Post-war British society has witnessed a very significant inward migration of people from the ‘New Commonwealth’, and the complex diaspora this immigration has created in many British cities is widely recognized as having fundamentally altered British society. Some observers have emphasized the positive aspects of the change, suggesting that the new kinds of identity and forms of living which it has produced have resulted in a transition towards an ethnically plural society. Others, while welcoming the changes, have drawn attention to the inequalities experienced by ethnic minorities and the persistence of racism in daily life, and in the major institutions of British society. The role of the state, and the ways in which ‘the race card’ has been played in British politics, have from the outset been the subject of extensive and often heated debate.

A key focus of this debate has been crime and policing. In 1979 the Institute of Race Relations raised policing as a central issue for ethnic minorities in Britain. It concluded that there was powerful evidence to suggest that arrest and police powers were being used to keep the black community in its place both physically and psychologically. In 1983 the Policy Studies Institute extended this finding by examining the operation of the ‘sus’ law. This law (originally instituted to control the working class in the early nineteenth century) made it a criminal offence to be ‘a suspicious person loitering with intent to commit a crime’. The PSI established that a disproportionate ratio (8:1) of young black men were being stopped, compared with young white men of the same ‘crimeogenic’ age.

A central theme of the racialization of crime, and the criminalization of Afro-Caribbean youth in the 1970s and 1980s, was the construction of ‘mugging’ as a threat to British society, and as a crime committed by young black men. The media, the police, the courts and politicians succeeded in importing a racialized
concept from the United States to ‘explain’ street crime. Street crime, well-known in British cities since the days of Dickens and Mayhew, was redefined as a feature of ethnic minority behaviour. As a result the campaign to reform the ‘sus’ law became a central component of Afro-Caribbean community politics and campaigns throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.

In the early 1990s the issues of ‘immigration’, ‘race relations’ and a ‘threat to the British way of life’ resurfaced with new force. There was now a shift of focus, from the ‘threat’ posed by ‘black’ culture to the ‘threat’ posed by ‘Islam’. The Conservative MP Winston Churchill asserted that ‘the population of many of our northern cities is now well over 50 per cent immigrant, and Moslems claim there are now more than two million of their co-religionists in Britain’. He developed a local campaign about this in the north-west of England, arguing that the time had come for the government ‘to come clean on this issue and to crack down firmly on all illegal immigrants’. The Manchester Evening News polled its readers with the question ‘Is he right?’ The paper received more responses to this question than on almost any other issue: 96 per cent of respondents said Yes. In 1995 the erstwhile social democrat Paul Johnson reflected on results such as these and gave voice to the core theme of the cultural Right – the story of an ‘island people’ betrayed. In his opinion,

The smouldering anger among the British people reflects the view that they believe that they have been lied to twice. The first time was in the late Forties and Fifties when a flood of Commonwealth immigrants arrived without anyone asking the British electorate if they were welcome. Within a generation, fundamental changes had taken place in the composition of the nation and we had become a multi-cultural, multi-racial society without any of us being give the smallest choice in the matter. The only prominent politician who told the truth about this invasion was Enoch Powell. Despite his gifts, his political career came to an abrupt end and never again did he hold office. His demise acted as an effective deterrent on anyone else speaking the truth.

This kind of interpretation held considerable sway as New Labour reached office in 1997. Right-wing Conservative politicians, egged on by a significant section of the tabloid press, would be tempted in defeat to seek popularity by endorsing it. Tony Blair’s New Labour party, in contrast, presented itself as differing radically from ‘Old Labour’ as well as from the Conservatives in laying a new emphasis on social inclusion, individual responsibility and incentives – defining features of the Third Way. So how the new government responded to the anti-immigrant campaign would be a key test of its credentials as a progressive, anti-racist party.

BREAKING NEW GROUND: THE STEPHEN LAWRENCE INQUIRY AND POLICING

Rhetorically, New Labour embraced multiculturalism – especially in its exotic aspects. The doors of Number 10 were opened to rock stars and footballers and
cultural practitioners of all colours. Multi-culturalism added an important cosmopolitan flavour to Blair’s idea of ‘a young country’. The conflictual field of ‘race relations’ thus presented the new government with some significant challenges if its claim to stand for a new, ‘Cool Britannia’ was to be justified.

A major focus for these challenges was a public inquiry established by the incoming Home Secretary, Jack Straw, into matters arising from the 1993 murder of a young black man, Stephen Lawrence, in south London. The injustice and police incompetence revealed in various accounts of the police investigation of the murder, and the way in which Stephen Lawrence’s Afro–Caribbean parents had been treated, had given rise to a sustained demand for a public inquiry and became a key issue in the 1997 General Election. New Labour promised that if elected, it would ensure that an inquiry was held. The inquiry, chaired by Sir William Macpherson, reported in 1999 and reached the damning conclusion that the investigation had been ‘marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers’.7 The report confirmed the view of David Muir, representing senior Black church leaders, that ‘the experience of black people over the last thirty years has been that we have been over-policed and to a large extent under-protected’.8 There was, it said, ‘inescapable evidence’ of a severe ‘lack of trust … between the police and the minority ethnic communities’.9

The Report’s adoption of the idea of ‘institutional racism’ broke new ground. It cited extensively a statement submitted by the race relations expert Robin Oakley, who wrote that

The term institutional racism should be understood to refer to the way institutions may systematically treat or tend to treat people differently in respect to race. The addition of the word ‘institutional’ therefore identifies the source of the differential treatment … The production of differential treatment is institutionalized in the ways the organisation operates … institutional racism in this sense is in fact pervasive throughout the culture and institutions of the whole of British society.10

The Inquiry itself advanced a somewhat narrower definition. In its view, institutional racism consisted of

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour that amounts to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.11

The sources of these deficiencies were not identified, but the condition was seen as pathological. Institutional racism was a ‘disease’ that ‘infested’ organizational life and culture.

The Macpherson Inquiry’s conclusion that ‘institutional racism’ (however conceived) was a fact of life brought the question of racism into public debate
in a new way. In flatly contradicting the opinion of Lord Scarman, in his report on the Brixton riots of 1981, the Macpherson report can be seen as progressive. But the scale of the problem it was acknowledging was vast.

In the first place, as of 1998 only two per cent of all officers in England and Wales were drawn from ethnic minorities, although the latter accounted for over five per cent of the population; in Scotland the figure was 0.2 per cent. Promotion to senior posts is consistently more limited for ethnic minority officers, who also have a much higher incidence of resigning or being dismissed. Internal inspections have drawn attention to a ‘canteen culture’ of sexist and racist banter, an antagonistic attitude towards equal opportunities, and outright harassment. In 1995, in a much-publicized case, Simon Holdaway resigned from the police having been an officer for eleven years. In his analysis of his experiences he focused on this ‘canteen culture’ and the difficulties it created for cooperative work between white and ethnic minority officers.

The problems faced by ethnic minority police officers mirror those experienced by black and Asian people in their daily dealings with the police. Since April 1993 all police forces have been required to publish annual figures on the ethnic origin of all those stopped and searched. In its 1995 analysis of these data Statewatch found that black people were much more likely to be stopped and searched than white people. Its report concluded that:

> These figures confirm what black people have known for some time, i.e. that they are being targeted by the police. There is a concern that we are seeing the return of the old ‘sus laws’ which were repealed in the early eighties, and which led to the very serious distrust between the police and the black community. This concern is greater because of the enhanced Stop and Search Powers contained in the Criminal Justice Act.

The Macpherson Inquiry also carried out a comprehensive analysis of the figures for 1996/97. Some of its findings were astonishing, including the fact that black people were 7.5 times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched, and 4 times more likely to be arrested. In some places (mainly London and the northern cities) the disparity in treatment was even more extreme. In fifteen selected areas, the police had arrested the equivalent of one in five of the total black population aged ten or over. A similar pattern related to sentencing policy in these areas, where the numbers of black people sent to prison following sentence was proportionately four to seven times greater than the corresponding numbers of white people.

This pattern of mistreatment and ‘over-policing’ is also evident in the use of police violence. The first people to die as a result of the introduction of the long-handled baton and CS gas were black. Deaths in police custody show the same pattern too. Police assaults against black people, or use of excessive force, have been so widespread that an increasing number of civil actions have been taken out against the police, and in particular against the Metropolitan Police. The
annual amount of compensation paid out by the Met increased from £393,000 in 1986 to £1,560,000 in 1995. The damages awarded to one man in March 1996 were a record £220,000.19

When the Institute of Race Relations gave evidence to the Macpherson Inquiry, it was thus amply justified in speaking of a ‘discriminatory pattern of policing’, pointing out that the impact of current police practice was twofold. First, racial discrimination in policing stereotypes whole sections of the black community, especially young people, as involved, or potentially involved, in criminal activities, ranging from street robbery (so-called ‘mugging’) and drug-dealing through to violent public disorder. Second, because of its focus on supposed black criminality, policing in the black community tends to downplay the position of black people as victims of crime and the significance of those types of criminal activity (e.g., violent and racist assaults) which most adversely affect them.20

The conclusions of the Macpherson inquiry did not go quite so far. But they did go beyond identifying institutional racism as something confined to police investigations of crimes. Macpherson saw the ‘stop and search’ data as worrying, along with the failure of the police to investigate seriously a number of ‘racial incidents’. More generally the report tackled the question of ‘canteen culture’ and the training of the police. In these ways, broader and more worrying trends were hinted at, and following the government’s acceptance of the report significant changes have been introduced in police training, and in efforts to recruit and retain officers from ethnic minorities.

But with crime and immigration being kept at the top of the political agenda by right-wing politicians and newspapers, resistance to change has also been strong. Claims have been made that the recommendations of the Macpherson report are hampering police activity and that many police officers have become afraid of the consequences of arresting members of ethnic minorities. Yet when in May 2002 the Home Secretary announced new measures to deal with street crime he noted that while the use by the police of stop and search powers declined by 17 per cent in the year up to April 2001, the number of black people stopped increased by 4 per cent. As The Guardian’s Home Affairs correspondent Allan Travers commented: ‘The new figures dispel the myth that the police have retreated from using powers to stop and search black people because of a fear of being branded racist’.21 In this atmosphere, a weakening of political will was evident within the New Labour government. Blair’s claim, in April 2000, that ‘our record on race relations is exemplary and one we are extremely proud of’ needs at least some qualification as far as the government’s record on policing is concerned.22

**DISCRIMINATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET**

Since the 1960s a series of reports have documented racial discrimination within British society.23 It was hoped that with the passage of time the labour and housing markets would adjust to accommodate the new immigrant minorities. It is not clear, however, that markets have operated in this way. While the first generation of workers established themselves within the labour forces of large
factories and public corporations, they were unable to do so in ways that gave them economic security. A study undertaken for the New Labour government by the Cabinet Office described the employment experiences of these workers as ‘a depressing story of continuing disadvantage’. Shamit Saggar, who led the research, described how after adjusting for age, language fluency, education and a range of other possible explanations for under-performance at work, the research team kept coming back to racial discrimination in the workplace as the key explanatory factor.24

Despite a generation of race relations legislation these patterns of wage inequality persist. The largest wage gap exists between the earnings of white men and those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi background and the narrowest is between white men and those of Indian background.25 The Financial Times noted that by the autumn of 1994 the unemployment rate for ethnic minorities was almost two-and-a-half times as high as that for whites; in 1984 it had not been twice as high.26 The Cabinet Office study even found the chances of ethnic minorities being jobless were higher in the tight labour markets of 2000 than they had been for whites a decade earlier, when the economy was in much worse shape. These patterns are reinforced by the fact that minority ethnic groups are concentrated in low paid and vulnerable sectors of the economy and so were particularly badly hit by the recession of the early nineties.

The patterns of discrimination discussed above have been replicated over time, leading people to talk of a ‘cement roof’ rather than a ‘glass ceiling’ above ethnic minority employees.27 In no sector of enterprise did ethnic minorities constitute more that 0.5 per cent of employment in management occupations.28 Historically, the expectation has been that the professions (especially those in the public sector) will provide a more even playing field for members of ethnic minorities. But even those with academic qualifications have found advancement in these fields difficult. Evidence consistently points to the operation of institutionalized racism in the health service, the legal profession, the civil service, higher education and local authorities.29

The ‘Asian corner shop’ and the ‘Indian restaurant’, on the other hand, have become an established part of British life, and the Indian and Pakistani immigrants who run them have been commonly supposed to be repeating the experiences of previous groups of migrants (notably Jews and East Europeans) who made a niche for themselves in retailing before extending their entrepreneurial activities into other branches of industry and commerce. But while some South Asian family firms are becoming established as successful medium-sized companies, most are small businesses, 42 per cent have no employees at all and have been described as an ‘economic dead end’.30 In explaining why people stay in such ‘dead ends’ the Policy Studies Institute concluded in 1996 that perceived and experienced patterns of discrimination in labour markets had been a strong influence.31 This was particularly the case amongst businesses owned by people of Pakistani origin, 56 per cent of whom indicated that they were self-employed because they felt that discrimination in the job market
limited their opportunities (compared with only 8 per cent of Indian origin). Over half the people contacted did not want their children to take over their business, and the fact that this was least true of people of Pakistani background suggested that they were most likely to perceive the next generation as suffering from a similar lack of opportunity as themselves. In the nineties this issue became a source of inter-generational conflict as young people became increasingly dissatisfied with the options available to them, and with their parents’ strategy of de facto ghettoization – a conflict exacerbated by the recent expansion of superstores offering 24-hour opening and Sunday trading, leading to an estimated decline of 25 per cent in the number of family-run Asian corner shops over the past decade.

In assessing New Labour’s record in grappling with discrimination in the labour market it thus unfortunately appears that its commitment to the free operation of markets has been greater than its political will to intervene as powerfully as it needed to against the forces of institutionalized racism. As a result, when commenting on the mounting evidence of discrimination, John Monks, the General Secretary of the TUC, declared with some justice ‘that racism still blights the working lives of thousands of black and Asian people’.

**THE NEW RACISM**

Similar patterns of discrimination exist in other aspects of social life, including public services such as housing, education, health care and so on. Taken together, the data go a long way towards supporting the thesis that a ‘racist attitude permeates society on the individual and institutional level, covertly or overtly’. However the data also reveal complex patterns of differentiation between ethnic minority groups.

For one thing, the ethnic minority population has changed over time. In many cases we are talking of individuals who were born in the UK and who speak with broad regional accents. While these people (and their parents and grandparents) have experienced racism in their daily lives, they have not been simply victims. They have adapted and developed social relationships in the context of UK society and in doing so they have changed it in a variety of ways. An obvious example is to be found in cuisine. British diet has been transformed over the past thirty years and the availability of a wide variety of ethnic foods has been a major influence. The overwhelming presence in the retail economy of people of Bangladeshi origins reflects their dominance of the ‘Indian restaurant’ trade, serving 2.5 million customers every week. To them is due the creation of ‘chicken tikka masala’ (a dish unknown in ‘India’), described by Robin Cook in 2001 as ‘Britain’s national dish’. Marks and Spencer now sells 18 tonnes of this pre-packed meal every week. Similar innovative contributions to British culture have come from British ‘Indians’ – or ‘Indian Britons’ – in the media, from films like *Bhaji on the Beach* to popular television series like *Goodness Gracious Me*. It is ultimately in these ways that British multi-culturalism has really been created, and presented as an historical fact.
And as the society has changed so has the nature of racism. Here the shift has been from a coherent set of ideas that organizes people into a hierarchy of biologically defined races, to one that emphasizes and makes symbolic certain cultural features. In this cultural form, racism operates under many guises. It becomes intertwined strongly with ideas of nation and national identity. Important here is the way in which the British Empire (strongly ordered on lines of biological racism) ended, and the questions that this left about the ‘place of Britain in the world’. As the 1990s progressed, this discourse was developed and brought to bear in complex ways on Muslims, economic migrants and ‘asylum seekers’ (always, it seems, with the prefix ‘bogus’). These developments were based partly on a move from biological to cultural racism. Muslims were attacked not because of their ‘race’ or the colour of their skin but because of their religion, because of the practice of arranged marriages, and latterly because of the association made between Islam and terrorism.

This stretching of racism to include such cultural and political attributes developed alongside a growing xenophobia that was also brought to bear upon the thousands of white people arriving dispossessed on the shores of the UK in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In reflecting upon this phenomenon Sivanandan has written of ‘xeno-racism’:

… a xenophobia that bears all the marks of the old racism, except that it is not colour-coded. It is a racism that is not just directed at those with darker skins, from the former colonial countries, but at the newer categories of the displaced and dispossessed whites, who are beating at western Europe’s doors, the Europe that displaced them in the first place. It is racism in substance but xeno in form – a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white.

A racism that once flourished on the football terraces, with bananas being thrown at black players, now flourishes on the streets as Islamic women become fearful of wearing head-scarves and Croatians too become victims of wanton violence.

If a week is a long time in Labour politics, three years is an epoch; and the years that followed the publication of the Macpherson Report were especially long ones in political time. Street crime, ever salient, became more and more a cause for concern for ‘middle Britain’, and this was played out in the tabloid press at a time when the issue of immigration came, once again, into the forefront of the public mind. New Labour responded with an increasingly tough stance that culminated in the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act and its subsequent amendments. If the Macpherson Inquiry marked the high point of new Labour’s policies, this was its low, the basis of Nick Cohen’s depiction of Cruel Britannia.

One of the features of the new world order that replaced the Cold War has been the large numbers of displaced peoples moving around the world in search of a better and safer life. These flows of people, packed into rusting ships and lorries, have moved northwards and westwards where they have been systemat-
ically repelled by the concerted armoury of ‘Fortress Europe’. In ways that are
difficult to contemplate, people still arrive and it is in its response to this crisis that
New Labour has revealed its reactionary side. Seemingly driven by the violent
rhetoric of the Tory right wing, New Labour attempted to put a stranglehold on
migration by instructing its Embassies in key states not to issue visas, and by intro-
ducing severe penalties to punish any carrier of ‘illegal immigrants’ into the UK.
Illegal immigrants and asylum seekers were to be dealt with summarily; some-
times held in special centres and provided not with money but with vouchers
(asylos) that could be exchanged only for food in supermarkets, and for which
they could receive no change. Deprived of cash and the legal status of a worker,
many of these people turned to begging, others to crime, encouraging calls for
even harsher treatment and demands for their expulsion.

The problem undoubtedly came to dominate the public mind in the late
nineties. Bill Morris, the moderate black General Secretary of the Transport and
General Workers Union, attacked the Home Secretary Jack Straw’s policies as
‘giving life to the racists’, creating a climate where ‘the mood music is playing a
hostile tune for black Britons’.41 He attacked the voucher system as ‘utterly
insane’, and was supported by other black leaders. The black Labour MP Dianne
Abbott, for example, told Tony Blair that ‘as a child of economic migrants I took
personal exception to ministers constantly talking about bogus asylum-seekers
and economic migrants as if they are some sort of parasite’. In offering an expla-
nation of these policies she maintained that

Although Jack’s [Straw’s] personal commitment to race relations is quite
strong, when the interests of good race relations clashes with the prejudices
of middle England, middle England wins every time.42

Here we see a classic example of a ‘moral panic’, centred upon the middle
classes but expressed most violently amongst the most dispossessed of white
workers. Poor people, living in poor accommodation in the southern port towns
(especially Dover), complained that the immigrants arriving there were being
treated better than they were. Poor white communities, suffering from economic
dislocation and political abandonment and appalling living conditions, saw
asylum-seekers housed in privately-run, profit-making accommodation in their
neighbourhoods. The asylum-seekers, barred from employment, were a daily
embodiment of media and politician-inspired myths. When they went shopping
local people encountered ‘them’ paying with asylos rather than money, an object
of attention and further proof that ‘they’ were getting everything that ‘we’, the
British, were denied.

Although the ‘they’ in these scenarios were at this point overwhelmingly
white, the validation of an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ politics was clear. The previous poli-
tics had demonized the non–white ‘them’ as the undeserving usurpers who
entered ‘our country’ to take our houses, jobs and benefits. These ideas and senti-
ments were refurbished, reinvigorated and applied to the new influx of ‘illegal
immigrants’ and ‘bogus’ asylum seekers. In port towns like Dover radio phone-
ins were dominated by a growing rhetoric of hatred. The Labour MP for Dover, Gwyn Prosser, explained how ‘ninety per cent, if not all, of the 175 asylum seekers here are unaccompanied minors. I’m not saying that all these young men are criminals … but I talk to people who have lived here all their lives and can now no longer walk down the streets’. These asylum seekers, he adds, ‘do not live in accordance with local people’s social habits’.43

The elements of the problem, and of the moral panic, are all revealed here. All recent estimates of net immigration indicate either a steady state or a decline. Nevertheless, immigration emerged as a major political issue, the shape of which seemed to be agreed by the major political parties. In its first attempts to defuse such tensions (others were to follow), the government opted for a policy of dispersal. Thus over a thousand migrants were, for example, moved into refurbished accommodation in the centre of one of the poorest parts of Glasgow. The local authority had accepted these people because they came with a ‘financial package’ from the central government. Local people viewed this development with intense resentment. Such were the feelings that one of the refugees was murdered in the street. Many of the others talked of being afraid to leave their apartments.

RIOTS, RACISM AND THE POLITICS OF POVERTY

Many facets of the race tragedy in Britain, and New Labour’s role in it, came together in a number of northern cities in the summer of 2001. In the old textile towns of Oldham and Burnley (Lancashire) and Bradford (Yorkshire) riots took place in which young working class men (‘Asians’ and whites) fought each other. Here, and especially in Oldham, the National Front was directly involved in a provocative role, claiming to defend white workers and their families. As a result, in some of the most deprived locations in the UK, the cold reality of ‘multiculturalism’ became clear. In these towns, in the context of the collapse of the clothing and textile industries and a depletion of the public housing stock due to continued privatization policies, multi-culturalism had come to border on separate development.

Among young men from the ethnic minorities in these towns there emerged a sense of grievance … not far beneath the surface. Many … believe that things are harder for them than for their parents, who came to Huddersfield in the fifties and sixties to work in the mills. There are no jobs now and young people are less likely to take any sort of low paid work.

‘No one is going to do us any favours,’ said Nicholas Modeste. ‘The police have attitude, they are more likely to blame us. Politicians don’t do anything for us.’44

And in these same communities white working-class people also looked for an explanation for the dislocation and despair that overwhelmed them. Abandoned by their employers and the state, they increasingly turned to racialized explanations of their situation. These explanations had the validation of ‘common sense’
(‘things were alright before they came’). The policies of local and national governments, and the competitive rules that determined the distribution of inadequate levels of resources, served to reinforce these views (‘They are getting everything around here’). This became the reality of life in the northern towns and cities mentioned above. In these places what one gained the other seemed to lose.

And there is more. Racially/ethnically segregated housing policies played a major role in the development of racially/ethnically segregated schooling in these places. Local authority decisions about school boundaries, the sites of new schools and other decisions made along racial/ethnic lines, also contributed to the development of segregated schooling. We are thus left with the dramatic and sad conclusion of the Independent Review into the Oldham riots:

Whether in school or out of school there are few opportunities for young people across the communal boundaries to mix within Oldham. Except where people have significant contact in the workplace this is the case for adults, too, and relationships between the communities at adult level are largely confined to business transactions (shops, restaurants, taxis). Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and whites simply do not meet one another to any significant degree, and this has led to ignorance, misunderstanding and fear.

The review concluded that this separation had produced a climate of distrust, competition and conflict. This ignorance and misunderstanding was reinforced by government policies which failed to provide investment in physical and human infrastructure to prepare for the decline and later the collapse of the textile industry, or to counter institutional racism in the educational, housing, employment and criminal justice areas. Such interventions as did occur were more often than not ineffective and, worse, involved making different groups, areas, and communities compete for limited funds.

The dominant motif was that of a zero-sum game. Each community saw the causes of their economic and social dislocation in the gains made by the other. In the 2001 General Election the far-right British National Party (BNP – the political and more respectable arm of the militant National Front) stood in many of these northern towns. Here it developed a radical right-wing politics that focused on and identified with the problems of poor white workers, the unemployed and the dispossessed. It voiced and amplified the anger of these neglected white communities. It pointed to the alleged dominance of ‘the others’ and the ways in which they were using legislation and the law to obtain special treatment; ‘better treatment than we get in our own country’.

The BNP not only increased racial tensions in these communities, but provided a vehicle for mobilizing the alienation and betrayal felt by white workers in these areas. In a real way, the BNP is the other side on the New Labour coin. For while New Labour indulged in the rhetoric of multiculturalism and social inclusion, the BNP focused on and exploited the daily material circumstances of a de-industrialized society and its rotting former heartlands.
Here (and in the old coalfield areas too) white workers who once occupied key positions in unionized factories look upon the rubble of their lives in a flexible de-unionized world. With no one to speak up for them they come to hate the politicians. Feeling isolated and unrepresented, their anger can provide the dynamic for racially-constructed interpretations and violent solutions.

In May 2001 all these forces came to a head. Increasing levels of racist violence and fears of more violent National Front invasions of the Asian communities provided the torch to light the powder keg of rage, resentment and racism that characterized life in Oldham. In this context the BNP portrayed itself as the voice of reason, condemning violence but in sombre tones declaring that it merely proved that a multiracial society was not possible. The party gained its highest ever level of votes as a result.

In the 2002 local elections the BNP concentrated their efforts in this area. Nearly 10,000 voters in Burnley cast their ballots for them, and they won 3 seats. Although they did not win any seats in Oldham they contested only five wards and took an average of 28 per cent of the vote in each. In the St James ward the Liberal-Democratic candidate won by a margin of only 3 per cent. They also broke the 10 per cent barrier in 16 of the remaining 48 seats they contested.

In some Northern towns and cities these elections also involved votes for a new position of mayor. In Hartlepool and Middlesborough the established political candidates were defeated by populist independents, like the local football team’s mascot in Hartlepool, campaigning in a monkey suit, and the former chief of police in Middlesborough, cashing in on his reputation for having pursued a policy of ‘zero tolerance’. After these results (and the disaffection from Labour politics that they seem to imply) the Government shelved plans for similar mayoral elections in Bradford and Birmingham, fearing that the BNP might steal victories there. As a ‘senior government figure close to the negotiations’ put it: ‘Giving the BNP a campaign platform in places like Bradford, which had race riots last summer, and Birmingham, cannot be a good idea’.

CONCLUSIONS

These local elections in northern England followed the strong performance of Le Pen in the first round of the French Presidential elections. and were succeeded by the developments in the Dutch elections that led to the assassination of Pim Fortuyn. These defeats for the Left and Centre Left in Western Europe were widely seen as relating to the growing strength of feeling against immigration. Sometimes dubbed ‘Fascist’, the new right-wing populist parties which made these gains are in fact more akin to older forms of reactionary conservatism. Across Europe they share similar concerns. They are opposed to immigration and mostly justify this in terms of the xenoracism mentioned above. They are also militantly opposed to crime, linking it to immigration, and by extension to particular racially defined groups. They claim to speak for the poor and the dispossessed; they are opposed to the elites, the ‘fat cats’ and the ‘spin’ with which comfortable politicians surround themselves.
Anthony Giddens, one of the originators of Blair’s Third Way, declared that New Labour provided the only feasible model for the European left. It needed, he said, to follow Blair’s ‘celebrated intention to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime’, which he described as ‘a major element of New Labour’s rise to prominence’. In his view the slogan now needed to be extended to include ‘policies … which are “tough on immigration, but tough on the causes of hostility to immigrants”’.\textsuperscript{49} How the latter was to be achieved was unclear. Suggested policies here were all ones that stress assimilation rather than multiculturalism. On the former, however, it seems that New Labour needed little instruction from Professor Giddens. The British Home Secretary in the second New Labour government, David Blunkett, followed in the footsteps of his predecessor and focused on issues of crime and immigration almost to the exclusion of all others. On 23 April, 2002, following the first round of the French Presidential elections and before the May local elections in Britain, Blunkett’s officials announced that his ‘tough policies on street crime, immigration and asylum were vital if jaundiced voters were not to abandon the mainstream parties’.\textsuperscript{50} Blunkett himself argued that ‘the centre left must take this fight [against the far right] head on. We cannot face this challenge by ducking hard debate’.\textsuperscript{51} In the elaboration of this ‘hard debate’, however, it becomes increasingly clear that in most instances the ground is conceded to the new populist parties of the right. Hence there is an immigration problem, asylum seekers are a problem, crime is a problem. ‘But we can solve it’.

There is a considerable danger that these policies of toughness will legitimate rather than challenge the new populism. In France, Denmark and elsewhere policies have been developed that attack asylum seekers and refugees and attempt to build security around ‘Fortress Europe’. While politics become increasingly concerned with these issues, the problems of dislocated communities, and complex patterns of racial segregation, racial hierarchy and racial tension go unchallenged. In April 2002 \textit{The Guardian} quoted a white youth in Bradford as asking ‘What is Bradford for? … We’ve got no industry, the place is falling apart and if you want anything worthwhile then you have to go to Leeds’.\textsuperscript{52} The left needs to develop a politics capable of entering this world and dealing honestly and effectively with its problems.

\textbf{NOTES}


9 Ibid., 45.6, p. 311.


11 Ibid., 6.34, p. 28.


18 The Institute of Race Relations identified a pattern of almost seventy deaths of black people in custody between 1987 and 1991. Inquest, a non-governmental organization working directly with the families of those who die in custody, identified thirty-seven Black custodial deaths between 1991 and February 1996 of which fourteen were in police custody. The Institute of Race Relations evidence to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry indicated that 67 per cent of people knew some one who had experienced physical abuse by a police officer; 40 per cent had personally experienced racial abuse from an officer; 78 per cent believed that police treated a crime in which the victim was white more seriously than one with a black victim; and 64 per cent of black inmates said they had witnessed an average of eight incidents over the same period. See Institute of Race Relations, *Deadly Silence: Black Deaths in Custody*, London: Institute of Race Relations, 1991; Inquest, *Racial Discrimination and Deaths in Custody: A Report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*, London: Inquest, 1996, pp. 20-1; Institute of Race Relations, *Online Resources: Institute of Race*

19 Statewatch, May-June 1996, p. 3.
20 Institute of Race Relations, Stephen Lawrence, p. 1.
21 The Observer, March 10 2002.
22 Daily Mail, 15 April 2000.

32 Ibid., pp.125-6.
36 For an earlier account of this development see Martin Barker, The New Racism and the Ideology of the Tribe, London: Junction Books, 1981. For the ways in which these processes impact upon young people see Les Back,


41 The Independent, 14 April 2000.

42 The Daily Telegraph, 15 April 2000.


44 The Observer, 28 July 1996, p. 16.


46 Oldham Independent Review. Report, 2001, p. 8 Similar Reports were produced for Bradford and Burnley where similar riots had occurred and where similar processes were seen to be at work.


48 Sunday Times, 5 May 2002.


51 Ibid.