

Against racism essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Racism never stands still. It changes shape, size, contours, purpose, function, with changes in the economy, the social structure, the system and, above all, the challenges, the resistances, to that system. The racism we are faced with today is not the racism we faced 40, 50 years ago, when we first came here.

Then, post-war Britain was in dire need of our labour - and, to facilitate that, the Nationality Act of 1948 made us all British citizens. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 was the first step towards dismantling that citizenship. What it said, in effect, was that Britain needed our labour, not us. It is at this point, with that first bit of racist immigration legislation, that state racism is born.

And it is the racism of the state - in legislation, in government, and in the criminal justice system - that put the imprimatur on institutional racism and gave a fillip to popular racism. The fight against that institutional racism, which maims and kills and blights the lives of young African-Caribbean and Asian peoples and other minority groups, continues. But there is a new racism abroad in the land, even more virulent and devastating than the ones we have seen before. And this is the racism that is meted out to refugees and asylum seekers irrespective of their colour. This is the racism that is meted out to Romas and Sintis and poor whites from Eastern Europe. This is the racism that pretends to be based on the fear of strangers and gives it the respectable name of xenophobia.

It may be xeno, in that it is directed at aliens, strangers, but it is racism in the way it operates against them. It is xeno in form but racism in content. It

is XENO-RACISM. To fight this racism successfully, however, we have got to understand how it is imbricated, layered, in the processes of globalisation and the anti-terrorist ideology that western powers are instituting through legislation, government and the media. Globalisation refers, of course, to the globalisation of capitalism, brought about by the collapse of Communism, on the one hand, and the technological revolution, on the other.

The first removed all opposition to capital, the second allowed capital to take up its plant and walk to any part of the world where labour is cheap and captive and plentiful. Governments, in turn, helped capital, specifically multinational corporations, to penetrate Third World countries through so-called aid – which bound those countries further into dependency – and by setting up satrap governments (in the name of democracy) that would follow the path of capital. And it is this invasion of Third World countries and of Eastern Europe (once Communist Europe) that has led to repressive regimes, to dictatorships, social disintegration, internecine wars – which, in their turn, have displaced these peoples and brought them as so much debris to the shores of Europe. As a comrade in Sri Lanka said to a conference of European aid-givers: ‘ It is your economics that makes our politics that makes us refugees in your countries.

’ We are here because you are still there. The state under globalisation, under the free market system, under deregulation, privatisation, the move from social welfare to social control and neoliberalism – the market state, in other words, as opposed to the nation state (and within parenthesis, let me say that if the Nation State was the vehicle of industrial capital, the Market State is the vehicle of global capital) is more concerned to serve

multinational corporations and big business than the poor and deprived of our societies. And the social reform it parades is no more than a warding off of the excesses of the market, mediated by spin and a corporate media. Not Britannia but Murdoch Rules the Waves.

) Thus the strategy of successive home secretaries has been first to attack purveyors of ‘airy-fairy civil liberties’, ‘Hampstead lawyers’ and others of their ilk in order to win the backing of a popular press which is already in the business of stoking up popular racism, and then follow it up by saying that the repressive legislation that is being put forward against refugees and asylum seekers and against the deprived generally is on behalf of the populace. The anti-terrorist ideology that has sprung up after September 11 has served to validate that strategy further. This time in the name of the nation, in the name of patriotism, in the name of assimilation. So that everybody who is foreign, especially non-whites and Muslims and Arabs in particular, is, per se a terrorist and is guilty till proven innocent. I once said of black people that we carry our passports on our faces. Today the refugees and asylum seekers have no passports and no faces – they are terrorists.

In recalling the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 we also need to recall the horrendous racism that was visited on us until we fought back and said, ‘We are settlers not immigrants: we are here to stay and here to fight’. We have had the experience of having our children bussed, our womenfolk examined for virginity at ports of entry, of being beaten up in police cells, of being spat upon and degraded on the streets of this country, of being burnt out of our homes, of being deported at the midnight hour without recourse to family, or friend or lawyer. But now, 40 years on, many of us have got

places. We are in the higher echelons of the media, of government, of business, of education.

We are sociologists and police chiefs, ministers and principals of schools. We are now, in this information society, entered into the engine-room of power and yet we do nothing about the refugees and asylum seekers. They are us, 40 years back. We are they, now. To come at it from another direction.

Globalisation has created a unified economic system and September 11 is engendering a uniform political culture.

And together, through the instrument of the market state, they are undermining civil liberties, degrading social relations and wrecking civil society. A free market inevitably destroys workers rights, suppresses civil liberties, and neuters democracy till all that is left is the vote. It dismantles the public sector, privatises the infrastructure and determines social need. It free-floats the currency and turns money itself into a commodity subject to speculation, so influencing fiscal policy. It controls inflation at the cost of employment, it creates immense prosperity at the cost of untold poverty, it violates the earth, contaminates the air and turns even water to profit.

And it throws up a political culture based on greed and self aggrandisement and sycophancy reducing personal relationship to a cash nexus (conducted in the language of the bazaar) even as it elevates consumerism to the height of Cartesian philosophy: ' I shop, therefore I am. ' A free market presages an un-free people. But that very same globalism that serves to produce a unified, monolithic economic system and culture is that which also allows us to create a unified political struggle. Whether we are against war with Iraq,

whether we are for fair (not free) trade, whether we are against the Ilisu Dam project, whether we are for justice for the Palestinian people, whether we are against the degradation of women - whatever the issue that we are involved in, you'll find that it is contaminated by other issues and that they all stem from the one source: globalism and the market state. We need, therefore, not only to unite our struggles but unite our peoples, call our intelligentsia to account, put the technology that instigated globalisation to our own, insurgent use.

But above all, we need to enter into a personal battle against greed and selfishness and the morality of the market place. Who we are is what we do. The political is personal. Thank you.