries, especially over the Rhodesia crisis, convinced the Wilson government to lessen its ties with the Commonwealth. Crucially, this rupture in the Commonwealth relationship coincided with Britain's second application to join the EEC in 1967.⁶³⁴ Consequently, in this context, concerns about the possible impact of immigration controls on the Commonwealth arguably became less important to Labour policy-makers. This issue has been touched on by some scholars. Hansen argued that the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill of 1968 'pointed to the declining role of the Commonwealth in post-war British politics'.⁶³⁵ According to Hansen, the fact that the Bill was passed within a year of Britain's unsuccessful application to join the EEC, 'confirms the importance of 1968 as a landmark year in the attenuation of Labour's commitment to the Commonwealth'.⁶³⁶ Foot claimed that one of the main reasons why Labour's opposition to immigration controls collapsed was 'the inevitable decline of the "Commonwealth ideal"'.⁶³⁷ For Foot, its 'irrelevance to modern politics was one

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ See Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role, 1964-1967*.

⁶³⁵ Hansen, 'The Kenyan Asians, British Politics, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1968', 811-812.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 190-191.

of the main reasons why Labour's opposition to controls fell off and never recovered'.⁶³⁸

The British Public and the Commonwealth

This supposed ambivalence towards the Commonwealth was reflected in a 1969 Gallup poll, in which just 32 per cent of respondents said that it would be serious for Britain if the Commonwealth were to break up and 28 per cent said it would not be serious at all.⁶³⁹ Although it would be difficult to attach too much significance to this one poll, the fact that such a question was even asked suggests the growing sense among some Britons in this period that the Commonwealth was becoming less important to Britain's standing in the world. Not only was the Commonwealth seemingly diminishing in value, it was also perceived by some commentators as a potentially harmful electoral issue for Labour, especially as it became associated with non-white immigration. In July 1964, an article in *Socialist Commentary* claimed that 'there was one issue on which the Labour Party and the electorate are far from seeing eye to eye'.⁶⁴⁰ The article cited a recent poll in which over half of respondents put immigration at the top of a list of important issues. The article also remarked that 'polls have been unable to reveal any particular animosity to apartheid' yet Labour had made the issue of racism in South Africa 'one of the most easily discernible differences between the two parties'.⁶⁴¹ The article questioned whether Labour has considered 'the possible electoral cost of its protestations' and projected that 'a number of seats may be involved'.⁶⁴² This article thus forecasted an electoral backlash against a Labour elite that supposedly prioritised Commonwealth affairs above the domestic concerns of their constituents.

This theme has been addressed by some scholars. Howe argued that 'specialisation in colonial affairs was far from advantageous to the MPs concerned in terms of their electoral popularity'.⁶⁴³ According to Howe, 'when domestic race

⁶³⁸ Ibid. Rose also argued that a major reason for Labour's immigration U-turn was 'the decline of the importance of the Commonwealth in domestic politics'. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 229-230.

⁶³⁹ George Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain: 1937-1975*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1976), 1035.

⁶⁴⁰ *Socialist Commentary*, July 1964, 16.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

⁶⁴³ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 247-248.

relations became an electoral issue in the 1960s those who had devoted much of their time and energy to campaigning for racial equality both in the colonies and in Britain often seemed to suffer for it'.⁶⁴⁴ This problem was alluded to by John Strachey who claimed that while Britain has given, through its democratic institutions, 'under-privileged sections of our population fairly effective means of insisting that we come to their assistance, this has been far less true of its relationship with the peoples of the undeveloped world'.⁶⁴⁵ According to Strachey, 'their fate has not really been considered our concern as they have had no votes in our communities'.⁶⁴⁶ He claimed that while Labour MPs 'may be good, humanitarily-minded men, professionally, they cannot go beyond what is sanctioned by the state of mind of their peoples', otherwise 'they will simply cease to represent their electorate and others will replace them'.⁶⁴⁷ Strachey thus implied that the more Labour politicians spoke out on colonial issues, the more likely that they would be rejected by their constituents.

This problem was arguably manifested in Brockway's defeat at the Eton and Slough election in 1964.⁶⁴⁸ Brockway was well-known for campaigning on colonial affairs throughout the post-war period. From 1954, he was chairman of the Movement for Colonial Freedom and was nicknamed the 'Member for Africa' by some MPs as he frequently raised African issues in parliament.⁶⁴⁹ Brockway also applied his activism to domestic causes as in nine successive years he introduced a Bill to prohibit racial discrimination in Britain.⁶⁵⁰ In his autobiography, *Towards Tomorrow*, Brockway claimed that his association with anti-racialism at home and abroad 'aroused vicious antagonism from people obsessed by colour prejudice'.⁶⁵¹ He frequently received abusive letters and telephone calls. On one occasion, the front of his house was covered with swastikas and the slogan, 'Keep Britain White'.⁶⁵² Although Brockway recognised that the people who went to those extremes were 'a

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Strachey, *The End of Empire*, 274.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ 'Mr Brockway not to seek election again', *The Guardian*, Oct 30th 1964.

⁶⁴⁹ Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow: The Autobiography of Fenner Brockway*. (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1977), 161.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid, 224.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

lunatic fringe', he nevertheless believed that in their racist views, they represented 'a much wider section of the community who resent the presence of coloured persons'.⁶⁵³ He noted that during his period as MP, 'feeling was bitter' against immigrant workers in Slough and 'he became disturbed by the prejudice against them'.⁶⁵⁴ Brockway argued that 'undoubtedly the determining issue' in his defeat was what he described as 'the invasion of Slough by Commonwealth immigrants'.⁶⁵⁵

Significantly, Brockway was criticised by his opponents for allegedly devoting all his time to colonial affairs.⁶⁵⁶ Brockway was critical of Henry Brooke, the Conservative Home Secretary, who was reported in the Slough press as saying that he had never heard Brockway speak in the Commons except on colonial issues.⁶⁵⁷ Brockway's defeat thus suggested that the British public was not only indifferent towards Commonwealth matters, they were also becoming frustrated with Labour politicians harking on about empire, especially in the context of domestic problems supposedly caused by non-white immigration. However, it was not just the electorate that was seemingly irritated with Brockway's activism. According to Brockway, on polling day he learned that in one of Slough's biggest wards, with a large Labour vote, no Labour election committee had functioned because the local secretary did not like his views on race.⁶⁵⁸

Initially, though, many senior Labour figures considered these electoral concerns as secondary to the party's commitment to the Commonwealth. Gaitskell claimed in 1959 that 'if you were to say to me, "we've got to accept the colour bar, because you'll never get into power if you don't", I should say in not very polite language, "Go to hell" as that's absolutely against my principles'.⁶⁵⁹ Castle similarly declared in 1962, 'I do not care whether or not fighting this Commonwealth Immigrants Bill will lose me my seat, for I am sure that the Bill will lose this country the Commonwealth'.⁶⁶⁰ Interestingly, Castle reportedly fell asleep during the Cabinet

⁶⁵³ Brockway and Pannell, *Immigration, What Is the Answer? Two Opposing Views*, 80–81.

⁶⁵⁴ Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 154–155 and 224.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁶⁵⁶ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, 247–248.

⁶⁵⁷ Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 234.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁹ Brian Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell* (London: Richard Cohen, 1996), 344. Cited in Steven Fielding, "Brotherhood and the Brothers", 87–88.

⁶⁶⁰ C. General, HC Deb, 25th January 1962, vol.652 Col.481, *Hansard*.

meeting on the Kenyan Asians crisis on 22nd February 1968.⁶⁶¹ This one moment thus captured the speed with which senior Labour figures lost interest in the Commonwealth. While Castle and Gaitskell were prepared to lose their seats over this issue, the Labour Party soon changed its position on immigration once it returned to power in 1964. The Commonwealth ideal and the 'open door' principle were apparently disposed of once it seemed that Labour could lose significant electoral support over this issue. As Foot put it, 'the mere possibility of losing votes because of the "glorious Commonwealth ideal" was enough to make most former Commonwealth enthusiasts forget all about it'.⁶⁶²

However, the extent to which Labour's opposition to immigration controls was electorally disadvantageous for Labour politicians is questionable. In Eton and Slough, for example, Brockway lost by just eleven votes on a minute swing of 0.1 per cent against Labour. In such circumstances, it is difficult to determine how far the issue of immigration was really decisive.⁶⁶³ Brockway himself acknowledged after the election that 'a downpour of rain in the last hours of voting may have hurt him more than his opponent'.⁶⁶⁴ In any case, the constituency soon returned to Labour in 1966 as Joan Lester won with a majority of 4,663.⁶⁶⁵ The next section will assess the extent to which race represented a salient electoral issue in this period and ask whether Labour politicians were unnecessarily anxious about the political consequences of their policy towards immigration.

A 'Vote Loser?': Electoral Pressures

As mentioned earlier, the traditional narrative asserts that popular hostility towards non-white newcomers drove the Labour elite to change its immigration policy. This argument was most notably put forward by Crossman, who argued that the 1964 election and Smethwick, in particular, signified a 'pro-Tory undertow against Labour on the ground that we were soft on immigration' and so Labour 'had to out-trump the Tories' by rethinking its policy.⁶⁶⁶ According to Crossman, 'it is a sad

⁶⁶¹ Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964-1970* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 377-378. Cited in Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain*, 162.

⁶⁶² Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 190-191.

⁶⁶³ David E. Butler and Anthony King, *The British General Election of 1964* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 366.

⁶⁶⁴ 'Mr Brockway not to seek election again', *The Guardian*, Oct 30th 1964.

⁶⁶⁵ Butler and King, *The British General Election of 1964*, 366.

⁶⁶⁶ Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Vol. 1*, 477.

fact that when the Conservative government introduced the recent Immigration Act most of the electorate saw this as a welcome attempt to keep out the West Indians, Pakistani and Indians who have been pouring into the country in the last few years'.⁶⁶⁷ This view is supported by a 1961 Gallup poll, in which 76 per cent of respondents approved of the measures the Macmillan government planned to take in controlling immigration from the Commonwealth.⁶⁶⁸

Although Soskice was officially the minister responsible for immigration, Crossman claimed to have played an active role in Labour's policy-making. In his diary accounts, Crossman noted that he was involved in many sittings of the Cabinet Committee on Immigration. He wrote in one entry, 'as the committee has proceeded under Soskice's chairmanship he has been gradually dragged out of his purely liberalistic attitude to a recognition that we have to combine tight immigration controls with a constructive policy for integrating immigrants who are here already'.⁶⁶⁹ Crossman mentioned that on more than one occasion Wilson made it clear that he wanted to transfer control of immigration over to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, which was at the time headed by Crossman.⁶⁷⁰ He refused, though, on the grounds that he did not like being given the job because the government had what he described as an 'incompetent' Home Secretary.⁶⁷¹ Although Crossman turned down the chance to take charge of immigration policy, the fact that Wilson offered him this role indicated Labour's shift towards the tougher approach long advocated by Crossman.

This new approach was manifested in the 1965 White Paper, *Immigration from the Commonwealth*. Crossman claimed that 'the white paper had taken the poison out of politics so that in the 1966 election immigration was no longer a political issue'.⁶⁷² Emanuel Shinwell, the chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, also cited the apparent electoral benefits of the new measure. In a 1965 debate, Shinwell questioned whether Soskice was aware that by introducing proposed

⁶⁶⁷ MSS.154/4/BR/10/056, International Commentary. 241, BBC Hebrew Service, Transcript of BBC broadcast. 15th May 1963, MRC.

⁶⁶⁸ Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain: 1937-1975*, vol. 1, 610.

⁶⁶⁹ Crossman, *The Crossman Diaries*, ed. Anthony Howard (London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1991), 72-73.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 135-136 and 139.

⁶⁷¹ Crossman, *The Crossman Diaries*, 135-136.

⁶⁷² Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Vol.2*, 689.

modifications to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 'he is making it impossible for the Leader of the Opposition to fight the next election on the subject of immigration'.⁶⁷³

Opinion polls and surveys during this period, though, present a different picture regarding the impact of the immigration issue on the British electorate. Certainly, opinion polls indicate that the British public were generally supportive of immigration controls. David Butler and Donald Stokes' post-election surveys reveal 'an undeviating opposition' to non-white immigration throughout the 1960s.⁶⁷⁴ In Butler and Stokes' surveys of 1964, 1966 and 1970, never less than 80 per cent of those polled believed that too many immigrants had been let into Britain.⁶⁷⁵ Gallup polls also suggest popular public support for restrictions. In a 1961 poll, 76 per cent of respondents approved of the Conservative government's planned immigration restrictions; in a 1965 poll, 87 per cent approved of the Wilson government's stricter controls and, in a 1968 poll, 90 per cent believed that the government was right to place further restrictions on immigrants following the Kenyan Asians crisis.⁶⁷⁶

However, this popular approval of restrictions does not necessarily prove that immigration was a significant issue for the electorate. In a 1961 Gallup poll, 94 per cent of respondents claimed that the debate over the Immigration Bill had no influence on the way they intended to vote at the next election, and only 2 per cent said it had caused them to switch from Labour.⁶⁷⁷ Equally, in the 1966 Survey of Race Relations in Britain, only 14 per cent of those polled said that they regarded coloured immigration as a very important part of their problems, and over two-thirds said that it was of no importance.⁶⁷⁸ Hence, while the majority of the British public may have disapproved of Labour's position on immigration, there were arguably other more pressing issues that influenced voting behaviour during this period. Butler and Stokes argued that 'although it lost Labour three seats against the tide in 1964,

⁶⁷³ Commonwealth Immigration, HC Debate, 4th February 1965. vol. 705 cc1284-1288, *Hansard*.

⁶⁷⁴ David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice*, (London: Macmillan, 1974), 303–308. Butler and Stokes' post-election surveys of 1964, 1966, and 1970 interviewed between 1200 and 2000 people. Among the socioeconomic variables used in this analysis were age, social class, income level and education.

⁶⁷⁵ Butler and Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice*, 461–464.

⁶⁷⁶ Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain: 1937-1975*, vols. 1 and 2: 610, 823 and 979.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 610–611.

⁶⁷⁸ Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 586.

and probably prevented them from winning several others, the immigration issue never exercised anything like its potential electoral impact at the 1964 election'.⁶⁷⁹ They attribute the supposed marginal impact of the immigration issue to the British public's failure to differentiate between the positions of the two main parties. In their 1964 survey, 26 per cent said that they thought that the Conservatives were more likely to keep immigrants out compared to 19 per cent who thought Labour, while 41 per cent believed that there was no difference between the two parties.⁶⁸⁰ According to Butler and Stokes, 'in such circumstances, the issue can hardly have had great influence on the strength of the parties across the country as a whole'.⁶⁸¹

In their analysis of the 1964 election, David Butler and Anthony King claimed that while the 'issue of immigration was much talked about in the West Midlands, as well as in one or two London constituencies, it seemed to have had little influence on voting in most affected areas'.⁶⁸² They noted that in the London constituencies with a high concentration of West Indian immigrants, the swing to Labour tended to be above the national average.⁶⁸³ According to Butler and King, the issue of immigration was rarely debated at the national level, with the exception of one speech by the Conservative Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home, in which he claimed that Britain would have been flooded with immigrants but for the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act.⁶⁸⁴ Butler and King argued that 'the leadership of the main parties were expressly determined not to exploit the immigration issue'.⁶⁸⁵

One notable exception to this was Duncan Sandys, the Conservative Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations (1960-1962) and Colonial Secretary (1962-1964), who from the mid-1960s onwards launched a vociferous attack on the Wilson government's race relations and immigration policies.⁶⁸⁶ In a parliamentary debate in 1966, Sandys called for the House to 'examine our whole attitude towards

⁶⁷⁹ Butler and Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice*, 303–308.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid. Similarly, in a 1964 Gallup poll, 34 per cent said that they believed there was no difference between the two parties on coloured immigration, while 26 per cent said there was a difference. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain: 1937-1975*, Vol 2: 739.

⁶⁸¹ Butler and Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice*, 303–308.

⁶⁸² Butler and King, *The British General Election of 1964*, 224.

⁶⁸³ Ibid, 354.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid, 120.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid, 141.

⁶⁸⁶ Peter Brooke, *Duncan Sandys and the Informal Politics of Decolonisation, 1960-1968*, (PhD, King's College London, 2016), 130.

immigration' and, in particular, discuss what he described as 'the most delicate aspect of the question—the racial aspect'.⁶⁸⁷ In a speech the previous year, he argued that there had been 'too much woolly talk on the question of immigration', criticising the assumption that 'this is not a racial problem' and simply one of numbers. 'We all know', Sandys remarked, that if the immigrants were 'Australians it would be quite easy to absorb, but when they are people of different races, sometimes of different religions, and speak different languages, the problem of integration is very much more difficult'.⁶⁸⁸ Going beyond the official Conservative line, he called for a 'complete stop on all immigration' and demanded that the government should 'reduce the number' already living in Britain.⁶⁸⁹ Sandys' views though were a departure from the discourse at the national level during this period, at least until Powell's speech in 1968.

One constituency where the immigration issue undoubtedly affected Labour adversely in 1964 was Smethwick. Smethwick, a provincial town on the outskirts of Birmingham, was a predominantly working class constituency, which had voted solidly for Labour since 1945. However, it also contained a growing population of non-white immigrants, which by 1964 represented around 6 per cent of the population.⁶⁹⁰ A Labour majority of 3,544 at the 1959 election was transformed into a Conservative majority of 1,744 in 1964.⁶⁹¹ This result represented a swing of 7.2 per cent, the largest swing against Labour in any constituency during the election.⁶⁹² Michael Hartley-Brewer argued in his case study of the Smethwick election that 'the result was an anomaly, and can only be explained by anomalous circumstances—it was clear that Gordon Walker's defeat was due to the immigration issue'.⁶⁹³ He cited a small survey of Smethwick voters, in which over half of the respondents stated that

⁶⁸⁷ HC Deb, 8th November 1966, vol.735, cc1188-1189, *Hansard*. Quoted in Brooke, *Duncan Sandys and the Informal Politics of Decolonisation*, 135-137.

⁶⁸⁸ HC Deb, 1st June 1965, vol. 713, col. 1631-1632, *Hansard*. Quoted in Brooke, *Duncan Sandys and the Informal Politics of Decolonisation*, 135-137.

⁶⁸⁹ Brooke, *Duncan Sandys and the Informal Politics of Decolonisation*, 130.

⁶⁹⁰ Hartley-Brewer, 'Smethwick' in Deakin, *Colour and the British Electorate*, 80.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid*, 102.

⁶⁹² *Ibid*.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid*, 104.

they felt immigration, race or colour was the single most important issue of the election.⁶⁹⁴

Gordon Walker was subject to a considerable amount of criticism during the campaign. At a pre-election rally, he acknowledged that it had been 'a dirty, rough campaign' and that a lot of lies had been spread about him.⁶⁹⁵ These included rumours that his daughter had married a black man and that he had sold his house in Smethwick to immigrants.⁶⁹⁶ This dirty campaign was epitomised by the slogan, 'If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Liberal or Labour'.⁶⁹⁷ Although Griffiths denied responsibility for the slogan, he refused to criticise those who expressed their feelings in what he described as 'earthy language'.⁶⁹⁸ According to Griffiths, this 'strong popular feeling should be channelled into positive action' and that was one of the main functions of the Smethwick Conservative Party.⁶⁹⁹ Thus, while Griffiths distanced himself from such racialist language, he nevertheless believed that it was his duty to provide a political channel for this supposed popular resentment about immigration. The Griffiths campaign thus focused almost exclusively on immigration. According to Hartley-Brewer, immigration 'received more attention from Griffiths both in his election literature and at his meetings than any other issue'.⁷⁰⁰

In his personal account of the election, Griffiths touched on the idea that Labour leaders were preoccupied with Commonwealth affairs and out of touch with the problems of their traditional working class constituents. Griffiths questioned why Labour MPs, who have known 'full well the misery being created in their areas' by immigration, have not spoken up 'for the working class that they claimed to represent'.⁷⁰¹ For Griffiths, the answer lay in Labour's belief in 'the solidarity of the workers of every race and nationality'.⁷⁰² He claimed that this made the exclusion of non-white immigrants 'anathema to the doctrinaire socialist'.⁷⁰³ Griffiths cited the fact

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, 92. 37 of the 67 respondents answered that they felt immigration, race or colour was the most important issue of the election.

⁶⁹⁵ 'Mr Gordon Walker tells of 'lies'', *The Guardian*, 15th October 1964, 3.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁷ 'Vile- it's all in Black and White', *The Times*, 13th October 1964, 18.

⁶⁹⁸ Griffiths, *A Question of Colour?*, 154.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, 154.

⁷⁰⁰ Hartley-Brewer, 'Smethwick' in Deakin, *Colour and the British Electorate*, 85.

⁷⁰¹ Griffiths, *A Question of Colour?*, 152.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

that many senior Labour figures were committed members of groups opposing apartheid in South Africa. He argued that ‘this great mass of opinion within the Labour Party made its attitude to immigration control inevitable’.⁷⁰⁴ This argument thus echoed the *Socialist Commentary* article, which suggested that Labour’s pro-Commonwealth and anti-racist rhetoric would have negative repercussions, particularly in areas affected by immigration.

As Labour’s leading Commonwealth spokesman, Gordon Walker arguably felt the force of this apparent backlash in his defeat at Smethwick. Robert Pearce argued in his introduction to Gordon Walker’s diaries that though Gordon Walker expressed his support for the Commonwealth with ‘cogency and passion’, ‘to put it bluntly, he backed a loser’.⁷⁰⁵ Pearce claimed that the Commonwealth failed to evoke much public interest, and when Commonwealth issues did hit the headlines—namely, on immigration—his ‘pro-Commonwealth stance won him only unpopularity’.⁷⁰⁶ According to Pearce, ‘few positive reputations could be built on a Commonwealth scaffolding’.⁷⁰⁷

Ironically, Gordon Walker had a rather chequered history on Commonwealth issues. As alluded to earlier, in 1950 Gordon Walker authorised the controversial exile of Seretse Khama from the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Also, Gordon Walker supported the idea of federation in Central Africa, which came to fruition under the Conservative government in 1953. The irony that Gordon Walker, a man who was condemned for his apparent bow to racism on these colonial issues, lost at the hands of a racist campaign in 1964 was not lost on some scholars. Foot argued that ‘one of the most ironic aspects of the racist campaign by the Smethwick Conservatives was its target’.⁷⁰⁸ According to Foot, ‘the man who bore the brunt of the attack, the man they painted in the most lurid colours, was perhaps the most reactionary of all Labour’s old guard’.⁷⁰⁹ Pearce similarly noted that with his defeat at

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 152–153.

⁷⁰⁵ Pearce, *Patrick Gordon Walker: Political Diaries 1932-1971*, 29–31.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁸ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 53–56.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

Smethwick, 'the Seretse Khama issue had finally been forgotten—with a vengeance'.⁷¹⁰

Furthermore, while Gordon Walker was criticised for opposing the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill in 1961, his views on immigration were actually far less liberal than his critics suggested.⁷¹¹ In as early as 1957, he argued that 'it is conceivable that the inflow from other parts of the Commonwealth, including Asia and the West Indies, could become so great that it could not be left wholly uncontrolled'.⁷¹² He was certainly not averse to putting this view forward during the election campaign. In July 1964, the Smethwick Labour Party issued 20,000 copies of a leaflet titled, *Labour's Point of View on Immigration*. It pledged that Labour would maintain immigration controls and introduce stricter health controls and powers to deport criminals.⁷¹³ In a pre-election speech, Gordon Walker admitted that the current rate of immigration 'might be too high' and that the present controls 'may be letting too many people in at a time when social problems are being created'.⁷¹⁴

The Labour campaign in Smethwick sometimes exploited the immigration issue itself for political ends. Shortly before the election, the Smethwick Labour Party issued a pamphlet which stated that 'immigrants only arrived in Smethwick in large numbers during the past ten years—while the Tory government was in power'.⁷¹⁵ The pamphlet exclaimed, 'you can't blame Labour or Gordon Walker for that'.⁷¹⁶ In another leaflet, Gordon Walker wrote that 'a lie has been spread that I was in some way responsible for the coming of Commonwealth immigrants to Britain'.⁷¹⁷ He claimed that this was 'sheer nonsense' as 'the main flow of immigrants happened to come in the thirteen years during which the Conservatives were in office'.⁷¹⁸ Foot argued that 'without gaining more than a handful of votes, Labour's tactics at Smethwick lost what was far more important—a hard core of principled opposition to

⁷¹⁰ Robert Pearce, 'Walker, Patrick Gordon (1907–1980)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

⁷¹¹ Pearce, *Patrick Gordon Walker: Political Diaries 1932-1971*, 42.

⁷¹² Patrick Gordon Walker, 'The UK Needs a Migration Policy', *New Commonwealth (Incorporating the Crown Colonist)* 33 (July 1957): 5–7.

⁷¹³ *Birmingham Post*, 27th July 1964; *Sunday Telegraph*, 9th August 1964.

⁷¹⁴ *The Guardian*, 14th October 1964.

⁷¹⁵ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 59–62.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁷ Michael Hartley-Brewer, 'Smethwick' in Deakin, *Colour and the British Electorate*, 89.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*

racialist propaganda'.⁷¹⁹ For Foot, by employing such tactics, 'Gordon Walker allowed anti-immigrant slander to gain credence and respectability by default'.⁷²⁰

Consequently, while immigration was undoubtedly the decisive factor in Gordon Walker's defeat, the campaign was nevertheless far more complex than the traditional narrative suggests. The Smethwick Labour Party were also susceptible to exploiting the race issue, albeit not to the same abhorrent extent as the Conservatives. Moreover, the extent to which the Smethwick result was indicative of a broader problem that Labour had on immigration is doubtful. This result was not replicated in other West Midland or South-East constituencies with similar immigration 'problems' and the constituency soon returned to Labour in 1966 as Andrew Faulds won with a majority of 3,490.⁷²¹ In their analysis of the 1966 election, Butler and King claimed that since 1964 'Griffiths' position in Smethwick had weakened considerably'.⁷²² According to Butler and King, 'the immigration issue had lost some of its novelty', especially after Gordon Walker had disappeared from the scene.⁷²³

Unlike Gordon Walker, Faulds refused to exploit the immigration issue for electoral purposes. Faulds declared upon his selection as Labour candidate that he believed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was 'largely racist'.⁷²⁴ A *Guardian* article noted that this view brought him into 'direct conflict with the point of view that is credited with clinching Griffiths' election victory'.⁷²⁵ The article remarked that Faulds is 'obviously determined not to go to any artificial lengths to curry favour, and thinks the next election will be won without it'.⁷²⁶ Faulds adhered to this approach as he opposed the Wilson government's new immigration measures. He argued that the 1965 white paper was 'racialist' and represented 'a sad retreat from the principles of the Labour Party'.⁷²⁷ Although Faulds admitted that he 'could coast home in Smethwick on this white paper', he avowed that he did not 'take on that seat to win it

⁷¹⁹ Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, 59–62.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ David E. Butler and Anthony King, *The British General Election of 1966* (London: MacMillan, 1966), 250–251.

⁷²² Ibid.

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ 'Labour picks a fighter', *The Guardian*, 24th May 1965.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ 'Faulds Letter to the Editor', *The Guardian*, 20th August 1965.

by pandering to the racist element'.⁷²⁸ Faulds' victory in 1966 thus seemed to confound the notion that Labour politicians had to adopt a tough line on immigration in order to avoid electoral defeat in places such as Smethwick. Butler and King claimed that with Faulds' success at Smethwick, 'immigration as an election-winning issue was dead—possibly for all time'.⁷²⁹ While this claim is undoubtedly an overstatement, the fact that Faulds won in spite of his pro-immigration stance still brings into question the salience of race as an electoral issue during this period. The next section will return to the imperial theme by examining how the Rhodesia crisis, in particular, became interlinked with the domestic issue of immigration, thus reflecting a broader debate regarding the meaning of Britishness in the 1960s.

Rhodesia, Immigration and 'Britishness'

An intriguing aspect of Faulds' approach towards immigration was his frequent references to the Rhodesia crisis. Butler and King noted that during the 1966 election campaign Faulds was 'always on the offensive' as he sought to 'define Griffiths as a candidate of the extreme right and supporter of Ian Smith'.⁷³⁰ Faulds most notably alluded to Rhodesia during the parliamentary debate on the Commonwealth Immigration Bill of 1968. Faulds argued that the Bill was 'racialist' as the exemption of people with familial connections to Britain was clearly aimed at 'white emigrants who might want to return'.⁷³¹ He claimed that fairly soon Rhodesia would declare itself a republic, which would mean that the white settlers with British heritage would relinquish their British citizenry.⁷³² Faulds asked, 'what will happen to these people when, as is inevitable, the Africans liberate themselves and establish the State of Zimbabwe? Shall we then adopt a measure of similar discrimination against a quarter of a million Europeans scrambling to get on our drawbridge'?⁷³³ He thus used the hypothetical scenario of a white exodus from Rhodesia to expose the racial bias at the heart of Britain's immigration policy.

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

⁷²⁹ Butler and King, *The British General Election of 1966*, 253.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Commonwealth Immigration Bill, HC Deb 27th February 1968, vol. 759, cc1295-1299, *Hansard*.

⁷³² Rhodesia did indeed declare itself a republic in 1970, thereby severing its ties to the British crown.

⁷³³ Commonwealth Immigration Bill, HC Deb 27th February 1968, vol. 759, cc1295-1299, *Hansard*.

Faulds also argued that 'it will be interesting to see the reaction of certain honourable members sitting opposite' to this potential situation.⁷³⁴ This comment was aimed at the small group of Conservative MPs who were sympathetic towards their white 'kith and kin' in Rhodesia and hostile to non-white immigrants in Britain. This connection was often used by Labour politicians to attack opponents of immigration. In 1965, Brockway claimed that there was 'one extraordinary contradiction in the advocates of "Keep Britain White". They do not want to keep Africa black'.⁷³⁵ According to Brockway, 'they are the foremost champions of white minority privileges in Rhodesia and South Africa'.⁷³⁶ In 1968, Gerald Gardiner remarked that it was 'rather curious that the right-wing of the Conservative Party, who tend here to say, "immigrants go home" do not make a similar noise in regard to the British in Rhodesia'.⁷³⁷ In 1969, Joan Lester, a Labour MP, asked Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary, if he found it 'curious that those people who are so hostile to immigrants in this country are so "pro" and sympathetic to white immigrants in Rhodesia'.⁷³⁸

This link between the Rhodesia crisis and the immigration issue has been addressed by some scholars. Schwarz argued that the coincidence of this colonial crisis at the same time as a domestic crisis triggered by non-white immigration 'created circumstances in which symbolically and politically, the two became superimposed'.⁷³⁹ He claimed that in Britain, the Rhodesia crisis 'took on the appearance of a battle between two irreconcilable Englands'.⁷⁴⁰ On the one hand, there was a 'New Britain'— interestingly, the title of Labour's 1964 election manifesto—which was personified by Wilson, a man who Schwarz claimed was 'barely touched by the older trappings of empire'.⁷⁴¹ On the other hand, there was an older, imperial conception of Britain based on white racial kinship, which was supposedly embodied by the Smith regime.⁷⁴² According to Schwarz, the notion of a 'temporal divide between an old Rhodesia, still locked into the romantic imperial

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Brockway and Pannell, *Immigration, What Is the Answer? Two Opposing Views*, 84–85.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Southern Rhodesia (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1968, HL Deb, 18th July 1968, vol. 295 cc502-504, *Hansard*.

⁷³⁸ Rhodesia HC Deb, 23rd June 1969, vol. 785 cc996-7, *Hansard*.

⁷³⁹ Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 396.

⁷⁴⁰ Bill Schwarz, "'The Only White Man in There': The Re-Racialisation of England, 1956–1968," *Race and Class* 38, no. 1 (1996): 71.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 71–73; 'The New Britain', *1964 General Election Manifesto* (London: Labour Party, 1964).

⁷⁴² Schwarz, "'The Only White Man in There": The Re-Racialisation of England, 1956–1968', 71-73.

past, and a modern Britain, which had apparently broken free from the detritus of empire, was a common perception of the time'.⁷⁴³ He noted that even Wilson occasionally thought in these terms. In a television address before UDI, Wilson said that Britain and Rhodesia were 'living in almost different centuries'.⁷⁴⁴ However, for Schwarz, with non-white immigration to Britain, this supposedly archaic vision of Britain 'came home'.⁷⁴⁵

The Smith regime frequently drew on this notion of 'Britishness' to justify its rebellion. By issuing UDI on Remembrance Day, thereby reminding Britons of Rhodesia's contribution to the Second World War, and signing off the UDI proclamation with the message, 'God Save the Queen', the Smith regime sought to preserve its British identity despite officially rebelling against the crown. In 1966, Smith claimed that 'if Churchill were alive today, I believe he would probably emigrate to Rhodesia'.⁷⁴⁶ According to Smith, this was because 'all those admirable qualities and characteristics of the British that we believed in, loved and preached to our children, no longer exist in Britain'.⁷⁴⁷ He thus used Churchill as a symbol of the 'British' values that had lost sway at home and were apparently upheld by Rhodesia. Webster argued that by claiming Rhodesia as a place to which Churchill would now emigrate, 'Smith constructed white Rhodesians as bearers of true Britishness, and true defenders of the nation, against a metropolis that they accused of betraying the cause of empire'.⁷⁴⁸

In *Englishness and Empire*, Webster claimed that Smith's verdict that the imperial identity associated with Churchill no longer had much currency among the British political establishment was 'one that was widely articulated in the 1960s'.⁷⁴⁹ Webster cites *Guns at Batasi* (1964) as an example of a film that 'drew on a familiar analysis made by the white settler community in Rhodesia'.⁷⁵⁰ In *Guns at Batasi*, a group of British soldiers, led by the strict Regimental Sergeant Major Lauderdale, are faced with a coup in a fictional country in post-colonial Africa. The film pits

⁷⁴³ Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 406.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Schwarz, "'The Only White Man in There": The Re-Racialisation of England, 1956–1968', 73.

⁷⁴⁶ *The Sunday Times*, 6th November 1966. Quoted in Webster, "'There'll Always Be an England'", 581.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Webster, "'There'll Always Be an England'", 581.

⁷⁴⁹ Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965*, 185–186.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid, 207–210.

Lauderdale, a defender of the old imperial British values, against Miss Barker-Wise, a female MP, who symbolised the 'new' Britain supposedly divorced from empire. Barker-Wise supports the African nationalists and the mutinous officer, Lieutenant Boniface, while Lauderdale dismisses her views as 'liberal' and 'bloody half-baked'.⁷⁵¹ The film endorses Lauderdale's verdict by showing Boniface to be cruel and untrustworthy. Webster claimed that 'in its portrayal of Barker-Wise, the film suggests Smith's verdict on contemporary Britain and its politicians'—namely, 'they betray the values of empire and, far from supporting a racial community of Britons, are enthusiasts for granting independence to Africans, putting at risk the livelihoods of whites'.⁷⁵²

Significantly, this language of the beleaguered white settler was often utilised by critics of non-white immigration in Britain. This is evidenced in a series of letters from members of the public to Bottomley, who as Commonwealth Secretary played a key role in Labour's Rhodesia policy. Through a close examination of these letters, it is evident that for many of the correspondents the colonial crisis in Rhodesia and the problem of immigration at home were synonymous. Although these letters are by no means representative of the British public as a whole, they nevertheless provide a sense of how some Britons thought about immigration and the meaning of Britishness in the 1960s. One letter argued that Bottomley was 'in no position to criticise the living conditions of Africans in Rhodesia when you consider that thousands of decent working class English families are living in similar conditions thanks to this government's policy of overcrowding our small country with foreigners'.⁷⁵³ This letter claimed that 'minority rule in Rhodesia is unthinkable, but we seem to be getting black minority rule in this country'.⁷⁵⁴ This person thus saw a contradiction between Bottomley's insistence on majority rule in Rhodesia and his support for non-white immigration to Britain; a policy that was supposedly imposed on an unwilling British public by politicians in Westminster.

A recurrent theme in these letters is the number of correspondents who challenge the portrayal of Smith as a traitor for illegally declaring independence from

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Ibid.

⁷⁵³ Letter from Mrs U.G. Leslie, Ealing, 16th October 1968 in Bottomley/17, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

Britain. This characterisation was often employed by Bottomley. In a 1968 debate, Bottomley declared, 'I hope that for the sake of parliament there will be no attempt to deal with a man whom I regard as a traitor'.⁷⁵⁵ In response, one letter argued, 'I always thought that traitors were people who helped to hand over their own country to foreigners as your Labour government has done'.⁷⁵⁶ Another letter claimed that 'if anyone deserves the tag of traitor, you undoubtedly fit the bill and not Smith'.⁷⁵⁷ According to this correspondent, Bottomley's first duty should be to his constituency and not to the black Rhodesians. The letter exclaimed, 'where your pride of race and colour is, God alone knows'.⁷⁵⁸ Hence, for these correspondents, it was the Labour elite who were the real traitors to a white vision of Britain that was apparently being destroyed by immigration.

Another common theme in these letters is the number of correspondents who express contempt towards the Commonwealth. In many letters, the non-white Commonwealth countries were disparagingly labelled as dictatorships. One letter argued, 'you should remember that not one country given independence by Wilson has kept the agreement to govern by democratic law. All are dictators'.⁷⁵⁹ Another letter claimed, 'you are partly responsible for the dislike of immigrants, and I will tell you why. Without exception, the Commonwealth countries which are coloured are one party dictatorships'.⁷⁶⁰ Thus, for this person, the apparent tendency of non-white countries to veer towards dictatorship somehow contributed to the hostility faced by non-white immigrants in Britain. In contrast, this letter described Rhodesia as 'a fine country' and claimed that 'the natives have a better standard of living there than in any of the other African states so why not leave well alone'.⁷⁶¹

While senior Labour figures such as Bottomley portrayed the Commonwealth as a multi-racial 'family of nations', these correspondents, instead, subscribed to an older, more restrictive notion of the Commonwealth as a 'white man's club', an

⁷⁵⁵ Southern Rhodesia, HC Deb, 22nd October 1968, vol. 770, cc1116-1117, *Hansard*.

⁷⁵⁶ Anonymous letter in Bottomley/17, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

⁷⁵⁷ Letter from K.S. Petty, Emsworth, Hants, 22nd October 1968 in Bottomley/17, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁹ Anonymous Letter, London, 22nd October 1968 in Bottomley/17, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

⁷⁶⁰ Anonymous Letter, Birkdale, Lancashire, 24th November 1968 in Bottomley/9, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*

association that had seemingly become defunct as the non-white members became a majority. These competing visions of the Commonwealth were reflected in a 1969 Gallup poll, in which 45 per cent said that the Commonwealth should combine all colours and creeds and 40 per cent said that they would prefer if the Commonwealth were confined to countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand with whom Britain 'had a lot in common'.⁷⁶² Interestingly, in the same poll, 34 per cent said that the Commonwealth hindered Britain's negotiations with Rhodesia while 22 per cent thought that the Commonwealth helped the discussions.⁷⁶³ Although it would be difficult to attach too much meaning to this poll, the fact that these questions were put forward suggests a growing sense of the British public's discontent with the Commonwealth as the non-white members began challenge British authority, most notably through their interventions on Rhodesia.

This connection with the plight of the white settler in Africa was sometimes employed by Conservative campaigners in Smethwick. Two weeks before the election, Don Finney, a Conservative councillor and close aide of Griffiths, denied claims that the Conservatives had provoked racial hostilities in their campaign. Finney argued that 'the term racialist now appears to be applied to anyone who tries to help English people who have problems caused by immigrants'.⁷⁶⁴ He countered that the only racialists he knew were 'the new leaders and their friends in Africa, under whose rule people with white skins have had their livelihoods taken away'.⁷⁶⁵ According to Finney, 'people here shout their heads off if a coloured man says he has been refused service in a pub, but they don't say a word when white people in Kenya are sacked or deported because of the colour of their skins'.⁷⁶⁶ Finney thus drew a parallel between the white settler communities in Africa and the white man in Britain, both supposedly beleaguered.

Crucially, Griffiths himself drew on this connection to justify his opposition to immigration. In *A Question of Colour* Griffiths used the examples of Rhodesia and South Africa to support his racist assertion that non-white peoples could not be

⁷⁶² Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain: 1937-1975*, 1976, 2:1035.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁴ *The Smethwick Telephone & Warley Courier*, 2nd Oct 1964. Cited in Alice Marie Ritscherle, *Opting out of Utopia: Race and Working-Class Political Culture in Britain during the Age of Decolonisation, 1948-1968*, (PhD, University of Michigan, 2005), 232-233.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

integrated into European societies. Griffiths argued that 'those who call for the integration of coloured immigrants into our society are muddled in their thinking' as 'historical evidence' indicated that 'urban civilisation is most certainly not the natural environment for Negroes'.⁷⁶⁷ In the case of South Africa, he claimed that 'white urban society was completely alien to the Bantu', and apartheid made 'special provision for the self-government of the Bantu peoples in their homeland'.⁷⁶⁸ In the case of Rhodesia, he asserted that its 'great economic progress' was 'entirely due to European initiative' as before the arrival of the Europeans in the 1890s, 'the King's kraal at Bulawayo was a hut of mud and wood floored with cow-dung'.⁷⁶⁹

Griffiths believed that through these examples 'we come to see the germ of the solution to racial tension'.⁷⁷⁰ He claimed that 'the lesson for us in Britain is that relations between white and coloured races can be perfectly amicable as long as the social structure of each society is retained'.⁷⁷¹ Consequently, in his opposition to immigration, Griffiths was well aware of the wider context of the decline of empire in the 1960s and, in particular, the demise of white imperial rule over supposedly uncivilised races. Griffiths and his supporters were arguably protesting not only about the single issue of immigration, but also the broader decline of whiteness both, domestically, as Britain became a more multi-racial society, and internationally, as the non-white countries became a more dominant presence in the Commonwealth. In this context, it is not surprising that Griffiths looked to Rhodesia and South Africa as the last bastions of white supremacy.⁷⁷²

The Labour Party and the 'British World'

Crucially for this thesis, although the Wilson government, in theory, endorsed a 'new' vision of Britain that was multi-racial and inclusive, in practise, its immigration policy suggested the enduring sway of this older vision of Britishness. As the chapter has demonstrated, Labour's immigration policy was not only influenced by public pressures, it was also shaped by the way in which senior policy-makers viewed, at

⁷⁶⁷ Griffiths, *A Question of Colour?*, 21-22.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 59-61.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 68.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 75-77.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid*.

⁷⁷² Fittingly, Ian Smith often portrayed himself as 'the last white man'. See Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 438.

least privately, the boundaries of British belonging in the 1960s. Interestingly, at the same time as tougher restrictions were placed on non-white immigrants, the Wilson government continued to endorse a racialised 'British World' that comprised the old Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Although Britain faced a skilled labour shortage in the early 1960s, Labour figures still encouraged emigration to the former settler empire. This migration was given official legislative approval through the renewal of the Commonwealth Settlement Act in 1967.⁷⁷³ This Act authorised an annual expenditure of £1.5million a year on assisted migration schemes for British emigrants to the Commonwealth.⁷⁷⁴ In May 1964, Bottomley claimed that 'we want to retain the closest possible relations with Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Emigration keeps our four countries bound together with those ties of blood which, I feel, will always be more important than legal institutions'.⁷⁷⁵ According to Bottomley, 'the whole history of this island and our place in the world has been based on the remarkable dispersal of the British people to other lands'.⁷⁷⁶

This political endorsement of white emigration has been touched on by some scholars.⁷⁷⁷ Kathleen Paul argued that 'British policy makers' acquiescence in the loss of one of post-war Britain's scarcest resources—labour—highlights the significance that post-war governments attached to the imperial ideal'.⁷⁷⁸ According to Paul, successive administrations were convinced that the emigrating 'British stock' would 'retain allegiance to Britain and membership in the imperial and familial communities of Britishness'.⁷⁷⁹ Schwarz has claimed that this support for emigration 'derived from high imperial reasoning'.⁷⁸⁰ According to Schwarz, throughout the post-war period 'politicians from both parties advocated the peopling of Britain's erstwhile possessions with "British stock" in order to strengthen the ties between the mother

⁷⁷³ The Empire (later Commonwealth) Settlement Act of 1922 authorised British government expenditure on assisted migration schemes for a period of fifteen years. The Act was renewed for a further fifteen years in 1937, and then renewed at five-year intervals in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967 until the Act finally lapsed in 1972.

⁷⁷⁴ Commonwealth Settlement Bill HC Deb, 5th April 1967, vol. 744 cc159-62, *Hansard*.

⁷⁷⁵ Speech to the World Assembly of Youth, Commonwealth Institute, 9th May 1964, Bottomley/9, The Papers of Arthur Bottomley, BLPES.

⁷⁷⁶ Emigration to Commonwealth Countries, HC Deb, 26th March 1964, vol.692 cc742-745, *Hansard*.

⁷⁷⁷ Stephen Constantine, "Waving Goodbye? Australia, Assisted Passages, and the Empire and Commonwealth Settlement Acts, 1945-72," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26, no. 2 (1998): 176–95; Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),

⁷⁷⁸ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 25–28.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁰ Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 57–60.

country and Commonwealth'.⁷⁸¹ This sentiment was reflected in an article by Gordon Walker in 1956. Whilst acknowledging the costs of emigration—namely, 'the loss of skilled and vigorous people and their replacement by lower-quality labour'—Gordon Walker declared that there were other important considerations.⁷⁸² He argued that 'migrants are more than mere sources of economic power. They carry with them habits of mind and ways of life'.⁷⁸³ Gordon Walker claimed that 'migration from Britain has been the formative and creative factor in the Commonwealth. It virtually peopled Australia and New Zealand, and it made a vital contribution to the populations of Canada and South Africa'.⁷⁸⁴

Despite gaining official legislative independence as Dominions in 1931, Britain's former settler colonies continued to attract migrants from the metropole. In the period 1946 to 1960, about 1.5million Britons moved to Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa and the self-governing colony of Rhodesia.⁷⁸⁵ This migration was actively encouraged by the receiving countries, who all introduced assisted passage schemes in some form after the war. In 1946, the Rhodesian government signed an agreement with Britain on assisted passages.⁷⁸⁶ In 1948, the New Zealand government introduced an assisted passages scheme that lasted until 1976.⁷⁸⁷ The Canadian government also granted preferred immigration status to Britons after the war and introduced an assisted passages scheme in 1951.⁷⁸⁸ The most extensive scheme by far was introduced by Australia. In 1946, the Australian government began subsidising the travel costs for British migrants who paid just £10

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

⁷⁸² Patrick Gordon Walker, "Commonwealth Migration: The Complex Pattern," *New Commonwealth (Incorporating the Crown Colonist)* 32 (December 1956): 619–21.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 31 and 37; CAB 129/107/51, 1st December 1961, British Emigration Policy, NA. In total, 566,429 Britons migrated to Australia; 582,787 to Canada; 151,730 to New Zealand; 125,678 to South Africa and 82,178 to Rhodesia during this period.

⁷⁸⁶ Constantine, "Waving Goodbye? Australia, Assisted Passages, and the Empire and Commonwealth Settlement Acts, 1945-72," 176–177.

⁷⁸⁷ In total, approximately 100,000 Britons benefited from this scheme. Harper and Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, 89.

⁷⁸⁸ Ninette Kelley and M. J Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 325–329. Cited in Ellen Boucher, *Empire's Children: Child Emigration, Welfare, and the Decline of the British World, 1869–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 162–163.

for their fare, the so-called 'Ten Pound Pom' scheme.⁷⁸⁹ In total, 1,011,985 Britons benefited from this scheme until it was abandoned in 1972.⁷⁹⁰

This vision of an expanded Britain, though, was undermined by the changing ethnic composition of migrants to the Dominions in the post-war period. As the demand for new settlers outweighed the supply of 'British stock', the Dominions increasingly recruited white migrants from non-British sources.⁷⁹¹ In the period 1946 to 1960, Britons accounted for only 35 per cent of immigrants into Australia; 29 per cent of immigrants to Canada and 53 per cent of immigrants to New Zealand.⁷⁹² This phenomenon has been addressed by some scholars. Tony Hopkins claimed that 'imperial patriotism, which provided a measure of the strength of informal ties between Britain and the old Dominions, began to ebb from the 1960s'.⁷⁹³ According to Hopkins, the Commonwealth, long considered a 'British club', 'came to be seen as a threat to British identity as non-white immigrants made their appearance in numbers that could readily be seen'.⁷⁹⁴ Moreover, 'the ethnic basis of "Greater Britain" began to disintegrate, when it became clear that the number of "race patriots" emigrating to the empire was insufficient to maintain the required levels of "British stock"'.⁷⁹⁵

By viewing the domestic issue of immigration in conjunction with the decline of the 'British World', Hopkins offers a new way of thinking about the end of empire. Decolonisation could be defined, not merely as the loss of Britain's non-settler colonies, but the decline of Britishness, both domestically, as non-white migrants arrived in the metropole, and internationally, as ties between Britain and the former settler empire diminished. This argument is echoed by James Belich who described the Dominion government's recruitment of immigrants from non-British sources as 'a

⁷⁸⁹ 'Ten Pound Pom' was a colloquial term widely-used in Australia to describe Britons who travelled to Australia after the Second World War under this scheme. See A. James Hammerton, *Ten Pound Poms: Australia's Invisible Migrants* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

⁷⁹⁰ Reginald T. Appleyard, *The Ten Pound Immigrants* (London: Boxtree, 1988), 160.

⁷⁹¹ Constantine, "British Emigration to the Empire-Commonwealth since 1880: From Overseas Settlement to Diaspora?," 26-27.

⁷⁹² In total, Britain provided just 34 per cent of the 4.43 million immigrants to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Rhodesia in this period. CAB 129/107/51, 1st December 1961, British Emigration Policy, NA.

⁷⁹³ Tony Hopkins, "Rethinking Decolonisation," *Past and Present*, 200 (2008): 229–230.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

sign of decolonisation'.⁷⁹⁶ He pinpoints Britain's first bid to join the European Economic Community in 1961, above all, as 'a clear declaration of intent to apply euthanasia to Greater Britain'.⁷⁹⁷ Significantly, it was on this basis that the Labour Party initially opposed membership of the EEC. However, six years later, the Labour elite itself turned towards Europe with the vision of a 'British World' seemingly in tatters.

The decline of the 'British World' together with the issue of non-white immigration was symptomatic of a broader problem regarding the meaning of Britishness in the 1960s. This chapter has shown that despite the multi-racial rhetoric expressed by many senior Labour figures, the Wilson government's approach to immigration signified the endurance of an older, white conception of Britishness, which drew heavily on the legacies of imperial racism and, in particular, a civilisational doctrine that divided the advanced and backward peoples of the empire along racial lines. Just as Britain's non-white colonies were seen as too primitive to be granted independence, non-white immigrants to Britain were deemed too culturally different to be integrated into British society. Labour leaders, having grown up in a world where the white imperial powers ruled over other races, saw only problems posed by the inflow of former non-white colonial subjects into the metropole. Crucially, this changing approach to immigration coincided with the Labour elite's broader disillusionment with the Commonwealth in this period as Britain's assumed leadership role was challenged by the non-white nations. It was this, rather than the influence of public pressures, that underpinned the Wilson government's shift from the ideal of equality to the apparent necessity of integration.

⁷⁹⁶ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 466.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 472.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the Wilson government's approach to race and decolonisation in the period 1964-1970. Although most of Britain's colonies gained their independence before Labour returned to power in 1964, the Wilson government was still faced with the question of Britain's imperial role East of Suez and the seemingly intractable problem of Rhodesia. Moreover, the Wilson government had to address the social, economic and cultural effects of the end of the empire, both at home and abroad. Internationally, senior Labour figures had to outline the role that Britain would play with regards to its former colonies. This was evident in the Wilson government's commitment to the Commonwealth and overseas development. Domestically, senior Labour figures were faced with another legacy of empire—the migration of former non-white colonial subjects to the metropole. Drawing on the claims of the New Imperial History, this thesis has explored the links between the Wilson government's approach to these two issues.

The first chapter provided a historical background to the Wilson government by exploring how senior Labour figures approached the issues of race and empire earlier in the twentieth century. Although senior Labour figures mostly rejected the overt racial ideologies typified by 'scientific' racism, they nevertheless drew on a long-standing liberal approach to empire that justified the continued subjugation of non-white peoples. The characterisation of empire as a 'civilising mission', above all, underpinned the Labour leadership's approach towards empire throughout the twentieth century from Ramsay MacDonald's notion of an 'imperial standard' to Arthur Creech Jones' idea of colonial development as a prerequisite to independence. Africa, in particular, represented for these senior Labour figures a physical and discursive space in which the fires of this civilising mission still burned. The chapter argued that the Wilson government's policy towards the former empire, particularly its vision of development, was a legacy of these earlier approaches.

The second chapter traced the Wilson government's growing disillusionment with the Commonwealth in the period 1964-1967. While the Wilson government entered office in 1964 with a firm commitment to the Commonwealth, this was contingent on Britain retaining a special role as the 'mother country'. This condition stemmed from a narrative, which was popular among senior Labour figures, that cast

British statesmen, particularly in the post-war Attlee government, as the catalysts behind the creation of the multi-racial Commonwealth. This narrative, though, masked the reality in which the non-white nations had to assert themselves in order to force the pace of decolonisation and reshape the Commonwealth association. The chapter argued that the prevalence of this narrative among Labour leaders in part explains the Wilson government's indignation at the political challenges it faced from the Commonwealth, especially the criticism that the non-white members levelled at Britain's Rhodesia policy at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meetings of 1966. This was epitomised by Wilson's complaint that Britain was being treated as if it were 'a bloody colony'. Consequently, once it became clear that Britain could no longer control the association and dominate its former colonies, the Wilson government's interest in the Commonwealth soon diminished.

The third chapter looked at the Labour Party's changing approach to immigration in the period 1964-1968. While scholars have traditionally focused on the impact of events such as the Smethwick election, this chapter has instead situated Labour's immigration policy within the broader context of the party's shift away from the Commonwealth in this period. Although senior Labour figures initially defended non-white immigration as part of their broader ideological commitment to the Commonwealth, as Labour's vision for the Commonwealth began to wane, concerns about the possible impact of immigration controls on the Commonwealth relationship seemingly became less important to Labour policy-makers. Crucially, the difficulties that supposedly emanated from integrating former colonial peoples into British society reflected the Labour elite's own assumptions regarding non-white races, which were shaped by the legacies of empire. This chapter has also argued that the Wilson government's approach to immigration was symptomatic of a deeper issue regarding the meaning of Britishness in the 1960s. While the Wilson government, in theory, promoted a vision of a 'new' Britain that was supposedly divorced from empire, in reality its approach to immigration suggested the enduring sway of an imperial conception of Britishness based on white racial kinship. Significantly, at the same time as the Wilson government introduced tougher

restrictions on non-white immigrants, senior Labour figures continued to support a racialised 'British World' linked together by 'ties of blood'.⁷⁹⁸

Thus, while the Labour Party formally endorsed the multi-racial association, senior Labour figures seemingly could not shake off a more archaic vision of the Commonwealth as a 'white man's club'. This was especially evident in the Wilson government's immigration policy. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968, by extending controls to citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies without a proven 'close connection' to Britain, created a distinction between white Commonwealth citizens who could claim lineage with Britain and non-white Commonwealth citizens who could no longer claim to be 'British'. This racialised separation of the Commonwealth later became official when the Heath government introduced the Immigration Act of 1971, which brought the concept of 'patriality' into British immigration law. Interestingly, this Act came into force on 1st January 1973, the same day in which Britain joined the European Economic Community and, in so doing, allowed the free movement of EEC members to Britain. Smith and Marmo argued that 'it is evident from these two events that the concerns of the British government were not necessarily to do with labour migration as the door was opened for potential European workers'.⁷⁹⁹

A key assumption at the heart of the Wilson government's policy was that hostility towards non-white newcomers would only subside if the number of immigrants coming to Britain was significantly reduced. This was epitomised by Hattersley's maxim that 'without limitation, integration is impossible'.⁸⁰⁰ However, in 1968, long after the Labour Party had abandoned its opposition to immigration controls, the issue of race in British politics again came to the fore when Enoch Powell delivered his 'rivers of blood' speech. Although Powell received a lot of criticism for the speech and was dismissed from the Shadow Cabinet, opinion polls and surveys during this period suggest that the 'rivers of blood' affair had an impact on the British electorate. In Butler and Stokes' election survey of 1970, 57 per cent now believed that the Conservatives were more likely to keep immigrants out

⁷⁹⁸ Arthur Bottomley in Emigration to Commonwealth Countries, HC Deb, 26th March 1964, vol.692 cc742-745, *Hansard*.

⁷⁹⁹ Smith and Marmo, "The Myth of Sovereignty: British Immigration Control in Policy and Practice in the Nineteen-Seventies," 344.

⁸⁰⁰ Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations*, 229.

compared to just 4 per cent who thought Labour.⁸⁰¹ This represented a sizable shift from the 1964 survey when 26 per cent thought that the Conservatives were most likely to keep immigrants out compared to 19 per cent who thought Labour.

Interestingly, this change in public perception occurred at a time when the two parties' policies became more aligned following the Wilson government's introduction of tougher restrictions. Butler and Stokes attribute this seeming paradox to the strong anti-immigrant feeling voiced by Powell. In a 1968 Gallup poll, 74 per cent said that they agreed with what Powell said in his speech.⁸⁰² Butler and Stokes argued that though Powell was 'far from the spokesman of his party, it is hard to doubt that he had succeeded in associating the Conservatives with opposition to immigration in the public mind'.⁸⁰³ These findings suggest that it was perception rather than policy that informed the British public's attitude towards immigration and race in this period, thus undermining the idea that tougher restrictions would ease racial discrimination. As Peter Alexander put it, 'immigration control was expected to reduce racism. The reverse happened. And with increased racism came further controls'.⁸⁰⁴ Nevertheless, while Powell's views may have garnered sympathy from significant sections of the British public, this does not necessarily mean that immigration was a major issue for the electorate. A key contention of this thesis is that such fears of racial tensions and electoral backlashes reflected the Labour elite's own prejudiced assumptions about the difficulties supposedly posed by integrating non-white former colonial peoples into British society, a legacy of empire.

In response to Powell's speech, Wilson had declared a 'battle against racialism' that stretched from 'Birmingham to Bulawayo'.⁸⁰⁵ However, just as the Wilson government seemingly failed to quell the racial bias at the heart of Britain's immigration policy, it appeared powerless to stop the Smith regime from maintaining white minority rule in Rhodesia. The Wilson government's sanctions campaign proved ineffective in bringing down the rebellion and it was not until 1980 that Zimbabwe finally gained independence under majority rule following a long guerrilla

⁸⁰¹ Butler and Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice*, 461–464.

⁸⁰² Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, Great Britain: 1937-1975*, 1976, 2: 984–985.

⁸⁰³ Butler and Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice*, 303–308.

⁸⁰⁴ Peter Alexander, *Racism, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Bookmarks, 1987), 34. Quoted in Smith and Marmo, *Race, Gender and the Body in British Immigration Control: Subject to Examination*, 35.

⁸⁰⁵ Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70: A Personal Record*, 524-528.

war fought by rival nationalist groups.⁸⁰⁶ The Wilson government was criticised, particularly by the non-white nations, for allowing 'kith and kin' sympathies to influence their response to UDI and the issue almost caused a rupture in the Commonwealth relationship. Although Wilson managed to ease Commonwealth tensions by issuing a communique at the 1966 conference that reaffirmed Britain's commitment to NIBMAR, the perception of Britain in the dock at the Commonwealth clearly did not sit well with a Labour elite that expected Britain to play a dominant role in the association. This moment, together with the creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat, symbolised Britain's diminishing role as the head nation.

This notion of the Commonwealth moving away from British control was manifested in the Singapore Declaration issued by the assembled leaders at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1971. The declaration outlined the core principles that were common to all Commonwealth members. Significantly, this included opposition to 'all forms of colonial domination and racial oppression'.⁸⁰⁷ This declaration thus affirmed the Commonwealth's official shift from a white-dominated club to a multi-racial and equal association in which Britain would no longer hold a special status. In later years, the Commonwealth would incorporate new members such as Mozambique and Rwanda with no former constitutional links to Britain.⁸⁰⁸ Therefore, even historic ties to the British Empire were removed as a criterion of membership. This does not mean, however, that the Commonwealth was no longer an institution in which Britain could play a leading role. In 2013, Gambia quit the Commonwealth claiming that it will 'never be a party to any institution that represents an extension of colonialism'.⁸⁰⁹ Thus, despite the significant changes that took place in the period covered in this thesis, the perception of the Commonwealth as a continuation of British influence over its former colonies still remains. This is arguably also evident in the enduring concept of overseas aid and development. Some

⁸⁰⁶ Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African Peoples Union and Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union. For the Zimbabwe War of Liberation, see Paul L. Moorcraft, *The Rhodesian War: A Military History* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2008).

⁸⁰⁷ Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, Issued at the Heads of Government Meeting in Singapore on 22nd January 1971 (Commonwealth Secretariat: Pall Mall, London, 1971).

⁸⁰⁸ Mozambique joined in 1995 and Rwanda in 2009.

⁸⁰⁹ 'Gambia quits the Commonwealth', *The Guardian*, 3rd October 2013.

scholars have linked modern concepts of international security, development and humanitarian intervention to 'the historical artefacts and strategies of empire'.⁸¹⁰

While scholars such as Ward, Webster and Schwarz have examined the enduring impact of empire in 1960s Britain through the prism of British society and culture, this thesis has instead explored this theme through the actions and attitudes of key figures at the high-political level of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Labour leaders, like the British public, had to come to terms with a world in which Britain was no longer an imperial power. This was especially problematic on the issue of race. Despite the end of formal empire, senior Labour figures still believed that Britain had a duty to help the social and economic development of its former colonies, particularly in Africa. Although grounded in apparently good intentions, this policy was imbued with racist assumptions of Britain as a paternal force responsible to the supposedly backward peoples of the world, a legacy of the 'civilising mission'. This racialised discourse even manifested itself in Labour's domestic policy as the Wilson government implemented a strategy of 'limitation' and 'integration' to cope with the 'problem' of non-white immigration.

⁸¹⁰ Duffield and Hewitt, *Empire, Development & Colonialism*, 1–3. Also see Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert* and James Midgley and David Piachaud, eds., *Colonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011).

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