

Death at the Frontier

Border Control, Migration and the
Workers' Movement

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CARIBBEAN LABOUR SOLIDARITY

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Rear Cover, "To avoid wars, get rid of the borders" *La Vie Ouvrière*", 1914

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Introduction

The Main Enemy Is at Home

The present Conservative government's Nationality and Borders Bill has reignited the discussion about border control and labour migration. The official discussion about immigration concentrates on the needs of the economy and the so-called labour market. In other words the matter is observed from the viewpoint of the employing class.

Caribbean Labour Solidarity, on the other hand, seeks to analyse the situation from a working-class standpoint. This has led us to the conclusion that workers' organisations should welcome migrant workers and concentrate on uniting all workers to oppose capitalism.

Today, the world is in crisis with poverty, famine and war forcing whole populations to seek a new life in richer areas of the world. Meanwhile, hard, militarised borders, such as the Mediterranean, the English Channel and the Arizona desert, are claiming thousands of lives every year. Much of this migration is caused by the detrimental effects of climate change.

Under capitalism there is an international division of labour with a hierarchy in which the most developed capitalist countries exploit the rest through the medium of finance capital and industrial corporations, backed by superior weaponry and fire-power.

One of the accusations against immigrant labour is that they undercut, and thereby reduce, the wages of the workers who are native-born citizens. We argue that the lowering of wages, the increase in hours of work and the deterioration in health and safety standards are the direct result of the failure to stop an employers' offensive based on deregulation, privatisation and outsourcing.

Hard borders exist as much to prevent people leaving their country of origin as to prevent their arrival elsewhere. A cross-border, internationalist working-class movement is needed to fight for a world-wide minimum wage and maximum hours of work, for parity with the best available. Why should a Haitian or Jamaican worker be expected to have a standard of living so much lower than the norm in Europe?

From a working-class point of view, we should not be calling for restrictions on migration, but rather fighting to place the maximum restrictions on capital.

Workers of All Countries Unite!

Nationality and Borders Bill

The narrative about the increasing need for stricter border controls dates back until at least the start of the 20th century and the Aliens Act 1905. It accelerated throughout the decades after the Second World War and during the years of Blair government. It has continued ever since.

It is built on the myth that the United Kingdom has no more space for migrants, whether this is on a geographic or economic basis. This is despite the fact that Scotland and Northern Ireland, in particular, wish to welcome new migrants to support their own economies and in recognition of their own histories of migration. It is also the case that migrant communities contribute more to the UK economy than they derive from it. The narrative has been used to mask a society that increasingly finds racism acceptable, is searching for scapegoats for the consequences of Brexit and in which governments have continued to play the divide-and-rule card to turn workers of different races and origins against each other.

The starting point for discussion about the current bill is the fact that the UK already has a tightly controlled points-based system within which entry is only possible if an individual is a family member, a student, a worker or a business person and can also meet very demanding pre-entry conditions.

Campaigns have quite rightly highlighted the fact that a person who has dual citizenship or potential dual citizenship may be stripped of his or her British citizenship. But this provision already exists in section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981. What the Nationality and Borders Bill includes is a new clause that states that a person can be deprived of their British citizenship without prior notice, if the Secretary of State for the Home Department deems that it is necessary to do so, for example, on grounds of public interest or nationality security. The inclusion of this additional clause is designed to signal that the Government intends to be even tougher on migrant communities.

The larger part of the Bill is a repudiation of many of the UK's international obligations arising from the UN Refugee Convention. Up until now, successive UK governments have sought to juggle the duty, that arises from the Convention, to give due consideration to an application for asylum from any person who manages to land on British soil with the popular narrative that the majority of asylum seekers are just economic and undeserving migrants in disguise. They did so by granting asylum seekers "temporary admission" when they arrived in the United Kingdom, as opposed to "leave to enter", until they had been finally granted refugee status. The Bill will do away with "temporary admission" for this purpose and will make it a criminal offence to merely "arrive" in the United Kingdom without pre-entry leave to do so.

The consequences of this unlawful "arrival" will not be just potential criminalisation. Asylum seekers will also be dispersed to accommodation centres, instead of housing in the community. The very poor conditions in existing centres, such as Napier Barracks, and many of the hotels used for those settled from Afghanistan, suggest that these centres are unlikely

to comply with international human rights law. Those who “arrive” in this way will also be categorised as “second-class” refugees. Therefore, even if they are found to be refugees by the Immigration Service or, subsequently, by an Immigration and Asylum Tribunal after an appeal, they will not be permitted to bring close family dependants to the UK to join them and will not have access to a wide range of social security and other benefits.

The Government relies on its record of settling refugees from refugee camps close to some areas of conflict, principally Syria, and who are granted leave to enter before they arrive. However, persecution and the entitlement to international protection is not limited to these few areas. The total numbers of those resettled in the five years between 2016 and 2020 was 23,651, while in those same years, 157,991 individuals claimed asylum in the UK.

The Bill also contains a number of provisions to narrow the remaining discretion permitted to immigration judges, in relation to how they assess the credibility of accounts given by asylum seekers. This will have particularly negative effects when the person concerned is an unaccompanied child, is someone who has been trafficked and/or suffers from the consequences of trauma or has special educational needs. The Bill also re-writes the definitions for elements of the refugee protection process and, in doing so, ignores decades of decisions by the Supreme Court and lower tribunals that were based on real-life experience of the complexities of asylum law.

Furthermore, the Government has used a migration bill, to reduce the protection offered to those identified as having been trafficked. In addition, by lessening the protection to all asylum seekers, it has increased their vulnerability to being trafficked into and within the United Kingdom.

It also uses the complex challenges of reaching an accurate age assessment of children from a wide range of different cultures and who have faced a myriad of traumas in their pasts, to give the government discretion to use untried and, at times, unnamed “scientific” methods to assess age. This is in the context of a wide range of medical professional bodies stressing that there are no current methods for assessing chronological age, with an accuracy that is closer than plus or minus two years or more. In a move that has become characteristic of this current administration’s distrust of trained professionals, the Government has set up its own Science Advisory Committee of hand-picked “experts” to approve new methodologies in the future, before the Bill has even become law. In much the same way, it is also proposing a National Age Assessment Board, which will arrange for age assessments to be undertaken by social workers employed by the Home Office. This is reminiscent of an increasing trend to place unaccompanied children, who have not been age-disputed, on their own in hotels managed by the Home Office with, at best, visiting social workers employed by the Home Office. Both developments indicate a wish to remove unaccompanied migrant children from the safety of the child protection system.

Border Control, Migration and the Workers' Movement

Despite the many attempts to convince us that modern nations represent historical peoples within their own territory, the notion that states should have defined borders based on maps and mutual recognition has its origins as recently as 1648. The concept of citizenship, with its origins in the French Revolution and an empowering concept in 1848, has, since the end of the First World War, despite conferring some democratic rights on some workers, become a means of social control using passports and ID cards, as well as being a source of division among workers with different rights, from health care to residency, dependent on often arbitrary allocations of citizenship. Today, the world is in crisis with poverty, famine and war forcing whole populations to seek a new life in richer areas of the world and the hard, militarised borders, such as the Mediterranean and the Arizona desert, claiming thousands of lives every year. Much of this migration is caused by the detrimental effects of climate change, but while individual nation states have control over extraction and emissions within their borders, it will be much more difficult to take the necessary steps to control global warming.

Rather than representing historical peoples within their own territory, the system of modern nations with defined borders based on maps and mutual recognition has its origin with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 at the end of the Thirty Years' War. Thus, the oldest formal borders are only a few hundred years old. Yet, despite its recent provenance, the nation state has become the basic unit of territorial division throughout the world, with nearly everyone assigned as a citizen of a particular nation, with those classified as "stateless" deprived of nearly all basic rights. The concept of the nation has become a powerful ideological tool in the hands of the ruling classes of the world and it is overwhelmingly accepted that individual citizens have a duty of loyalty to their country, giving them certain rights and duties denied to "foreigners". With a few exceptions, the organisations of the Labour and Socialist movement have fitted themselves into this framework, despite some internationalist rhetoric on Mayday. Modern nation states represent a system for maintaining political control of a defined territory, backed up by the threat of violence.

Harsha Walia describes the overarching nature of border controls as "border imperialism" - a process of capitalist accumulation aided by the criminalization of migrants, the production of racialised national identities and the denial of legal permanent residency and citizenship to migrants. "Border controls are used to deter those for whom migration is the only option to the plundering of their communities and economies due to the free license granted to capital and the military." ¹

1. Walia, Harsha. *Undoing Border Imperialism*. Oakland: AK Press, 2013.

Geography

Geography proved a key science in the formation of 19th-century nation states, and had a close association with the technical, regulatory needs of those in power. The professionalisation of geography and its incorporation as an academic discipline were direct consequences of rising military and economic nationalism. Without a reliable national map, government cannot politically reorganise its territory. States need maps to enforce their rule. The practical science of surveying has always been a mechanism to establish national territorial rights and private property against the previously existing commons, which did not need surveying as everyone knew the common rights and transgressors of the local customs were subject to community discipline.

But, as well as a tool for colonial-settler expansion, a national map also has ideological power. It serves to define a space within which the ruling class could claim legitimate rights to rule. If a map were simply a representation of reality, then a national map by definition presupposed the existence of the nation itself. US officials relied upon a kind of cartographic determinism to justify their imperial pretensions. The early maps of the USA show a clear boundary to a vast area that was merely claimed and was in fact populated by a host of Indigenous peoples, most of whom were only vaguely aware of the existence of a so-called United States of America.

At the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, the British government forbade the territorial expansion over the Appalachian Mountains by their colonial subjects in the North American colonies. "We shall avoid many future quarrels with the savages by this salutary measure," said General Thomas Gage, who commanded all British forces in North America. The dispute over their intended expansion into "Indian Territory" became a key grievance in the US War of Independence, particularly as the hated "Stamp Act" was levied on the colonists to finance the extra British troops needed to restrict their settlement area. The wealth of the slave owners of the Southern colonies relied on gaining access to more and more land as they depleted the soil with intensive monoculture and so they defied the proclamation, taking survey teams into the "wilderness" to map the territory for future settlement and the expansion of slavery. George Washington, so-called "Father of the Nation", who led many of these expeditions, was well known as a slave owner and speculator in new lands for slave-based production.² But the nation state required more than brute force, it needed the science of geography both to delineate its boundaries and to provide ideological justification. Of course, maps are vital for anyone who wishes to travel in unfamiliar territory, but their very utility serves to justify their ideological function. The USA gained control of the area within its self-proclaimed borders by a war of genocide against the native inhabitants and, in order to populate this territory, encouraged one of the only examples of state-sponsored mass free movement of labour in history as European settlers were allowed to colonise the land vacated by the extermination of the "Indians". This process of colonisation was accompanied

2. Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. "Settler Colonialism and the Second Amendment" *Monthly Review*, February 2018, 26–32.

by a process similar to the enclosures of common land that took place in England from the 17th to the 19th centuries.³ The Homestead Act of 1862 started to divide the "public land" of the West into private property reinforced by barbed wire. It is ironic that European refugees from the defeat of the revolutions of 1848 would fuel the expropriation and destruction of the First Nations of the Americas. A similar process occurred in the Southern Cone as Argentina and Chile spread into the lands of the Mapuche. But, once the replacement of the Indigenous population by colonial settlers had been completed, free-movement of labour was again restricted.

Immigration Law

The "Indian Wars" came to an end with the Massacre at Wounded Knee and the murder of Sitting Bull in 1890, while the first major restriction of immigration from Europe to the USA came the following year with the 1891 Immigration Act, although immigration from Asia had already been prohibited.

In 1882, with the support of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the US Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, halting the entry of Chinese immigrants into the country and in 1908, Japanese immigration into the US was also banned. In 1907, on behalf of the US Socialist Party leadership, Morris Hillquit and Victor Berger proposed that a resolution be sent to the Socialist International calling for a campaign against "the wilful importation of cheap foreign labour calculated to destroy labour organizations, to lower the standard of living of the working class, and to retard the ultimate realization of socialism".

Hillquit, defending the US Socialist Party's resolution to the Stuttgart congress of the Socialist International, argued that unlike "natural immigration" from Europe, "capitalism's importation of foreign labor cheaper than that of native-born workers" is "a pool of unconscious strikebreakers". He asserted: "Chinese and Japanese workers play that role today, as does the yellow race in general.... Do we want to grant privileges to foreign strikebreakers when they are locked in struggle with native-born workers? If we fail to take measure against the importation of Chinese strikebreakers, we will thrust the Socialist workers' movement backwards."

It is indeed strange to hear the AFL and the right wing of the US Socialist Party decrying strikebreakers when they were never known for their industrial militancy. Eugene Debs, leader of the American Railway Union, which received no support from the American Federation of Labor during the Pullman Strike of 1894, defended the rights of Chinese immigrant workers and described the Chinese Exclusion Act and the position of those who supported it as "utterly unsocialistic, reactionary, and, in truth, outrageous".

3. Linebaugh, Peter. *Stop, Thief!: The Commons, Enclosures, And Resistance*. Oakland: PM Press, 2014.

Wages

One of the accusations against immigrant labour is that they undercut, and thereby reduce, the wages of the workers who are native-born citizens, either by working for low wages or strike-breaking. This argument was used in support of the anti-alien resolution at the 1895 British TUC conference in Cardiff. There was a robust response from a number of predominantly Jewish trade-union organisations in the form of a pamphlet entitled *A Voice from the Aliens about the Anti-alien Resolution of the Cardiff Trade Union Congress*. This summed up the class nature of immigration control by saying:

We have been informed by the Press that a deputation of the organised English working men met the Government and laid before them many resolutions that were passed at the Cardiff Congress. Of all that was asked, only one thing was granted. It is this: That all alien exploiters, swindlers, blacklegs, drunkards, idlers of all sorts who HAVE money are welcomed here; but that skilful, industrious, honest working men, who have either been out of work for a long time, or have been locked out by their masters for taking part in strikes and boycotts, and therefore have NO money, shall be prohibited from coming here.⁴

This was launched at a mass meeting in London addressed by Eleanor Marx, Ben Tillett and Peter Kropotkin.⁵ Immigration restrictions were first introduced in the UK in 1905 following a campaign in the yellow press in which the term "traitors" figured prominently, accompanied by a campaign of antisemitic violence in the East End of London. In the debate, the Liberal MP John Burns opposed the restrictions and argued that the way to stop sweated labour was through regulation of hours and the abolition of subcontracting.⁶ A resolution of the 1908 congress of the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT - General Confederation of Labour) stated:

In view of the fact that geographical frontiers can be modified at the whim of the possessing classes, workers recognise only economic frontiers, those separating the two enemy classes: the working class and the capitalist class.⁷

In 1907, at the Stuttgart Congress of the Socialist International, in response to a motion from the US, Australian and Dutch delegations calling for the restriction of the immigration of "backward races", the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD - *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) supported a resolution to campaign for "abolition of all restrictions that prevent those of particular nations or races from residing in a country or which exclude them from, or prevent the exercise of, the social, political and economic rights of the nationals". The resolution affirmed that the only way to overcome the difficulties caused by immigration was through organising the immigrants and through securing legislation granting them equal political and economic rights. Such activities, coupled with the passage of legislation for

4. Independent Tailors, Machinists, and Pressers' Union. et al.. *A Voice from the Aliens about the Anti-Alien Resolution of the Cardiff Trade Union Congress*. Clerkenwell Green: Twentieth Century Press, 1895.

5. Wayne, Larry. *Union Bread. Bagels, Platzels and Chollah: The Story of the London Jewish Bakers' Union*. London: Socialist History Society and the Jewish Socialists Group, 2009 p. 36.

6. Foot, Paul. 1965. *Immigration and Race in British Politics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. pp. 93-96.

7. We are grateful to Ian Birchall for this quotation. Levine, Louis, 1912, *Syndicalism in France*, New York, AMS Press.

minimum wages, maximum hours and the regulation of sweated industries, would eliminate most of the difficulties.⁸ Writing in the newspaper *Proletary* after the Congress, Vladimir Lenin criticised the "petty-bourgeois narrow-mindedness" of the US Socialist Party's support for restricting immigration from China saying: "This is the same spirit of aristocratism that one finds among workers in some of the 'civilised' countries, who derive certain advantages from their privileged position and are, therefore, inclined to forget the need for international class solidarity."

Then as now, the lowering of wages, the increase in hours of work and the deterioration in health and safety standards are the direct result of the failure to stop an employers' offensive based on deregulation, privatisation and outsourcing. The real villain is the British capitalist, not the Polish plumber.

Internationalism or National Organisation

There is a tradition of internationalism articulated by Karl Marx in his address to the 1867 Lausanne Congress of the International Workingmen's Association, in response to the Dundee flax and linen mill owners outsourcing production to Bengal:

A study of the struggle waged by the British working class, reveals that in order to oppose their workers, the employers either bring in workers from abroad or else transfer manufacture to countries where there is a cheap labour force. If the working class wishes to continue its struggle with some chance of success, the national organisations must become international. Let every worker give serious consideration to this new aspect of the problem, let him realise that in rallying to our banner he is defending his own bread and that of his children.⁹

Ever since the collapse of the International Workingmen's Association in 1876, most Socialists and Communists have organised themselves in separate national parties. This left them bound within the limitations of the nation state. The adoption by the Soviet Union of the principle of "Socialism in One Country" tied much of the Communist movement to working within the rules imposed by nation states and their borders. This policy was in part forced upon them by the defeat of the German Revolution and the resulting isolation of the Soviet Union but, especially in its later forms, this approach meant the sacrifice of the movement elsewhere to the perceived national interests of USSR.

Equally, following the defeat of the revolutionary wave that followed the First World War, the German Social Democrats, now in government, abandoned their Stuttgart resolution and accepted the policy of "primacy for nationals" so that foreigners could be hired only when no German workers were available. The admission of foreign workers was to be monitored by commissions composed equally of representatives of management and unions. These class-collaborationist measures helped undermine organised labour by incorporating the unions

8. Kipnis, Ira. *The American Socialist Movement 1897-1912*. Chicago: Haymarket, 2005, pp. 277-8.

9. Smith, John. *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century: Globalization, Super-Exploitation, and Capitalism's Final Crisis*. New York: Monthly Review, 2016, p. 40.

into the machinery of nationalist discrimination and by strengthening the line of demarcation between foreign workers and "citizens".

There were direct, detrimental consequences arising from the labour movement accepting the legitimacy of the nation state. Thus, we see the roots of the defeat of the 1919 US Steel strike in the division between the US citizens in the more skilled trades and the mainly immigrant, unskilled strikers, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of nativist patriotism in undermining solidarity. Compare this with the success of the Lawrence textile strike in Massachusetts, led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) in 1912, when the resolutely internationalist IWW distributed its propaganda in 16 languages.¹⁰ The IWW was the only union organisation operating in the USA that firmly opposed the Chinese Exclusion Act 1882 and it is significant that the "Wobblies" had sections in Australia, Canada, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand and South Africa. Anti-racism and internationalism were a significant factor at the IWW founding convention. For example, Canadian-born John Riordan travelled 2,000 miles from the Kootenay region of British Columbia to attend. When it was suggested that the new union be called the "Industrial Workers of America" Riordan objected to the implied national chauvinism, saying that many workers in Canada "realize the fact that they must be cosmopolitan in a matter of this kind. They do not want to recognize international boundary lines. I for one do not".¹¹

Samuel Gompers, founding leader of the AFL, had been particularly concerned by competition from the IWW and wholeheartedly supported President Woodrow Wilson's ruthless campaign of state repression against them. In 1916, Gompers represented "labour" on the Council of National Defence, the body aimed at putting the US economy on a war footing and, in 1917, at government behest, tried to persuade the Mexican government to join the war on the US side. Aware that the IWW was recruiting in Mexico, in 1918 he helped set up the Pan-American Federation of Labor (PAFL) in an alliance with the Mexican trade-union federation, the *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM - Mexican Regional Confederation of Workers). This cross-border initiative had support from the US government via \$50,000 from the President's "special fund", thus setting a pattern of collaboration between the AFL and the US state that continues to this day. The PAFL quickly turned its attention to combatting Communism, which replaced the IWW as the main "Red menace".

The PAFL appears at first sight as an international organisation, but in reality it was a binary alliance between two nationalist organisations, the AFL and the CROM, both working for what they considered to be their own "national interest", but with a common enemy,

10. Yellen, Samuel. *American Labor Struggles 1877-1934*. New York: Pathfinder, 1974.

11. Cole, Peter, David Struthers, and Kenyon Zimmer, eds. *Wobblies of the World, A Global History of the IWW*. London: Pluto, 2017, p. 157.

working-class radical internationalism. The CROM had been founded earlier in 1918 at a congress of labour delegates that had been called by Mexican President, Venustiano Carranza, in an attempt to break the Mexican working class from its traditionally anarchist politics. The nationalist ideology of the leaders of the new confederation tied it to the government, which kept their loyalty by increasingly blatant corruption. By the time President Calles decided in 1928 that he no longer needed the CROM, the rejected union leadership had lost all respect among the rank-and-file and were unable to organise any defence. There are those who criticise the inability of the IWW to maintain a stable organisation, but at least they went down fighting and left a generation of militants ready for future battles. The CROM had served their purpose of tying the Mexican workers to nationalist class-collaboration and then disappeared with hardly a whimper.¹²

In stark contrast to this, from 1915 to 1930, IWW members organised alongside local Anarchists and Communists in the Mexican port of Tampico and, in July 1917, this coalition of 15,000 workers in the city, organised a strike for wage equality between Mexican and US workers. Cross border organising was a significant factor in this success, as was the activity of the militant seamen of the Philadelphia based Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union. So when the US government repression of militant workers organisations reached its height in 1919, the workers of Tampico sent £11,000 to the defence fund in Chicago and later, in 1921, demonstrated outside the US consulate in Tampico to protest against the frame-up of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian-American working-class militants executed on trumped up charges.¹³ Needless to say, the Mexican and US authorities were united in their attempts to prevent such cross-border solidarity. The Los Angeles newspaper *Regeneración* contains reports of union activists caught between the *Rurales*, the Mexican federal police, who would have shot them as insurrectionists if they found them in Mexico, and the vigilantes who were burning down their union halls in the USA.¹⁴ Most trade union organisations are nationally based and generally place the defence of workers in their home countries above international solidarity and, as a result, are not even very effective at defending their own members. True there are international federations for most trades, but they are mainly toothless bureaucracies that are unwilling and unable to coordinate militant action on an international level.

The major exception to this pattern was the anti-Nazi activity of the International Transport Workers' Federation, the ITF, led by its General Secretary, Edo Fimmen. From

12. Trejo Delarbe, Raúl, "The Mexican Labor Movement: 1917-1975," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1976, pp. 133-153.

13. Aguilar, Kevan Antonio. *The IWW in Tampico: Anarchism, Internationalism, and Solidarity Unionism in a Mexican Port*, in Cole, Peter, David Struthers, and Kenyon Zimmer, eds.. *Wobblies of the World, A Global History of the IWW*. London: Pluto, 2017, pp. 124-139.

14. Rosenthal, Anton. "Radical Border Crossers: The Industrial Workers of the World and their Press in Latin America", *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, 2011, vol. 22, no. 2.

1933 onwards, it organised and supported illegal underground resistance groups among German seafarers, dockers, barge workers and railway workers, all of whom at different points helped smuggle anti-Nazi propaganda to an underground network. Fimmen's emphasis was the illegal organisation and activity of rank and file trade unionists, maintaining contacts with sympathisers and exploiting 'bread and butter' daily issues, to draw other workers towards the anti-Nazi struggle. During the Spanish civil war, the ITF were involved in supporting the anti-fascist forces in Spain. ITF shop stewards aimed to stop or delay military and other supplies reaching the Francoists. The ITF leadership also collected funds to support families of fighters who had died on the anti-fascist front.

But the main history of internationalist working-class organisations is to be found in more unofficial structures. The Red International of Labour Unions helped set up the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, initially run by George Padmore out of the Hamburg docks. Hakim Adi and Margaret Stevens have recently published books that tell the story of this initiative and the seamen and dockers who built international links of solidarity.¹⁵ Christian Høgsbjerg tells us of the seamen who resisted the racism of the British National Union of Seamen and their policy of allowing lower pay rates for colonial seafarers.¹⁶ Vicente Perez, a Cuban Communist organiser spoke in an interview of the dockers of Caibarién in northern Cuba who, in the 1950s were fighting the mechanisation of sugar loading. They were in regular contact with the dockers of Liverpool who were similarly struggling against the introduction of the fork-lift truck.¹⁷ Militant seamen provided the link between these and many other port struggles.

Neocolonialism

However, the workers' movement in a colonial, neo-colonial or otherwise subordinate country cannot be expected to renounce nationalism without first having seen practical anti-imperialist solidarity from the workers in the imperialist countries. It is hardly surprising that James Connolly led the Irish Citizen Army into the Easter Rising alongside the nationalists in 1916 given the complete failure of the British Trade Union Congress to fight for Irish freedom.¹⁸ Nowhere in the history of the British Empire did the British trade unions take an unequivocal stand for the self-determination of the colonies against their own government.¹⁹ Such "social-chauvinist scoundrels", as Vladimir Lenin so picturesquely called them, played an essential role in justifying the imperialist expansion of the European and North American

15. Stevens, Margaret. *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939*. London: Pluto, 2017.

Adi, Hakim. *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2013.

16. Høgsbjerg, Christian. *Mariner, Renegade and Castaway: Chris Braithwaite*. London: Redwords and SHS, 2013.

17. Interview with Steve Cushion, Havana, 2009.

18. Bell, Geoffrey. *Hesitant Comrades: The Irish Revolution and the British Labour Movement*. London: Pluto Press, 2016, pp. 1-22.

19. Nicholson, Marjorie. *The TUC Overseas : The Roots of Policy*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1986.

powers. In 1924, Sydney Olivier, a leading Fabian who became Secretary of State for India in the first Labour government, wrote:

There can be no reasonable question of locking up these sources of wealth because certain barbarous tribes, as a result of the migration of centuries, are found in this day and age sparsely inhabiting the countries which can produce them.²⁰

This brings us to the difference between imperialist nations and their colonies and ex-colonies. While nearly all borders are created by war, the borders in the colonial empires were created both by invasion and by inter-imperialist rivalries. The Treaty of Berlin of 1884 divided up Africa. The period immediately after the First World War saw the Middle East divided by the Sykes-Picot agreement and the Balfour Declaration, with no consideration for local political and economic structures, languages, cultures or traditions.²¹ These arbitrary boundaries are still maintained in the face of any logic or justice by the United Nations, which represents a direct continuation of the concept of states with hard borders that started with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The lengths to which the UN will go to maintain existing borders is demonstrated by the case of the Republic of Somaliland, seen by the UN as merely an autonomous region of Somalia. Yet Somaliland is a stable entity with democratically elected governments, while the internationally recognised state, Somalia has been in a state of chaos and civil war for years. Of course, recognising Somalia's borders does not stop the US air force from regularly bombing any Somali target they choose with considerable civilian loss of life, nor prevent the Kenyan army making regular military incursions. The alleged sanctity of international borders is tempered by the older principle of "might is right".

Nations Without States

Israel has the most complete border fencing and security network in the world. The West Bank does not follow the boundaries of the state of Israel that are recognised by the United Nations; 80 per cent of the route is built on land that the Israeli Defence Force conquered and occupied after the 1967 Six-Day War. The wall is only part of the expansion process, which goes alongside the construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The settler movement argues that biblical Israel included all of the land from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River and the government has encouraged the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Israelis into Gaza and the West Bank as part of a process of gradual annexation. The result of these practices over the past forty years is that large sections of formerly Palestinian land have been transformed into Israeli land. Palestine is not a member of the United Nations, so its territory is not formally established.²² Sykes, Picot, Balfour and the system they established in 1918 have a lot to answer for. The UN wrings its hands but, given the support

20. Gupta, Partha Sarathi. *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964*. London: Palgrave, 1975. p. 32.

21. Fromkin, David. 2001. *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Owl Books.; Regan, Bernard. 2017. *The Balfour Declaration, Empire, the Mandate and Resistance in Palestine*. London: Verso.

22. Jones, Reece, 2017, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, London: Verso, p.41

Israel receives from the major imperialist powers, nothing is done.

Thus, the United Nations system maintains the racist oppression of many "nations without states", such as the Kurds and Armenians, or Palestine and Western Sahara. The organisation's name includes the word "nations", but the reality is that the UN is run by and through sovereign "states". Although nation and state are often used interchangeably, they refer to different entities. A state is a political institution with a bureaucracy, territory, borders, laws and a monopoly of legitimate violence. A nation is a group of people who perceive that they have a shared connection to each other and to a land that entitles them to political control over that territory. There are many examples of groups such as the Kurds that consider themselves to be nations but do not control an independent state. Such peoples are frequently the victims of racial discrimination and oppression.

During and after the First World War, Turkish armed forces and militias systematically subjected Armenians, Jews, Greeks and Assyrians to genocidal atrocities. The Kurds are seen to be particularly disloyal and are perceived as a threat to the cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic hegemony that underpins Turkish nationalism. They have been a target of the Turkish regime for decades and Turkey currently has one of the highest percentages of political prisoners in the world. A large proportion of these prisoners are of Kurdish heritage.²³

Just as the post-colonial Third World has maintained the old imperial boundaries , imperialist property relations have also, with very few exceptions, been maintained. The capitalist state and the ideological construct of the nation are inextricably linked, so when the new ruling classes of the post-colonial states sought to gain admittance to the world capitalist pork-barrel, the nation state became the obvious vehicle. For every Patrice Lumumba, there have been twenty of Hastings Banda: those they cannot suborn, they kill. Migrants from artificial nation states, the remnants of European colonialism, are then denied the right to move to Europe to escape the consequences of the boundaries that Europe left behind.

If it is to be successful, the demand for free movement of labour and a removal of hard borders will have to originate in the heartland of empire and it needs to be clear that it does not apply to colonial-settler states. The role of free movement of European labour to the USA up to the 1890s was, as mentioned above, encouraged as part of the expropriation and genocide of the Native Americans. Similarly, the White Australia policy and the £10 immigrants from Britain came on the back of a similar expropriation and genocide of the Aboriginal Australians, while European immigration to South Africa and Rhodesia had the purpose of reinforcing White supremacy and apartheid. The Israeli "Law of Return"

23. Dag, Veysi, "The Looming Genocide against the Kurds: History Should Not Repeat Itself", *Open Democracy*, 17 July 2020

reinforces the robbery of Palestinian land, just as Moroccan migration into the Western Sahara is designed to disenfranchise the Sahrawi people and undermine the Polisario Front.

But it does not have to be like this, the worldwide support of international labour of the Anti-Apartheid Movement was a significant factor in ending formal White domination of South Africa. As Vijay Prashad said of Ronnie Kasrils's recently published *International Brigade against Apartheid*, "To read this book is to both remember the past and to recognise what needs to be built in the present".²⁴

Division

Borders and immigration control represent much more than internal social control and attempts at racist "divide and conquer". Under capitalism there is an international division of labour with a hierarchy in which the most developed capitalist countries exploit the rest through the medium of finance capital and industrial corporations, backed by superior weaponry and fire-power.²⁵

Hard borders exist as much to prevent people leaving their country of origin as to prevent their arrival elsewhere.²⁶ Trump's wall is only partly about demagogic appeals to the apparent self interest of demoralised US workers who gain a crumb of comfort from their status as "American Citizens". It is just as much intended to keep poor Mexican workers south of the border where their low wages and poor conditions can be exploited by US big business. The increasing number of deaths of migrants at dangerous border crossings and perilous sea journeys serves as a dreadful warning to would-be migrants thereby helping to maintain cheap labour regimes in the Third World. The two aims are not contradictory, those who arrive without papers or with limited work permits are potential cheap labour, while those who are enclosed in their country of birth provide a different pool of cheap labour. The key to breaking this cycle is cross-border, internationalist workers' organisation.

A cross-border, internationalist working-class organisation would fight for a world-wide minimum wage and maximum hours of work, for parity with the best available. Why should a Bengali worker be expected to find it acceptable to have a standard of living so much lower than the norm in Europe? So-called "Fairtrade" has become a marketing tool that perpetuates low wages for workers and rock-bottom prices for farmers throughout the Third World. The average hourly wage on Fairtrade banana plantations in the Dominican Republic is 38 pesos per hour, less than 60 pence an hour, in Ghana 1.91 cedis, just over 30 pence an hour. In

24. Kasrils, Ronnie, *International Brigade Against Apartheid: Secrets of the People's War that Liberated South Africa*, Auckland Park: Jacana, 2021.

25. Ticktin, Hillel. "Marxism, Nationalism And The National Question After Stalinism." *Critique*, 2005, 33 (1), p. 21.

26. Jones, Reece. 2017. *Violent Borders, Refugees and the Right to Move*. London: Verso. pp. 127-135.

Colombia, they are doing slightly better at 6,376 pesos per hour, worth £1:63.²⁷ It takes real chutzpah to call such wages "fair".

Borders define the edges of different regulatory spaces and limit the movement of labour, thus creating pools of low-paid workers in areas with minimal environmental and labour regulations. Perhaps the worst example of this is the Bangladesh textile industry, where workers are paid unimaginably low wages for crippling long hours with such poor health and safety regulation that the whole factory has been known to collapse, such as the Rana Plaza building disaster, when 1,135 people were killed through the greed of their employer. Corporations operate across borders, workers and regulations are contained by them. Walmart, Primark and the like are big enough to bully and corrupt governments into reducing even further their country's already low wages, conditions and environmental protection. The ancient land of Bengal is divided between two nation states, Bangladesh and India, with the result that those who this artificial border keeps confined to Bangladesh are amongst the most exploited and oppressed workers in the world. Yet there is always someone worse off, the Rohingya people of northern Myanmar, accused of being "Bengalis" by the nationalist government of Aung San Suu Kyi, are deprived of citizenship and kept in vile oppression by means of a border created by British Imperialism. Thus post-colonial citizenship and colonial borders conspire together to deprive people of their civil rights and allow a corrupt ruling class to stay in power by pitting one group of disenfranchised poor people against another.

Capitalism and the State

The state was essential for the development of industrial capitalism and the nation state has become the standard pattern for political organisation the world over. British trade networks set the standard that other imperialist nations were obliged to follow, everything from a strong navy to financial instruments such as bills of exchange, which facilitated the transfer of capital over large distances. This state forged and protected global markets, regulated industry, created and enforced private property rights in land, created legal structures to enforce contracts over large distances and to collect taxes, thereby building a social, economic, and legal environment that made the exploitation of labour possible. Without a powerful state capable of legally, bureaucratically, infrastructurally, and militarily dominating its own territory, industrialization was impossible.²⁸ But, given that there were several competing imperialisms, militarised borders became essential for the control of the national territory. Already in 1884, Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* writes of the state arising from within the dynamics of a society riven with class conflict and that the state divides its subjects "according to territory" and "establishes a public power" that is separate from the population organising itself as a

27. Rijn, Fedes van, Lucas Judge, Ricardo Fort, Tinka Koster, Yuca Waarts, and Ruerd Ruben. 2016. *Fairtrade Certification in the Banana Hired Labour Sector*. Wageningen: Fairtrade International. pp. 42, 57, 69.

28. Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2014.

military force, as special bodies of armed men.²⁹ Vladimir Lenin goes on to speak of the state as a "parasitic organism" with "two institutions peculiar to bourgeois society, the bureaucracy and the standing army". In the intervening 100 years since he wrote those words, both the state bureaucracy and the standing army have grown beyond all recognition and are particularly noticeable along the border.³⁰ However, without the ideological justification of nationalism, all this firepower would be insufficient. What is also needed is the feeling amongst the mass of the population that the nation is somehow "ours".

Nativism

The Black members of the US delegation to the 6th Congress of the *Communist International* in 1928 were strongly critical of the neglect of work amongst African Americans and they gained a sympathetic hearing in Moscow. This was the same congress which adopted the "Third Period" thesis, which condemned social democracy as "social fascism". The Third Period has a deservedly poor reputation, with the common opinion being that the sectarian divisions between the German Communists and Social Democrats paved the way for the rise to power of the Nazis. The Third Period, by blurring the distinction between fascism and bourgeois democracy, ignores the reality of workers' rights obtained under capitalism. However, this looked rather different when viewed from the point of view of those who didn't have those rights in the first place - colonial subjects and oppressed races. The 6th Congress resulted in a change of leadership in the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) and the beginning of serious agitation work among African Americans in the US South.³¹ In turn this led to a similar change in orientation in the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), which began equally serious agitation amongst Cubans of African heritage as well as British West Indian and Haitian immigrant sugar workers in Eastern Cuba.

In August 1933 the Machado dictatorship in Cuba faced a massive general strike which had started amongst Havana bus drivers and spread like wildfire. The general strike continued until an army mutiny led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista removed Machado and installed a university professor, Ramón Grau San Martín, as President, and the radical nationalist Antonio Guiteras as Minister of the Interior. The overthrow of the dictatorship was accompanied by a wave of industrial action in the sugar industry. In many places the strike advanced into an occupation, with strike committees, supply committees and militias. Many of the strike committees in the occupied plantations adopted the title "soviet", although this was mainly giving a name to what they were already doing.³² In the end, the army managed to crush the sugar workers' insurgency. But it was not repression alone that brought it to defeat; divisions between native Cubans and immigrant workers from the British West

29. Engels, Friedrich. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Chicago: Charles Kerr, 1902, p. 129.

30. Lenin, Vladimir. *The State and Revolution*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970, pp. 10-12 & 34.

31. Zumoff, Jacob. *The Communist International and US Communism 1919-1929*. Chicago: Haymarket, 2015, pp. 330-352.

32. Carr, Barry. "Mill Occupations and Soviets: The Mobilisation of Sugar Workers in Cuba 1917-1933". *Journal of Latin American Studies*, v. 28, n. 1, 1996.

Indies and Haiti also played a role. The nationalist government of Ramón Grau introduced a Law for the Nationalisation of Labour, which provided that all firms must employ at least 50 per cent native Cuban labour, and began to deport British West Indian and Haitian immigrants. Far from being "cheap labour", many of these immigrants had become important local working-class leaders. In theory directed against the privileged position of Spanish workers in the economy, the 50 per cent law enabled politicians to channel Cuban workers' demands into merely seeking employment at the expense of the foreign-born rather than fighting for genuine socialist advances. Many Cuban workers of African heritage supported this measure and the divisions weakened the sugar insurgency in some key areas. In this racist backlash that derailed the 1933 Cuban revolution, most of the British West Indian workers were deported to Jamaica. However, some of those migrant workers escaped deportation and would play important roles in rebuilding the Cuban working-class movement. At the port of Nuevitas, for example, the leaders of the dock workers were mostly Jamaican and Haitian.³³ The Cuban Communist Party resolutely opposed the 50 per cent law from a principled anti-racist position and while this alienated many workers, it did attract a significant minority of class-conscious Black Cubans.³⁴ These Black workers were vital to the rebuilding of the Cuban trade-union movement in the 1940s with the General Secretary of the new union confederation, the *Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos* (CTC, Confederation of Cuban Workers), as well as the leaders of the Sugar Workers Federation and the Havana dockers all being of African heritage.

Border Patrol

The first US border controls were set up in 1904 and operated along the border with Mexico. Literacy tests and a head tax was imposed on Mexican immigrants in 1917 and the US Border Patrol was founded in 1924 as, tellingly, an agency of the United States Department of Labor. With the onset of the Great Depression, between 1929 and 1934, 1.8 million people of Mexican heritage were deported from the USA to Mexico, 60 per cent of them US citizens. The US government imposed restrictions for immigrant labour, requiring firms that supplied the government with goods and services to refrain from hiring immigrants, and most larger corporations complied. As a result, many employers discharged their Mexican employees and few hired new Spanish speaking workers.³⁵ Mexican labour migration was encouraged during the labour shortage of the Second World War under the name "Operation Bracero", but from 1948, the deportations increased with 2 million deportations between 1952 and 1954, offensively entitled "Operation Wetback".

33. Fuente, Alejandro de la. "Two Dangers, One Solution: Immigration, Race, and Labor in Cuba, 1900-1930." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 1997, no. 51 p. 44.

34. Rojas Blaquier, Angelina. *El Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba 1925 – 1935*, Santiago: Editorial Oriente, 2005.

35. Balderrama, Francisco, and Raymond Rodriguez. *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*. Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2006.

The increasing militarisation of the border had considerable advantages for the agricultural employers of the region. Cheap labour could be obtained, health and safety regulations could be ignored and "troublemakers" who tried to unionise their fellow workers could be tagged as "Communist undesirables" and easily removed over the border.³⁶ Not that Chicano migrant workers have proved a soft target for the employers and their allies. In 1903, Mexican and Japanese farm workers started to unite to fight for better wages and better working conditions. In 1913, the IWW organised a rally of two thousand farm workers at a large ranch in the rural area of Northern California. The National Guard attacked this assembly and, despite the majority of the violence coming from the guardsmen, two IWW organisers were arrested, convicted of murder, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Organising campaigns continued, including a strike in Imperial Valley, California in 1928, despite agricultural workers being exempt from the National Labor Relations Act 1936, which gave most other US workers the right to join unions.

The *United Farm Workers* was formed in 1966 following strikes the previous year. It gained some success at first, most notably the "Texas Strike" of 1966, and the 1971 lettuce strike in the Salinas Valley, California in the face of scabbing by the notoriously corrupt *International Brotherhood of Teamsters*. However, the union went into decline as its leadership concentrated on opposing illegal immigration rather than attempting to organise migrants.³⁷ The border served to both produce a super-exploited workforce on the USA, whose basic rights were denied because they were illegal immigrants, as well as keeping others south of the border where they could be employed by US corporations at lower wages and with none of the labour rights current in the USA.

Operation Bracero came to an end in 1962, but very quickly the Mexican government introduced the "Border Industrialization Program" which enabled US corporations to set up assembly plants or *maquiladoras* which import material and equipment on a tariff-free basis for assembly, processing, or manufacturing and then export the finished product back to the USA. Duty is only paid on the "value-added" during manufacture or assembly and the profits are exported back to the USA. The big attraction for the employers is the high unemployment in Mexico and the resulting much lower wages.

The hard border between Mexico and the USA and the welcoming environment for foreign capital investment has produced another problem, a phenomenon that Dawn Pawley calls "Drug War Capitalism".³⁸ The vast profits to be made from smuggling drugs into the USA has turned the border into an economic resource accompanied by an increase in the

36. Mitchell, D. *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

37. Shaw, Randy. *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

38. Pawley, Dawn. *Drug War Capitalism*. Oakland: AK Press, 2015.

murder rate and a strengthening of paramilitary police forces. The system works through complicity between the state and criminal gangs. In a downward spiral of repression, we see a similarity between old-style counter insurgency and modern counter-narcotics military training. It is only possible for the cartels to move tons of illegal drugs, launder billions of dollars and maintain an organisation of thousands of armed men with political and police protection as well as alliances with the financial services industry. For example, Wells Fargo Bank has admitted that its Wachovia unit was involved in money laundering for drug traffickers. It allowed money to be transferred in and out of *casas de cambio*, without proper due diligence, in violation of the Currency and Foreign Transactions Reporting Act of 1970. In March 2010, Wachovia agreed to pay a \$160 million fine for involvement in Mexican drug cartel money laundering that could total up to \$420 billion.³⁹ The *maquiladoras* attract migrants to the area, then only pay them \$3 a shift. The illegal drug market offers much better opportunities, while the cartel gunmen and corrupt police can murder anyone who tries to organise either in the factory or in the community. Given the extraordinarily high level of murder in northern Mexico, getting rid of a socialist or trade union organiser is easy and cheap, while the terror inspired by the crime cartels and the paramilitary police prevents community organising; the conditions in which public assembly might be possible do not exist. Meanwhile, despite the militarised border, the amount of illegal drugs arriving in US cities shows no sign of diminishing.

The Border in Ireland

The British-drawn border between Ireland and Northern Ireland was an inevitable concession to the centuries of settler colonialism practised by the British in Ireland. It also reflected the privileged economic circumstances that had developed in Ulster and which benefitted, not only business owners and share-holders, but also the Protestant working class who had preferential access to employment opportunities and, in particular, skilled jobs. Partition and the creation of the so-called Orange State initially cemented these differences.

More recently, Ireland benefited economically and culturally from its membership of the European Union, while Northern Ireland continued to suffer from its geographical and economic position in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom and the demise of its remaining industries. The EU funding that Northern Ireland received did not revive these industries but tended to increase opportunities in tourism, community projects and service industries. Many people in the Protestant heartlands did not have the necessary skills to take advantage of this. Centuries of reliance on easy access to skilled jobs in industry had rendered them ill-prepared for changes in a high-tech and service economy.

This was the economic background to the majority of voters in Northern Ireland voting to remain in the EU and the Loyalist community becoming a minority view in this debate. Social attitudes also played an important role in the vote to remain in the EU, with the

39. Vulliamy, Ed. *Amexica: War Along the Borderline*. London: Vintage, 2011, pp. 308-9.

majority supporting same-sex marriage, abortion rights and an increasing number recognising the need for measures to tackle climate change and provide public services. Again, in all of these debates, hard line Loyalist opposition to change was increasingly a minority view, which was more aligned with a British government seemingly driven by 19th-century values and prejudices.

It is in this context that a United Ireland has once more become a focus for discussion throughout the island of Ireland and the British border is now more than ever seen as a barrier to social and economic progress. Academics, trade unionists, politicians and community activists are all playing their part and 'the red and the green' are working closely together in a manner which James Connolly dreamt of before his untimely execution by the British.

Class struggle

If we examine the history of the idea that migrant workers cause wages to fall for native born citizens, we see that, throughout the history of the British labour movement, it has been those very immigrants who have frequently rejuvenated the labour movement in their land of adoption. The strikes by the predominantly Irish dockers and match women in London during the 1890s won wage rises and inspired a wave of industrial militancy that led to a rising standard of living for native British workers and immigrants alike.⁴⁰ When West Indian and Asian bus-workers were recruited directly from their homelands by London Transport, it had been the employer's intention to pay them a lower rate. The insistence by the Transport and General Workers' Union on strict equality was repaid by these migrant workers who became enthusiastic supporters of the union. It was a commonplace that, during the heyday of the London Transport bus worker during the 1970s and '80s, the main defence of wages and conditions depended on the militancy of the Inner London garages, which had a much higher proportion of immigrant workers. The worsening of wage rates and hours of work in the 1990s was as a result of the failure of the trade union bureaucracy to fight deregulation and privatisation.

In some cases, British trade unions, despite some fine words from the Trade Union Congress, colluded with employers to keep Black and Asian workers as second-class industrial citizens.⁴¹ There is considerable literature on the failings of the trade unions in this regard, whether it be the refusal of Bristol bus crews to accept Black colleagues or the betrayal of strikes such as Mansfield Hosiery or Stanmore Engineering.⁴² The positive contribution made to the development of British trade unionism by migrant workers is much

40. Raw, Louise. *Striking a Light: The Bryant and May Matchwomen and Their Place in History*. London: Continuum, 2011; Charlton, John. *It Just Went like Tinder: The Mass Movement and New Unionism in Britain*. London: Redwords, 1999.

41. TUC, *Trades Union Congress Report – 1955*, p. 148.

42. Lindsey, Lydia. "The Split-Labor Phenomenon: Its Impact on West Indian Workers as a Marginal Working Class in Birmingham, England, 1948-1962", *The Journal of African American History*, 2002, Vol. 87, pp. 119-145.; Sivanandan, A. "From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean struggles in Britain", *Race and Class*, XXIII, 1981, 2/3 pp. 111-152, pp. 138-9.

less well represented in the academic literature. While Bill Morris, who finally became General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, is the most high-profile example, a disproportionately large number of Black West Indians have been active in the trade union movement in a tradition going back to William Cuffay who led the London Chartists in the 1840s. The pattern that emerges is one where class-collaborationist trade union organisations, which did not provide adequate representation to their White members, would permit racist practices to continue, while those who sought to build united, militant organisations would take up the grievances of all workers, regardless of ethnic origin. Many migrants were already well versed in trade union principles by the traditions of struggle in the land of their birth.⁴³ Thus, in the face of the racism represented by Peter Griffiths in Smethwick, the Indian Workers' Association organised the predominantly Punjabi workforce in the Birmid foundry into a militant union organisation. Some of the leadership of the Indian Workers Association in the West Midlands had been specially sent by Communist organisations in India to assist in the task of organising these migrant workers. Workplace solidarity proved to be a significant step in overcoming racial prejudices in many White workers, particularly where they were involved in joint strikes in multiracial workforces.⁴⁴ The inspirational effect of Jayaben Desai and the Grunwick strikers has become legendary. "We have shown," she said, "that workers like us, new to these shores, will never accept being treated without dignity or respect. We have shown that White workers will support us."⁴⁵ In 1992, the Commission for Racial Equality reported that there was a "link between greater involvement of Black trade union members and effective union organisation".⁴⁶

Welfare

Of course, the capitalist state is more than just "armies, police and prisons". There have been enormous gains for working people as the class struggle has forced the ruling class to concede health and welfare provision as well as regulations such as the minimum wage, maximum hours of work and the prohibition of child labour. This has become a frontier in itself as the bourgeoisie push back these gains in times of weak labour organisation while in times of working-class advance, to quote Quentin Hogg in 1943: "If you do not give the people reform they are going to give you social revolution." As David Matthews poses it: "By investing in healthcare, education, and housing, among other services, the welfare state supports the expansion of surplus value through its ability to reproduce and maintain the quantity and quality of labor power and its productive capacity.....While Marxist scholars have rightly demonstrated the advantages that welfare provision offers capitalism, it must also be acknowledged that many of the state's welfare services are the product of hard-

43. Interview with Denzel Parker, TGWU representative at Clapton bus garage who moved to London from St Lucia in 1960 (2007).

44. Fuller, Ken. *Champion: London Forest Strike*, London: TGWU. 1992, p. 32.

45. Dromey, Jack. "Jayaben Desai Obituary", *The Guardian*, December 28, 2010.

46. Labour Research Department. *Black Workers and the Trade Unions*, June 1993.

fought gains achieved by labor."⁴⁷ The success of the ruling class in this context has been to maintain the struggle for such reforms within the boundaries of the nation state.

But, as Roman Rosdolsky put it:

When the Communist Manifesto says that the workers 'have no country', this refers to the bourgeois national state, not to nationality in the ethnical sense. The workers 'have no country' because, according to Marx and Engels, they must regard the bourgeois national state as a machinery for their oppression and after they have achieved power they will likewise have 'no country' in the political sense, inasmuch as the separate socialist national states will be only a transitional stage on the way to the classless and stateless society of the future, since the construction of such a society is possible only on the international scale!⁴⁸

One of the things right-wing British nationalists particularly hate is the extension of health care and other welfare provisions to "foreigners", irrespective of the fact that a higher proportion of foreign workers pay their full tax than British capitalists who seem remarkably adept at tax-avoidance. The number of "foreigners" using the National Health Service has become a way of side-stepping the discussion of underfunding. One of the few progressive demands of the US War of Independence was "No taxation without representation", so the most basic internationalist demand the British working-class movement could raise would be for full voting rights for all taxpayers, irrespective of citizenship.

Digital identity, rights and citizenship in Latin America and the Caribbean: who is included and who is being left behind?

Eve Hayes de Kalaf writes:

Over the past three decades, a silent global revolution has been taking place which will have an impact on every living person on this planet. Far-reaching and transformative, digital identification systems have grown to become an integral component of everyday life.

Big tech companies, NGOs, legal specialists and governments are embracing the benefits of digital ID with considerable zeal. Their fundamental argument is that citizens, particularly the income poor, need to be correctly documented. Effective ID will help those included in these systems unlock their fundamental rights, thus facilitating access to essential state services such as healthcare, welfare and the financial sector.

Debates on identification measures, and the technologies that support them, are typically couched within a discourse of belonging, social inclusion and the universal right to a legal and, increasingly, digital identity. Now a central component in all development planning, access to social protection is wholly dependent on channelling assistance to those who hold the correct ID. Ambitiously, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are aiming to provide over one billion people with evidentiary proof of their legal existence by 2030.

Yet emerging research is providing some uncomfortable insights into the use and abuse of these modern-day identity-based development solutions. Earlier this year, Privacy

47. Matthews, David. "The Working-Class Struggle for Welfare in Britain." *Monthly Review*, February 2018, pp. 33-45.

48. Rosdolsky, Roman. "Worker and Fatherland: A Note on a Passage in the Communist Manifesto." *Science & Society*, 1965, 29, no. 3 pp. 330-37.

International expressed concerns that digital identification is being used to discriminate against ethnic and religious minorities, noting:

By virtue of their design, these systems inevitably exclude certain population groups from obtaining an ID and hence from accessing essential resources to which they are entitled.

Indigenous peoples, the Afro-descended and the income poor, especially women, were systematically excluded from the privileges of formal citizenship and treated as non-belongers in their country of birth.⁴⁹

Climate Refugees

But with the planet being destroyed by climate change, the situation has become crucial for us all, irrespective of nation. While climate change is global, the solutions are currently bounded by state borders and limited by the concept of private property. Because the climate is global, individual states acting unilaterally cannot prevent environmental change. Yet, the 1992 Rio Conference proclaimed: "States have the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and development policies."

The last hundred years has seen a dramatic hardening of borders and restrictions on free movement of labour, while free movement of capital and "free trade" have become the norm worldwide, making it easy for corporations to move production to ever cheaper locations and to dump their pollution on the Third World. Corporations operate across borders, while regulations and workers are contained by them. So, as long as oil and mineral extraction and the resulting pollution is controlled by corporations unbounded by borders and protected by "free trade", the real control of the environment will rest with those corporations. The structural violence of borders is not only to be seen in the victims of drowning in the English Channel or heat stroke in the Arizona desert. Borders and migration control will also concentrate the negative impact of climate change on more vulnerable places, for example, the Bay of Bengal and the Caribbean, while at the same time containing the people most affected within these areas. A 2003 US Defence Department report argued that the catastrophic effects of climate change would force the imperialist states to construct "defensive fortresses" along their borders to exclude climate refugees. "Military confrontation may be triggered by a desperate need, particularly in the global South, for natural resources such as energy, food and water, creating new national security threats to which the 'have' nations would need to respond militarily."⁵⁰

Presently the Caribbean islands face one of the worst threats of flooding from sea level rises and more violent hurricanes. At the same time, Caribbean victims of climate change are denied the right to migrate out of the threatened region.

All this illustrates the fatuous nature of European governments talking piously of reducing

49. Hayes de Kalaf, Eve, *Legal Identity, Race and Belonging in the Dominican Republic: From Citizen to Foreigner*, London: Anthem, 2021.

50. Schwartz, Peter and Doug Randall, *An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security*, Pasadena: California Institute of Technology, 2003.

their internal outputs of greenhouse gases, while their capitalists are busy exporting production to other parts of the world where they can pollute at their leisure. The actual volume of CO₂ emitted does not respect borders. Capitalist profit depends, in large part, in the mobility of production, forever seeking cheaper sources of labour power, which in turn depends on fossil fuel extraction. Thus, any serious attempt to restrict global warming to 1.5° will necessitate severe restrictions on the free movement of capital.

The *No One Is Illegal* collective writes:

The environmental degradation of the planet by capitalism has led to the displacement of people from their homes and livelihoods throughout capitalism's history. Currently, the vast majority of the people who are forced to migrate do so because of wars and invasion by the West, persecution by repressive right-wing regimes, and cuts in public expenditure, privatisation and other poverty-inducing measures enforced by the World Bank and other agencies of the West (partly as a means of extracting inflated interest payments on an unjust foreign debt).

Global warming and climate change, mainly brought about by the massive generation of greenhouse gases by the rich, are adding to the pressures on people to migrate. Global warming is contributing to desertification and droughts. In combination with the scramble by Western corporations for the wealth of the Third World this has created massive deforestation and in other places has driven people off their land or made it uninhabitable, creating deserts where there was once cultivated land, plains where animals could graze and people could live. Rising sea levels may force many millions off their land, most notably in Bangladesh and the islands of the Caribbean.

It would of course be better if people were not forced, by the actions of the rich and their governments and corporations, to take the drastic and often painful step of migrating. There is perhaps one humane way to reduce the need to migrate. This is for the rich countries to stop making wars, to stop stealing the wealth of the rest of the world and to stop destroying the climate through their excessive consumption and greed. But nor should anybody be trapped in places where they are in danger, or do not wish to be. All of us should have the basic human right of free movement, the freedom to decide for ourselves where we wish to live and to work, and equal rights wherever we live and whatever our national origins.

There is one atmosphere. It knows no borders. Weather, climatic changes, toxins are not governed by immigration controls. We all breath from this one atmosphere but borders keep us apart and stop us addressing our common global human problems.⁵¹

A response to this dire prospect may lie in the words of Kato Tokijiro, delegate of the Japanese Socialists to the 1907 Stuttgart Congress, who said: "It is the duty of Socialists to welcome these poor brothers, to defend them and, together with them, to fight capitalism. The founders of socialism, above all Karl Marx, did not address themselves to individual countries but to all humanity. Internationalism is inscribed on our banner".⁵²

51. "Climate Refugees: Pretext For Repression", A *No One Is Illegal* discussion paper, 2010.

Stansted 15

The Stansted 15 are a group of concerned citizens who peacefully stopped a deportation flight to Nigeria and Ghana at Stansted airport on 28 March 2017.

They expected to face retribution for their protest, but never expected to be found guilty of terrorism offences. But the group became the first activists involved in a non-violent direct action protest to be convicted under laws that were formulated in response to the Lockerbie bombing.

The group had information that people meant to be on that flight would be put in extreme danger if they were forcibly returned. For example, a lesbian woman feared persecution by the Nigerian authorities if returned to Nigeria. Her abusive ex-husband, who she was made to marry, had also told her he would kill her on return. Nigeria is one of the most dangerous places in the world for LGBT people. The Stansted 15 also knew that the Home Office was not respecting rule of law, as some of the people scheduled to be on the plane had ongoing claims and had not exhausted the legal process. They were deeply concerned about the treatment of detained people during the deportation process as well.

Charter flights (private, mass-deportation flights chartered by the Home Office), like the plane they stopped, are a particularly brutal, secretive and barely legal plank of the so-called "hostile environment" policy. People are racially targeted based on their perceived nationality, then ripped from their communities, friends and loved ones before they are forcibly deported. People are often deported before they can get access to a decent lawyer. People are seriously abused by guards involved in the deportation process. Being tranquillised, "dragged like a goat" in a restraint belt and racially abused, are all commonplace experiences. Charter flights take place in the middle of the night in a remote part of Stansted airport where the public cannot observe the dark deeds that are taking place. This offends common decency.

The Stansted 15 were the targets of a political frame up. They were charged with endangering safety at airports under terrorism-related legislation. The Government is in fact guilty of the charge the State has levied against the Stansted 15 – the Government endangers people every day with their brutal, unfair hostile environment policies and particularly the barbaric practice of charter flights.

The action by the Stansted 15 has mean that 11 of the 60 people due to be deported that night are still in the UK with their friends and families.

52. Akers-Chacón, Justin, and Mike Davis. *No One Is Illegal, Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Chicago: Haymarket, 2018, p. 292.

Melanie Strickland, one of the 15, wrote:

I was part of a group of 15 that peacefully stopped a deportation flight. To our great relief, the "terror" convictions we received for that direct action were quashed.

That night, we walked to the apron where the plane was being prepped by the catering staff, each of us dressed in pink high vis and pink hats, with jumpers that read "mass deportations kill". We erected a tripod and unfurled a banner that said "no-one is illegal". We 'locked on' in metal tubes around the tripod and around the nose wheel of the plane.

No-one interacted with us until we were in position, and the only damage was to the perimeter fence, which the CPS estimated to be £150. The action was fundamentally peaceful, in contrast to the menace we successfully stopped that night at the airport.

Unlawful deportation

It subsequently emerged with the Windrush scandal that the Home Office had been operating an unlawful deportation regime for many years. A regime that wrongly targeted people – many of whom had built their lives here – wrenching people from their loved ones, homes and communities and unlawfully pushing them out of the country.

Despite protests from Amnesty International and the United Nations, we were put on trial under section 1(2) (b) of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990. The trial lasted two-and-a-half months in late 2018.

Conviction

On conviction, the sentence could have been life in prison. We had to wait an agonising two months from the date of conviction to the sentencing to see whether we'd be sent to prison and for how long. The cost of all these legal proceedings would have been immense.

The judgment quashing our convictions is welcome, but we are outraged that we were ever prosecuted with this offence in the first place. It was totally disproportionate and I believe our prosecution was intended to intimidate us and other protestors. The whole trial process and conviction was a serious punishment in itself – preventing us from work during the long trial, and the conviction in some cases effectively "blacklisting" us from securing employment.

Should not have been prosecuted

It has taken years to clear our names. The Court of Appeal judgment states that "the appellants should not have been prosecuted for the extremely serious offence... because their conduct did not satisfy the various elements of the offence, in truth, there was no case to answer".

We get no compensation for the extreme stress of these proceedings, the loss of income during the trial and unpaid work we have done as the sentence for our wrongful conviction.

The implications of this ruling go beyond the defendants in this case. Other protestors

have started to be prosecuted under this terror-related legislation, including Extinction Rebellion activists, who took action against the Silvertown Tunnel in London. Hopefully, their charges will not be continued.

No regrets

Despite the huge consequences for all of us, our action on that fateful day had a lasting legacy. Eleven of the 60 people who were meant to be deported that night remain in the country. So, I have no regrets.

Many more may have done so but for the Home Office manoeuvring to charter another plane the day after our action. It is only a matter of luck that the Home Office could only charter a smaller plane that day.

It has been a source of strength and support for us to remain in contact with some of the people from the flight – a number of whom have now secured their legal right to be here having won their appeals, including trafficking survivors and parents of dependent children. Our experience of having our act of solidarity criminalised under terror legislation, plus having to fight for years, gave us a better insight into what those being criminalised by the hostile environment experience every day.

Prison

We didn't go to prison in the end, but every year tens of thousands of people are locked in detention, where they can remain indefinitely, away from their children and families. It is impossible to plan when you don't know what will happen to you from month to month or year to year. The stress puts a great strain on all your relationships and being subject to an unjust, unfair legal system is humiliating and disempowering. It is wrong that our neighbours and friends of insecure immigration status are subject to this.

People who have experienced detention are resilient people. Many people who have returned to the community from detention have had to fight hard to secure their release. They deserve our solidarity and support.

Federation of the West Indies

The idea of a coming-together of the islands has been around from the time the settlers sought to have an alliance for their joint benefit and protection from pirates, buccaneers and fear of slave rebellions.

In 1876, a colonial official advocated federation - to facilitate the freedom of movement of policemen, lepers and lunatics, since then “Numerous plans for varying degrees of regional unity amongst some or all of the British West Indies existed between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Before the 20th century, most efforts to create a British Caribbean Federation emanated from the metropole and represented imperial designs to institute efficient government via a streamlining of colonial administration in the region.” But the idea of federation was not only a top-down exercise, as the issue was taken up by radicals such as Marcus Garvey, William Galwey Donovan, Louise S. Merkle, T. A. Marrayshow, Captain Cipriani, W. E. B. Du Bois and other early 20th-century radicals.

In 1958, C. L. R. James had a different concept of federation; he saw it “as the process by which the West Indies, in common with the rest of the world, seeks to leave one stage of its existence which has lasted for some 300 years and move into a new sphere, with all the privileges, the responsibilities, the difficulties, and the opportunities which the transitional stage of existence offers to all who are able to take part in it.”

When C. L. R. James took on the challenge to champion Federation of the West Indies, he no doubt had a different agenda and could see the benefit of the Caribbean countries uniting as one; after all, they were mainly people of African heritage with a shared experience of enslavement and colonialism. He could foresee those small nations, in a hostile environment of rampant capitalism, being easily exploited.

The conditions in the 1950s were different, and the focus of a British West Indies federation was on a centralised economy. Today the challenges are numerous, and serious for the whole region. Depopulation is a problem, with the bright and skilled leaving in droves for North America because of lack of opportunity for jobs at home. The lack of imagination of the political class, many of whom hang on to the Westminster model of democracy, continues to drain the region’s scarce resources, as each country replicates work that it would make economic and political sense to centralise. Lack of political direction in the region gives the imperialists opportunity to divide and rule.

As climate change accelerates, many islands will be in danger. We need regional strategy to address the problems with a focus on putting people before profits. Whole regions may have to be resettled on a permanent or temporary basis to tackle drought, hurricane, and volcanic activity. The removal of borders in the region will give hope to the young, who will generate ideas and problem-solving for the region. Not feeling trapped is important to the young, keeping them in the region by providing more opportunity for movement will help stem the brain drain and depopulation of the region.

Since the short-lived days of West Indian Federation from 1958 to 1962, we have seen most of the countries achieve independence - each with a flag, lofty mottos and an anthem that represents little in terms of the aspirations of the masses. A burgeoning middle class has captured the trappings of power and would rather keep things that way - little kings in their fiefdoms. For the majority, life has become extremely difficult, with high unemployment and lack of opportunity a stubborn feature for most countries.

The time may be right for a renewed effort at federation, especially in the face of an increasingly polarised world and with the USA and Canada still holding on to retrograde ideas about their “backyard”, which can be dangerous for our sovereignty. The Covid 19 pandemic has exposed the failings of capitalism, with its promises of no one “will be left behind” as regards vaccines. Their refusal to suspend patents to allow poorer countries to develop their own vaccines has cost countless lives and further impoverished countries. Instead, we see Big Pharma making billions as new variants arise and spread because of a lack of vaccines in the unvaccinated poorer countries.

The issues facing the region, with rising seas, more frequent and stronger hurricanes, and volcanic activity followed by unseasonal rainfall and droughts, are challenges that can be best met with a federated Caribbean. What shape federation of the Caribbean in the 21st century might take should be the challenge for some of our best minds in the region and the diaspora to engage with.

Caribbean Labour Solidarity

CLS is not tied to any political party in the United Kingdom or the Caribbean. We work to unite all those who support equality, democracy, justice and social progress in the Caribbean. We will support all who recognise that the struggle against racism, fascism, imperialism and neo-colonialism in the Caribbean requires the building of strong international links between the working people there and their sisters and brother globally. We continue to play an important role, along with our sisters and brothers everywhere, in the worldwide peoples' movement for justice through the publication of articles in a variety of media; production of our bulletin Cutlass; organising or participating in public meetings or conferences; arranging pickets and demonstrations; joining deputations; collating and presenting petitions; distribution of our literature; and other associated activities. Through these actions we continue to popularise the activities and causes of the anti-imperialist fighters of the Caribbean.

Through our links with the trade unions and solidarity organisations in Britain we set ourselves the objectives of mobilising opinion in aid of these struggles. In doing so we also recognise the special bonds that exists between black peoples everywhere particularly Africa, America and Europe despite the different conditions in which their specific struggles are waged. We also actively participate in the struggle against racism, which has been the springboard for the development of organisations like the British National party and English Defence League in the UK, the Front National in France, Golden Dawn in Greece and other fascist organisations now gaining strength in Europe on the back of the current economic crisis. We therefore support anti-racist, anti-fascist campaigns in various forms including exposing these fascist organisations; the fight against the police harassment of black youth, trade unionists and progressive workers; the fight against institutionalised racism in employment, education, housing and its other forms.

In so doing we recognise that the British Empire has bestowed a bitter legacy on sections of the working classes in the UK and the former colonies. As an organisation seeking to maintain and expand solidarity with the black workers and their allies in the Caribbean we already make a distinct contribution to the anti racist struggle in Britain.

We urge all those who share these aims to join us and to participate in our work. It is fun, informative and empowering. In our work we collaborate with and seek united action with all sororial/fraternal groups that share our commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle.

Write to: 29 Myddelton Street, London EC1R 1UA
or email: info@cls-uk.org.uk
See our website - www.cls-uk.org.uk/

Death at the Frontier

Border Control, Migration
and the Workers' Movement

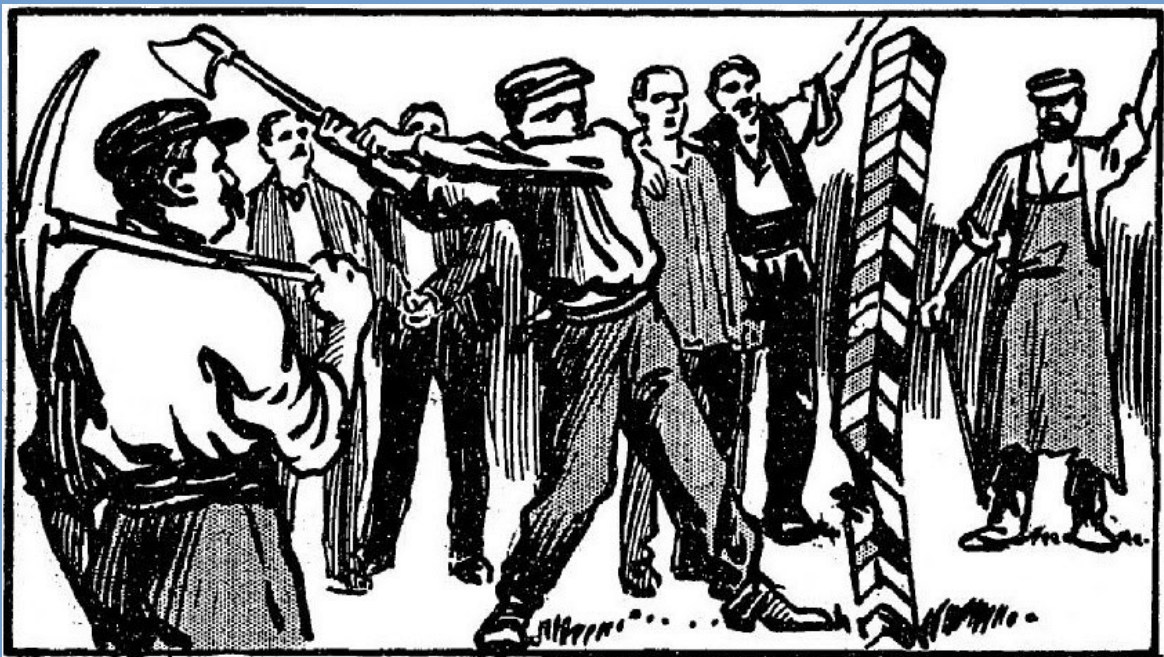
by

Luke Daniels, Nadine Finch and Steve Cushion

That all alien exploiters, swindlers, blacklegs, drunkards, idlers of all sorts who have money are welcomed here; but that skilful, industrious, honest working men, who have either been out of work for a long time, or have been locked out by their masters for taking part in strikes and boycotts, and therefore have no money, shall be prohibited from coming here.

A quote from A VOICE FROM THE ALIENS (1895)

It is time this stopped.



Pour éviter les guerres, supprimons les frontières.

